

SWIMMING POOL AT S. THOMAS' PREP SCHOOL, BANDARAWELA

The boys of Prep School Bandarawela in the Nineteen Forties and Fifties were bathed by the Ayahs Mary and Jane at the Spout. This spout was the beginning of one of the streams that fed a tributary of the Budulu-Oya which ultimately joined the Mahaweli Ganga, after cascading over the Dunhida Falls. The boys lined up for a dip under the spout before being soaped by either Mary or Jane and rejoined the queue for the final wash during which they enjoyed the fun and frolic of a care free boyhood.

The only Swimming was done by the Scouts of the school, the 6th Badulla Troop on their occasional excursions to Ellatota River below the 5th mile post of the Welimada road They learned swimming under Mr A Abeyasekera. Mr Keble did take the boys to the rock pool below the railway line on the Diyatalawa Road.

In 1949 Mr. Keble decided to build a Swimming Pool on top of the Hill behind the office building. The parents contributed Rs 10 each for its construction. The committee to construct the pool comprised M. Edirisinghe, Tony Myatt and M. Anzairy. The dimensions of the pool were 66 feet by 20 feet and the deep end was 4 feet. Five lengths completed 110 yards which was the competitive standard of the period at the Public Schools and other meets. The Prep School Boys helped in the excavations and in many other small jobs. The total donations of Rs 720/= was insufficient to complete the upper portion of it and cement it. The pool was opened on 13 Oct 1949 with 1 ½ feet of water and the boys were allowed to swim in it until the end of Third Term in 1949. I remember a Bucket Brigade that was organized by Mr Keble to bring in water from the stream below the Hill by the Dhobi hut. In 1950 the committee collected a further Rs 25 which was a great help to complete the pool.

Due to the lack of water, swimming was restricted to a few months and Mr Keble decided to build a Dormitory by the Pool to accommodate the increase of admission to the school as well as to use the rain water off the roofs to fill the Pool. So Mr. Keble wrote a book to build this dormitory. The book was " The life of Sir James Peiris" - an analysis of the constitutional reforms leading up to self government from 1890 - 1930, as a background to the life of Sir James Peiris, a politician, scholar, lawyer, philanthropist and a farmer. The cost of printing and production met by the Peiris family and the proceeds of the sales were given to the new building. Many other benefactors helped in this project.

The Inter House Swimming meet was held and Blue House were champions in 1951. My memories of the meet is cheating by placing the foot at the Bottom half way to complete a lap. Many boys used these tricks to complete a length after which we won a wooden plaque. The best swimmer of our time was Templeman-Kluit a Dutch student, who swam a non stop mile in this pool. Many of the boys who learnt to swim in this pool later entered Gurutalawa and won their events and broke records at the Public Schools Meets. Of these the outstanding swimmers from the students of 1950-53 were Dirk Meier, SKN Samarasinghe, Upali Horadagoda, Daya Kumarasinghe, David Silva and B Munasinghe,

Brig. B. Munasinghe

20th November 2008