

A CONDENSED HISTORY OF S. THOMAS' COLLEGE
AT GURUTALAWA.

S. Thomas' College at Gurutalawa was a serendipitous outcome of World War 2 (1938-1945). In the East, when the threat of war shifted to the Indian Ocean with the advance of the Imperialist military forces of Japan, Ceylon as the Island was then known, and Trincomalee harbour, became strategic objectives under imminent attack. The College at Mount Lavinia was consequently requisitioned by the British forces and on the 9th of April 1942 Dr. R.L.Hayman, the Sub-Warden was sent to Gurutalawa to prepare a branch for the school, but days before, on the 5th of April, Colombo was subject to an air raid and a Japanese plane had actually crashed in the College premises at Mt.Lavinia. Fortunately a magnificent Farm at Gurutalawa was gifted by Mr. Leslie de Saram (a Royalist) and Mrs. De Saram in 1942. Nestled in the Hills below Nuwara Eliya (6700ft) was The Farm at an elevation of 4000 ft, redolent with fruit of every variety and the livestock included a herd of over 100 Persian Black Head Sheep a rarity in "Ceylon". It had a central Farm Bungalow and a spattering of out houses and farm buildings in an area of over 32 acres. These proved adequate to house a complement of 55 Boarders (in the main Bangalow) and 9 staff members of whom Dr. R.L. Hayman was Headmaster and Rev. A.J. Foster the Chaplain. Both Oxford men, the one Dr. Hayman, M.A., D.Phil (Oxon) and Rev. Foster, M.A.(Oxon), who had stamped their mark as extraordinary men and teachers at S. Thomas' Mount Lavinia in the 1930's, and now went on to imbue the school at Gurutalawa, with a values system in selfless service and to establish a tradition of Excellence, making the school the most sought after in the whole Island. Mr.Leslie De Saram and his Farm Manager, Mr.Isaacs, helped immensely in the preparations.

When a Plaque with name of Mr & Mrs. De Saram was placed at the College entrance, they insisted that it should state "Two well wishers" so it reads " The Farm is the Gift to STC from Two well wishers of the College, April 1942".

The first session started in the 2nd Term on May 2nd 1942 with 2 day-boys also on the roll. The curriculum for the Middle and Upper School in those years was a formal academic one taught in most of the English schools at the time. The subjects were Divinity, English Language and Literature, Latin, Vernacular, Greek, Biology, Physics, Chemistry, Geography, Classical History and Mathematics in the form of Arithmetic, Algebra, Geometry and Trigonometry.

Games were compulsory and Cricket and Soccer were played in makeshift conditions outside the Farm boundaries, about 1 ½ miles distant on patna with a panoramic view of Haputale gap and the South face of the central hill massif which peaked at Pidurutalagala. Part of the main school from Mount Lavinia also shifted to Getambe on the Peradeniya/Kandy Road, and later in the year the Board decided to expand Gurutalawa to accommodate a further 150 boys from the Getambe 'branch'. Accordingly in 1944 the school buildings were extended and the Gurutalawa boys engaged in "shramadana" to prepare the land in front of the Farm Bungalow, towards this end. A new set of buildings was constructed away from the bungalow, which became the Senior Dormitories.

The shift took place in 1945 and the Boarding was constituted into three Houses- Garnier, De Saram and Reid. In September of the year Dr. Hayman and Canon Foster left on furlough with the end of the war in Europe and in December the Chapel dedicated to St. Francis of Assisi, was completed as an extension to the newly built Junior dormitories. This formed a square, with a flank of the Farm Bungalow providing the base, for making of the traditional public school "quadrangle". The buildings were of stone quarried from the surrounding environs and were designed by Mr. Shirley D' Alwis, the University Architect.

During the years 1942 to 1944 the formative pioneering years, though work and play and all the other activities were engaged in with zest and a special pride in achievement, the ambience of the school was that of a large happy family and staff and boys interacted with much bonhomie catalyzed by the example of Dr. Hayman and Rev. Foster, and the necessity of a shared common room. The school was small, exclusive and elitist and continued to be so for the full period of what has come to be known as the Hayman-Foster era, 1942-1964.

INTER-REGNUM : Mr.C.H.Davidson

During Dr. Hayman's absence on furlough in 1946 Mr. C.H. Davidson took over. He was also a revered teacher of pre-war Mount Lavinia vintage, and Classics Scholar. In the beginning of 1946, S. Thomas' College Mount Lavinia re-commenced and many of the boys at Gurutalawa resumed their education there. In any event since Gurutalawa has classes only upto the O.Level they were automatically accommodated at Mount Lavinia in College Form A and B classes for the University Entrance Examination. 1946 saw the numbers at Gurutalawa falling to 110 but the School was considered a separate school in the eyes of the Department of Education. However it was clearly accepted on a recommendation of Warden De Saram who has been the Head at Gurutalawa when the boys from Getambe moved in, that both S.Thomas' Mount Lavinia and Gurutalawa should be considered one and the same school. In that year a new Education Ordinance promulgated Free Education in the Country, with the medium of instruction in Sinhala and Tamil. In this scenario, S. Thomas' College opted out and remained a fee levying school.

DR.HAYMAN RETURNS

In 1948 Dr. Hayman now married, returned to Gurutalawa with Mrs. Hayman, and so did Rev. A.J. Foster. Immediately after their return from furlough they had helped Warden de Saram to re-establish the school at Mount Lavinia in April 1946/47. Mrs. Mary Hayman who had been a Nurse with the British Military in the War Years in Ceylon, took charge as the sick room matron. The Sick Room was extended to include a private surgery, which was accessible to the community at large. On 3rd November supposedly a disgruntled farm labourer set the classroom block which had a Mana thatched roof, on fire. Some good came out of this and in 1949 the Mana thatch-roof of the Junior dormitory and Chapel was replaced with asbestos sheeting. Also in 1949 work began on the new swimming bath, which was at that time, a small one built in 1943. Numbers had grown to 153 boarders and six day-boys.

EDUCATIONAL AND SOCIAL CHANGES

In 1951 The Board of Governors decided that S. Thomas' should further remain an independent school within the prevailing educational system. There was a flowering of activity in the school. PT, Gymnastics and the 'assault course' became part of the curriculum, as also Agriculture. Music was taught for the first time and in 1953 the new swimming bath was officially opened. Under Dr. Hayman and Rev. Foster, the school was subject to pressure for admissions. Significantly there were boys of many nationalities, mainly sons of expatriates and the school had a cosmopolitan character. The years '56 to '58 saw the social upheaval which engendered racial conflicts, and the policies of a new government in 1960, created further social tremors by the appropriation of Assisted Schools, mainly the Roman Catholic Schools, which had not opted like S. Thomas' to be fee levying but had continued to receive government grants.

There followed a period of uncertainty for private schools, but on matters of educational policy, the wise and courageous leadership of Warden de Saram, kept the School on course, in keeping with the vision of the Founder and the values of its tradition. Gurutalawa continued to flourish with its

facilities for out-door activities in addition to which Bird-watching was introduced as an official activity, and reflecting the social changes, Kandyan Dancing was taught. A squash court was built by the Social Service Club, thus maintaining the tradition of shramadana which had characterized the pioneering days of the school in the Forties.

GURUTALAWA IS STABILISED

It was in the decade from 1950 to 1960 that Gurutalawa was fully established as a school which is recognizable today. The years 1942-1944 were fairy tale years – as Dr. Hayman called them, a Schoolmaster’s dream - too good to last. Then when the boys of Getambe came there was a sense of Paradise Lost. Some of the most Senior newcomers seemed to resent the Special Status of the pioneers which expressed itself in open resentment. Factionalism emerged amongst them and there was an uneasy sense of indiscipline, which erupted in open disdain of authority. The School reflected the insecurity of change, which was manifest in the country with the birthpangs of independence. But normalcy soon returned.

1951 was the centenary year of the main School at Mount Lavinia and as already observed, S’. Thomas became a Fee levying School. With the contentious and critical issues behind, Dr. Hayman was able to focus long term on the shape that Gurutalawa would take. Ever the innovator, he began the practice of inviting Old boys of the Pioneering days now in the University, to come and provide leadership to the boys both in the classroom, the playing fields and in extra curricular activities, during their three months vacation. PT, Gymnastics, Swimming and the “Assault Courses” were continued as subjects to provide a break in the long session of 6 periods in the morning and which was a part of the New Time Table.

Agriculture was introduced as a subject for the first time in the curriculum by Mr. R. Peglar, the new Welsh Farm Manager who had seen active service in the battle-front during the war, in the Battle of Normandy (France). Drama, both in English and Sinhala flourished with enthusiastic support from the Head and Rev. Foster. There was an active Puppet Club. The Hiking Club under Mr. A.W.R.Tennekoon reached new heights. An adventurous group of boys walked from Gurutalawa to Colombo. Basket Ball and Riding were the new activities begun. Gurutalawa also became the first school in the Island to introduce Squash as a sport in schools.

A Building and Equipment Fund was started in 1952. Money came in small amounts and by the end of 1955, a small pavilion was constructed for the playing fields. A start was made for a Head Master’s Bungalow – on a very modified scale and at the cheapest cost. Dr. Hayman in fact had lived in virtually a converted bathroom of the Farm Bungalow since 1948. Mr. E. Scott the Woodwork Master who had also taught at Mount Lavinia, sculptured a statue of S. Francis of Assisi from a massive log of satinwood. Begun in 1953 it was ready in 1954, all of 5 feet 8 inches in height and weighing 500 lbs. The chapel belfry overlooked the main College Entrance, and the statue was placed two thirds of the way up the chapel tower, appropriately commanding it.

The College produced some excellent boxers and swimmers. Dr. Hayman was quick to get the best exponents of each activity to come up to Gurutalawa to teach and interact with the boys. Thus, a U.S. Olympic swimmer, Leary Constantine and Ceylon’s own Olympic performers, were there at various times.

The College produced star players in all sports as was the case in the forties. Thomian life saving efforts, caught the headlines now and again, and was one of Dr. Hayman’s pet concerns. One Gurutalawa old boy created history by joining the French Foreign Legion. Another the United States Marine Corps.

The College Library separated into a Senior and Junior Section, and Gurutalawa published its own magazine for the first time in 1963.

There were the usual staff changes; notably the departure of Mr. G.A.W.de Alwis as Headmaster Uva College Badulla and the emigration of Mr. & Mrs. Scott to Australia. Mrs. Scott was the mother of William Jayatilleke who captained S. Thomas' College, Mt.Lavinia in 1940. R.P.Simon Perera, the bell ringer notched 50 years of service to the school.

Gurutalawa in these years, was literally humming with activity and provided a rich and rewarding experience to the boys who had the good fortune to have been there. Rev. A.J.Foster was made a Canon of the Church. Numbers on the roll increased from 237 in 1956 to 300 in 1962.

DR.HAYMAN DEPARTS

Dr. Hayman made a valiant effort to obtain O/Level proficiency in Sinhala, but he abandoned plans he had nurtured to settle down in this Country and made ready to leave. One important step he took in terms of the future of the school and to maintain continuity, was to form in 1959 the Old Boys Association with the assistance of a senior Old Boy who from his pioneering days, had kept in touch with the school and with Dr. Hayman. 1962 marked Dr. Hayman's last Prize Giving. Numbers of the school stood at 300. His departure was a 'wrench' particularly considering his love for the country he lived in for over 35 years but the socio-political changes and its assault on "privileged" public schools identifying even men like Dr. Hayman as an Imperialist Foreigner, left him with little option but to leave. He had one regret - not enough Thomians had taken to the teaching profession.

The last day of Dr Hayman's stewardship was Thursday the 14th March 1963. The last notice signed by Dr Hayman before he relinquished office, was a notice of the Sinhala Literary Society which he signed in Sinhala. His vision for Gurutalawa was of Gordonstoun, an English Public School with special emphasis on outdoor life and inculcation of the spirit of adventure. He himself was a great lover of wildlife and nature, and many films he made are still in reasonably good condition.

His school routine in later years, will find most Headmasters wanting. After breakfast he would go to the surgery and assist Mrs Hayman. He taught a full timetable in the Lower 6th and Upper 6th forms in his subjects of physics and mathematics. After tea, he was at the swimming pool coaching swimming, diving and life saving. At dinner time, he very often supervised, with the Duty Master, the serving of dinner. After dinner he rounded off the day with a visit to the dormitories, a duty he shared with the Chaplain, Canon Foster.

Dr Hayman would be the first to acknowledge the role of Canon Foster in all these endeavours. They were complementary, like two sides of a coin. Neither should the role of Mrs Hayman go unrecorded. Devoted to the sick room, her penchant for cleanliness, particularly in the kitchen and dining hall, was an important contribution to the well being of the boys. Her love of animals and her concern for the protection of fauna and flora in the campus was an inspiring example for all.

There was a final Assembly, the walk between a Guard of Honour by the Boys to the main gate. Farewells to the staff; before the sad drive out with Mrs Hayman in his blue Holden car.

Winchester House would in future be called Hayman House.

ANOTHER INTER REGNUM : DEATH OF CANON FOSTER

Canon A.J Foster remained as Acting Headmaster from 1963 to 1965 but it was the end of an era. Canon Foster himself died in harness from a heart condition and this was followed by a period of uncertainty with no apparent successor, though Mr. A.K.Chapman, a respected senior master and Kingsley Dissanayake, Principal of the Deaf and Blind School, filled the breach temporarily. The uncertainty was reflected in the turnover of Staff but the numbers of the school still held around 350 and key, loyal, tested and trusted Senior Staff remained to serve.

Dr. R.L. Hayman and Canon A.J. Foster set a standard of Thomian education which is inconceivable would be equalled, leave alone surpassed. They drew truly from the rich tradition of the best public schools in England and transplanted them at Gurutalawa. The outward bound concept had been introduced in Gurutalawa by Dr. R.L. Hayman. They kept the school supplied with the most recent Text Books published in the U.K and not even heard of in Ceylon. Foster never returned from leave without some Object D'Art or artefact to adorn the chapel. It is small wonder that many Old boys of their era sought opportunities away from the socio-political turmoil of their times, and can be met in every corner of the world holding their own distinction to the amazement of their counter parts in the countries of their domicile.

MR. FRANK JAYASINGHE

Mr. Frank Jayasinghe (a 1st Class Trained Teacher and Honours Graduate in Oriental Languages of the University of London) took over in 1965, youthful and energetic, he had a salutary impact on the life of the school and the maintenance of standards. He was very fortunate that he had a loyal staff whose senior members co-operated with him in the running of the school. Education wise “New Mathematics” and the provision of technical and vocational education was instituted as Government policy, and Mr. Jayasinghe advocated as a model, Comprehensive or Multi-Lateral schools as found in Sweden and England. Singing in both Sinhala & English was started under Mrs. Jayasinghe for the first time as a subject.

Proceeds of a Thomian fair in 1962 were used to construct a Science laboratory as a testimonial to Dr. R.L. Hayman as mooted at the time of Canon Foster, when the memorial tablet was made with the inscription “To spend and to spend himself for others was his greatest privilege”, something which was said of Bishop Chapman who founded the College at Mutwal in 1851.

Mr. F.L. Amerasinghe retired in 1968 from the staff on reaching the age of 55 after two decades of untiring service to the school. He was a rock of discipline and a most conscientious teacher. His interest was not confined to academic matter and he was for sometime in charge of Hockey, Cadetting and Tennis.

An Old Thomian, Mr. O.E.J de Soysa also left the staff in 1967 to take up an appointment with the Department of Education. He was at various times in charge of cricket and under 16 hockey in which he excelled when he himself was a student both at Gurutalawa and Mount Lavinia. His Contribution to improve the School Library deserves Special Mention. The departure of these two stalwarts was badly felt, as apart from their all round contribution to the School in the classroom as well as the playing fields, more so as they were married, the presence of their families added greatly to the social life of the small community which was Gurutalawa.

Mr. James P. Obeyesekera was the chief guest at the School prize giving in 1968 and it was gratifying to hear from him in his address that the Hayman-Foster aura had not diminished in the pervading social flux.

He said, "I came here for the first time a few months ago, and as one enters the gates one senses the atmosphere in the place. It is an atmosphere that one does not get anywhere in the country. There is the same air. The same quiet atmosphere that which I used to know in the old days of the Cambridge Colleges. You have that same feeling when you enter the portals of S. Thomas' College Gurutalawa. A feeling of quality, a feeling of quietness, an indescribable atmosphere. It has got to be an example, a pattern for all schools in the country."

It was Mrs. Siva Obeyesekera, Senator Obeyesekera's wife who had organized the Thomian Fair and has done many Fairs since to raise funds for the school, both at Gurutalawa and Mt. Lavinia.

MR.E.L.PERERA

Mr. Frank Jayasinghe left at the end of the year 1968 to take an appointment as Sub Warden S. Thomas' College, Mount Lavinia. The numbers in the school had risen to 400 of which 318 were boarders. He was succeeded by Mr. E.L.Perera, B.Sc, 1st Class Trained, educated at Trinity College and had been a renowned teacher at Mount Lavinia from 1932 and a founder member of the teaching staff at Gurutalawa in 1942.

It was always important to follow the Education Department policy directives carefully as Schools like S. Thomas' were considered privileged institutions by the new social order and every now and again motions were taken up even in Parliament, to take over the non-fee levying schools as well. During his tenure Mr. Perera who was an ardent advocate of "The New Mathematics" piloted the new Science and Mathematics programmes introduced in the secondary schools.

The government also raised the school going age to 6 years and introduced an examination at grade 9(NCGE) in place of the SSC at grade 10, to be followed by the Higher examination at grade 11. 2 pre vocational subjects were compulsory for everyone and unlike the disruption caused by the former, this was grist to the mill of a school such as Gurutalawa, where already agriculture, woodwork, metalwork and Kandyan dancing had been taught for a long time.

One of the highlights of this period was the opening of the New Science laboratory as a testimonial to Dr. Hayman who returned to Sri Lanka, the first of four such visits, as the Chief Guest for the opening.

In 1975 the School suffered a great loss with the departure of Mr. A.K.Chapman to Australia. A legend at Gurutalawa he had been one of the first batch of students and served the school for 25 years teaching Chemistry and Mathematics. He earned the highest respect of everyone.

MR.M.L.C.ILLANGAKOON

When Mr. E.L.Perera retired in 1974 he was succeeded by Mr. M.L.C.Illangakoon an old Thomian who had started at Mount Lavinia in 1942 and joined the Dept. of Agriculture from where he retired in 1973 as a Deputy Director. He was Graduate of the University of London in Chemistry, Botany & Zoology and an Associate of the Imperial College of Tropical Agriculture.

An immediate problem was that boys who did not qualify for senior secondary education to proceed to grades 10 and 11 had nowhere to go and Gurutalawa would be a school diminished in numbers and restricted only from grade 6 (Lower 4th) to Grade 9 (Lower 6th). The Headmaster therefore decided to start classes from grade 5 in 1976 and grade 4 in 1977. Further the Board decided to introduce a vocational education course for the missing year, Upper 6th. Agriculture was recommended for

Gurutalawa for obvious reasons but at a meeting of the parents chiefly attended by headmasters from the Govt. Schools in the vicinity, they emphasized that they wanted their children to benefit from a Thomian education in English. This was significant, coming from a social milieu, which was Sinhala only in character. The vocational course drew very few in numbers and with the change in Government in 1977, the NCGE was abandoned and “O” levels and “A” levels were introduced.

Another problem, which had a lasting effect, was that with the Prep. Schools extending their classes beyond grade 5, admission to Gurutalawa from these schools dried up. These boys had been given a sound academic foundation. They were well disciplined, familiar with the routines and the ‘give and take’ of boarding life and had been nurtured in the Thomian tradition. No adjustments were necessary when they came to Gurutalawa and it was as it seemed, a continuation in the same school. But after 1970 all this had changed and the boys who came to Gurutalawa, did so from different schools with different backgrounds.

This was a watershed phenomenon but the saving grace was the fact that successive Headmasters were Thomians and would come to grips with the challenges they were confronted with but for how long this would be, was a moot point.

In 1974 the number in the school was 433 of which 330 were boarders. Yet another concern of Mr. Illangakoon was the inadequacy of the water supply with the burgeoning numbers. Water consuming trees were cut down and replanted with water conserving trees and the water supply source in Gonagala, was secured from village expansion. He also effected a qualitative change in Agricultural Education and the layout and beauty of the whole school campus, specially around the new hall area. The management of the School farm was improved and the farm developed.

A College Savings Bank managed entirely by students was opened in January 1975 following the new ground that was broken by the formation of the Parent Teachers Association in 1974. The New College Hall built in Mr. E.L.Perera’s time was formally opened on 24th February 1974 by Miss. Joan Foster, sister of the late Canon Foster, the famed first Chaplain of the School and Dr. Hayman’s right hand in the glory days of the College. She accompanied Dr. and Mrs. Mary Hayman on another of their visits, their second visit to the College since they retired. The new hall, put behind the days when the dining hall was used for Meals, Prep, Assembly, Prize Givings, staging of plays and film shows. Mr. & Mrs. Illangakoon invested the School with a certain dignity, sophistication and style, as was evident in the way they bore themselves as the leaders of the community, overviewed the housekeeping of the College campus and maintained the Headmaster’s Bungalow.

In June 1977 after three eventful years Mr. Illangakoon accepted the offer of taking up the Wardenship of Mount Lavinia, albeit most reluctantly. Also retiring at this time were Mr. Richard Kularatne the farm manager after 30 years loyal service to the school, and Mrs. Jayawickrema the matron in charge, after 17 years.

MR.S.H.C. De SILVA

Mr. S.C.H.De Silva B.Sc (Lond), Dip. Education (Lond), Dip. In Admin. (Indiana, USA), who had ended his career in the State Education Sector as the Principal of Prince of Wales College Moratuwa succeeded Mr. Illangakoon in July 1977. He will be remembered mainly for starting the primary section of the School, Grades 1, 2 and 3, and also admitting girls to the Male Atmosphere of the College. The necessary classrooms were built in the Keble House premises while Keble House itself was converted into a dormitory for the boarders.

The head of the Primary School was Mr. Cyril Perera who had joined the staff in 1963. An attempt was made to start A.Level classes too and a beginning was made in 1980 but had to be abandoned in 1987 because of the difficulty of obtaining qualified staff. This inevitably caused admission problems as the New Warden, Mr.Neville De Alwis refused to grant automatic admissions to Gurutalawa Boys who qualified for “A” levels, as had been the practice from the very beginning. Parents of boys in Gurutalawa would now have to find new schools for their sons after the “O” Levels and this affected “quality” admissions.

OLD FAITHFULS

Mr. De Silva was very fortunate to have Mr. J.De S Jayasinghe a much respected and Hayman Loyalist as Deputy Headmaster. He joined the staff in 1949 and had been Senior Boarding House Master since '72. He was an illustrious alumni of Mahinda College Galle and was a leading flag bearer of the traditions of Gurutalawa. Together with Mr. Benjamin Fernando, Bursar, who had been a Thomian from the days of the Mt.Lavinia orphanage, and Mr. A.C.M.Lafir, Prefect of Games, who had joined the staff from the day he left school, they kept the flag fluttering aloft even as the school showed signs of being cast adrift from its Thomian moorings. Mrs. Benjamin Fernando also was on the college staff and served as Assistant Matron and she together with Mr. Fernando and Mr. Lafir completed their Silver Jubilee in 1978. Mr. Jayasinghe had done so, four years earlier.

Mr.S B Fernando left to go to Mt. Lavinia and left a void that seemed impossible to fill. He was a Gurutalawa pioneer. He had served in the College office and there was nothing he did not know about the School. He was appointed Bursar in due course and was a tower of strength to every Headmaster of the College. Moreover he was also very closely connected with the running of the Chapel where Mrs. Fernando also helped out performing in addition a multitude of duties. All the above were excellent examples of the secret of Gurutalawa’s standing. They performed 24 hour jobs and took on any responsibility to help out in a crisis. Personal gain was never in their equation of service. Love and dedication were their watchwords. In short, they were imbued with the Hayman – Foster spirit.

In 1978, the Haymans with Miss. Foster, made another visit from January to April and spent most of this time at Gurutalawa, visiting friends and enjoying familiar surroundings.

It was about this time that girls were admitted to the College, the first being a daughter of a member of the Staff.

MR.PATRICK GUNAWARDENA

Mr. Patrick Gunawardena (B.A.,Dip.Ed.) was appointed Headmaster in January 1982. Being an old Thomian and fully aware of the liberal traditions of S.Thomas’ College, he was well qualified for the job. He was a Principal of a Govt. School and came to Gurutalawa from S.T.C. Mount Lavinia, where he was Sub-Warden.

Though in 1982 a firm decision was taken to continue with Advanced Level classes and the expectation that the presence of these classes ensured that there would be 50 to 60 mature boys to provide leadership and disciplinary control of the students through a respected prefects body, as pointed out earlier, the classes were per force abandoned.

In 1983 Dr. and Mrs. Hayman made what was to be Dr. Hayman’s final visit to Gurutalawa. Dr. Hayman was not in the best of health and soon after his return to Bournemouth, passed away. The Rt.

Rev. Lakshman Wickremasinghe one of the first batch of boys to be admitted to the school, preached the sermon at the funeral services prior to his burial in Bournemouth on 12th May 1983.

With the 1983 Black July events many Tamil students left the school and Tamil parents had second thoughts of sending their sons to the school. However, nearly 125 Tamil boys whose homes, parents, business places, were destroyed were provided with free tuition and half boarding fees from July to December 1983.

Mr. Gunawardena installed a Dr. R. L. Hayman Memorial Library constructed in 1987 with funds donated by the Old Thomian Association U.K. He took a significant step in the field of curriculum development and introduced a computer science centre. This enabled a large number of students on leaving school to join courses of advanced computer studies in technology institutes. Woodwork which had been abandoned was re-introduced in 1982 and Art was also introduced as a vocational subject.

As already mentioned a special effort went into the teaching of English as by now 95% of students hailed from non-English speaking homes and the clamour from parents was for more and better English teaching. But the character of the school was changing fast for this reason. With his experience at Mt. Lavinia and as an Old Boy of the School, Mr. Gunawardene re-activated all clubs and societies and introduced several new ones as he knew the importance of extra curricular activities especially in the isolated community that was Gurutalawa. The College Magazine which had been in abeyance since 1968 was revived in 1982 and edited by the Headmaster, came out regularly from 1982 to 1985. Cadeting was also revived in 1982 and become a very popular activity.

It is to the credit of Mr. Gunawardene that three students for the first time in the history of the College gained direct entrance to the University in 1982 and that others followed. In 1987 one student become the first to do Medicine at the Faculty of Colombo. Mr. Gunawardene had a mild and outgoing temperament and it could be said that the school reflected his cheerful spirit. But due to financial restraints, numbers were increased in the Boarding House beyond norms and discipline suffered. In fact the School had over a thousand students

MR. J.BALA GUNASEGARAM

Mr. Gunawardene was succeeded by Mr. J.B. Gunasegaram, B.Sc.(Eng.) M.Sc.(NY), M I Mech. E., Chartered Engineer and a Fulbright Scholar. He was an Old Boy of Mt. Lavinia and a highly qualified engineer with experience abroad both in the U.K., U.S.A, Zambia and Singapore and was a Senior Lecturer at the Open University of Colombo.

He was a strict disciplinarian and within a month's time, there was visible improvement in discipline and the organization of the school. In his short period of office he made a significant contribution in collecting arrears of school fees and exercising strict financial control and cleared all outstanding debts of the College which was on a Bank Overdraft before his time. In the interregnum before he took office, Mr. J. De S. Jayasinghe acted as Headmaster and initiated strict measures to collect a volume of outstanding school fees. Mr. Jayasinghe himself subsequently retired at the end of June 1989 after a period of long and faithful service lasting 40 years.

Mr Gunasegeram was greatly concerned with the cleanliness and appearance of the College Campus. Sometimes he himself, undertook 'menial' tasks, his ubiquitous presence kept everyone on their toes.

A master says, " He got the Swimming Pool scrubbed and cleaned so thoroughly that it was once again, what it used to be".

Inevitably, his integrity and disciplinary standards, irked some members of the staff. In readying himself for the assignment as Headmaster, he had absorbed every note and scrap of paper on which Dr.Hayman had made comments in his period as Head. Thus Mr Gunasegeram was his own man, and this added to build up resentment.

The years 1987 – 1989, was a period of trouble, which engulfed the whole country. The radical JVP unleashed, a reign of terror, which petrified most people. The intrepid Mr Gunasegeram did not cave into threats, but kept his dignity and that of the school, though there were unavoidable stoppages.

On October 20th 1989, he and his wife were brutally murdered in their bungalow at about 1.30 a.m. It was a shattering blow to many old boys who saw in him “the man” to make a mid course correction in the way the school was heading and again reached the top.

Naturally, the staff and the students felt uneasy and uncertain. A number of parents removed their children from the school and there were doubts whether the school could continue. Fortunately, Rev.R.Harrold Goodchild who had returned as Chaplain, took the helm and the school reopened in early November.

MR. COLIN RATNAYAKE

Mr Colin Ratnayake, from Trinity College, a graduate and special trained teacher of Science (1st Class), succeeded the late Mr Gunasegeram as Headmaster. His style of management was somewhat different to all his predecessors. He surrounded himself with new staff he had known before in Kandy and who had his confidence. This seems natural in the light of the fate that overtook the Gunasegerams but it did not go down well with the existing staff. He saw to it that the school boundaries were securely fenced with barbed wire and concrete posts, despite strong opposition from the Villagers, as it was through a break in the fence at the 6th Mile post on the Borlanda Road, above the Headmaster’s bungalow, that Mr Gunasegeram’s assassins had got into the campus.

However, the school at that time relied heavily on MrA.C.M.Lafir, the Prefect of Games, and Mr.K.Bandusena, Senior Boarding House Master, and who had proved to be most dedicated, loyal and conscientious members of the staff. There was also Mr. Cyril Perera and Mr.L.A.M. Chandrasekera, long standing staff members. Mr Lafir and Mr Bandusena however, held the two key positions which determined, to a great extent, the character of a boarding school. With their help the school came back to normalcy in terms of its day to day running.

Shortly after Mr Ratnayake took over, another senior staff member Mr Nirodhawardena left the school. He was Cadet Master and at one time Prefect of Discipline. Further, Rev.Harrold Goodchild, Mr.R.E.Jayarajah and Mr.J.W. Marasinghe, the Secretary, left during the year. Rev. Goodchild’s contribution to the life of the school made him a worthy successor to Canon Foster, for whom he had to act on occasion, as far back as 1964, before taking over the mantle of Chaplain after Canon Foster’s death in 1965 while Mr.Marasinghe had been 33 years in service.

Mr Jeyarajah had joined the staff in 1968, taught Mathematics and English, and was a valuable asset in the Chapel, as was Mrs Jeyarajah, who played the piano. Mr Marasinghe was an old boy who was a student in the school from 1948 to 1954. He came back in 1957 as Personal Secretary to Dr Hayman. His and Mr Lafir’s presence in the school as old boys who had come strongly under the influence of Dr Hayman and Canon Foster, was incalculable in its worth.

Generous donations were received from the U.K. and Australian O.B.A’s for the College, as also from an English past pupil of the early 50s. These went into the Canon De Saram Library and the Computer Room. A big project undertaken was the building of a main dining hall and office with the

Gurutalawa O.B.A. support. It had two stories and a basement with a floor area in total of 10,000 sq.ft. The exact cost of the building is not known but about Rs.3.5 million of OBA funds were utilized while old boys contributed in cash and materials for a final estimated total cost of over Rs 6 million. The senior and junior dormitories were re-done and tiled. Mr Lafir left the staff after more than 40 years service. He passed away soon after. He had literally given his life for the school. Mr Cyril Perera, another senior and key staff member, also retired after 30 years service.

Mr Ratnayake resigned from his position in 1997. There followed an unsettled period and the whole community was restless after the uncertainties of the past. Finding a Headmaster with the requisite qualifications was a difficult task. He had to be a Christian, preferably an old boy and a teacher with 10 years experience as laid down by the Education Ordinance.

For the interim Mr.L.A.M. Chandrasekera was appointed acting Headmaster He was the most senior master at the time and kept things going till the appointment of Mr Alban Fernando who retired in September 2001.

The perception of the senior old boys of the Hayman-Foster era was that something was seriously wrong in Gurutalawa. The last straw was the retirement of Mr K. Bandusena who in his quiet and positive manner held the center as it were, when things were falling apart. He was respected by his peer teachers, students and old boys alike, and who counted on his presence in the school, particularly after Mr Lafir had departed. Mr Bandusena left in May 1999 after a little over 30 years of service and apart from teaching, he gave of his time to badminton, table tennis and scouting.

MR.GEETHAL C. MENDIS

Mr Chandrasekera himself was transferred to St.Thomas' Prep School, Bandarawela and Mr Geethal C.Mendis who had earlier taught at Gurutalawa for 7 years, starting from Mr Frank Jayasinghe's time, and had moved to the Prep. School, Kollupitiya, and later been appointed Principal of the Deaf & Blind School Ratmalana, was appointed the new Headmaster, from September 2001, to face the early years of the new Millennium.

With the change of Headmaster and of the Bishop, (Rt.Rev. Dulip de Chickera replacing Rt.Rev.Kenneth Fernando) , the most significant development was the determination of the senior old boys to play a more proactive role in the management of the school. They have been fortunate that Mr Mendis has been most accommodative of this idea. Battling the legacy of financial difficulties, the overall declining standards and the endemic indiscipline, he had been pragmatic to realize that the Old Boys Association had a positive role to play, not merely for much needed funds to rehabilitate the school buildings and infrastructure, which were in a sorry state of disrepair and neglect, but also to advise and assist and lend support in the management of the school. On the recommendation of a Report, commissioned by the OBA from a reputed firm of Chartered Accountants and Consultants, an Administrative Officer was appointed to assist the Headmaster. Also an old boy was appointed as the Farm Manager, and this stemmed the losses that were a drain on the limited resources of the College. The old boys also undertook various projects to rehabilitate the school buildings and infrastructure, particularly the staff quarters and one particular old boy restored the Senior Dormitories at a personal cost of over Rs.2 million. There is a perceptible improvement in the College at present and also hope for continued improvement, but there is always much to be done and a long way to go.

Colombo
September 08,2003

Mr.P S Duleepkumar