

The Sri Lankan Settlers of Thursday Island¹

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Introduction

The dismantling of the White Australia Policy in the early 1970s, allied with periodic civil strife in their homeland, brought significant numbers of Sri Lankan immigrants to Australia. Few Australians, however, are aware that, a century before, hundreds of mostly male ‘Cingalese’ (as Sri Lankans were then called),² mainly from the southern coastal districts of Galle and Matara in the British colony of Ceylon, came as labourers to the British colony of Queensland.³ The first of these arrived independently in the 1870s to join the Torres Strait pearling fleets, but larger numbers were brought to Queensland a decade later as indentured (contract) seamen on Thursday Island and, shortly thereafter, as farm workers for the cane fields around Mackay and Bundaberg, where many of their descendants still live. The arrival of the first batch of 25 indentured Sri Lankan seamen on Thursday Island in 1882 coincided with the importation of ‘Malays’ and Japanese. Yet, unlike the latter, comparatively little has been published on their origins, lives and destinies, nor their contributions to the business, social and cultural life of Thursday Island.

Some of those first arrivals demonstrated a remarkable entrepreneurial flair, taking up employment as ‘watermen’ (boatmen), ferrying passengers and

cargo from ship to shore and subsequently taking out licences as small businessmen: boarding-house keepers, billiard-room proprietors, shopkeepers, pawnbrokers, boat-owners, gem and curio hawkers and commercial fishermen. They were joined by professional jewellers, part of the Sri Lankan gem-trade diaspora into the islands of South-East Asia during the last decade of the 19th century. Although never as numerous as some other Thursday Island Asian communities, the Sri Lankans were perceived as a distinctive group and inhabited a recognised 'Cingalese quarter': a cluster of buildings — boarding house, billiard room, store and dwelling houses — located at the eastern end of Victoria Street. Religious life was centred on the Buddhist temple. Yet, after two decades, only 20 individuals remained. The decision to leave was influenced by economic difficulties in the marine industries and, it is said, increasing uneasiness among community members who feared the confiscation of their assets and either internment in or expulsion from a newly federated Australia.⁴ Most of them, however, did not return to their homes in Sri Lanka but took their skills, experience and newly acquired capital to Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia and other parts of South-East Asia.⁵

First Arrivals

Sri Lankan seamen joined hundreds of other outsiders in the Torres Strait pearl rush of the 1870s. One independent arrival was the seaman, James, who, with three others, was engaged by Police Magistrate H. M. Chester on Thursday Island on 31 May, 1879, to travel south to Brisbane and bring back the Government schooner, *Pearl*. His monthly wages were specified as £3.10 but, reliable crewmen being hard to procure at that time, Chester was obliged to give him £1 to secure the contract.⁶ He may be the enterprising James Appu De Silva, who, in 1885, ran the Cingalese boarding house and went on to establish several other businesses. Another independent arrival was Assan Ceylon, who told an inquiry in 1901 that he had been diving in Torres Strait since about 1879.⁷

James and Assan Ceylon may have been among the 20 Sri Lankans who, by 1882, were already living in Queensland and who found the place to be 'quite satisfactory'.⁸ There are also oral accounts from Torres Strait Islanders and Papua New Guineans claiming Sri Lankan connections that predate the arrival of the first indentured seamen. One was the husband of Konai from Erub (Darnley Island). His name is forgotten, but he is said to have fathered three daughters, Morabisi, Sophie and Balo, born on Erub in the 1870s.⁹ Another may have been the diver, Yusuf (known locally as John Joseph Bombay).¹⁰

Mass Indenture

Organised mass migration of Sri Lankans to Thursday Island began officially on 12 June, 1882, when Scottish businessman James Burns (of Burns Philp & Co.), acting as agent for the pearl-shellers, secured the services of some 25 'Cingalese' from the Galle area. Burns had recently imported 50 'Malays' on three-year contracts from Singapore and had had no difficulty in finding shellers to employ them. In his letter to the Colonial Secretary of Ceylon, dated 19 June, 1882, he expressed his intention of increasing the number of Sri Lankan indents to 100 'in a few months time'.

The 25 men James Burns initially recruited were undoubtedly eager to work in Torres Strait. They, like the Chinese, Indonesians, Filipinos, Japanese, Pacific Islanders and Europeans, were attracted by the prospect of making their fortune. Pearling was 'in full swing', new shelling stations were being established under a recently instituted system of official lease agreements, and demand for labour was at a premium at a time when the entire population of Thursday Island 'white and coloured [did] not exceed a hundred'.¹¹ Some of the newcomers may have gained prior experience in the pearl fields of the Gulf of Mannar and would have been anxious to try their luck in Torres Strait.

Moreover, as the historian, Swan, points out, there were economic pressures at home that 'pushed' the men to seek employment elsewhere. The Sri Lankan coffee industry had collapsed in the 1870s and 1880s due to blight and times were difficult.¹² Perhaps fearing that the Colonial Secretary might veto their plans, they went with Burns to the Police Magistrate in Galle and signed a contract, declaring that they were 'free British subjects belonging to the British Colony of Ceylon', who understood English and Sinhalese, and were desirous of proceeding to 'the British Colony of Queensland in Australia' to serve in the Torres Strait marine industries for three years. They were to be given the sum of three rupees for travelling expenses between Galle and Colombo, the cost of their steamship passages from Colombo to Thursday Island, return passage from Thursday Island to Colombo at the expiry of their term of indenture, and a month's pay in advance. Their wages were to be 'twelve rupees per month for the first twelve months, fifteen rupees per month for the second twelve months and 20 rupees per month for the third twelve months'. Each man would be supplied 'with the usual food and clothing to the extent of two shirts and two pairs of trousers every year'. There were also conditions on their transfer and possible repatriation, should they fail to give satisfaction.¹³

The Colonial Secretary in Ceylon gave his official permission on 22 June, 1882.¹⁴ The 'Cingalese' who signed this document were eventually provided

with berths on board the S.S. *Scotland* and arrived in Queensland in August of that year.¹⁵ They were the first batch of indentured Sri Lankans to arrive in Queensland. On 30 August, all the men were transferred with their consent to the employ of Joseph Tucker, who had established a pearling station on Goode Island, 8km from Thursday Island. The new agreements were ratified and confirmed by the Police Magistrate on Thursday Island, who noted that the men had the option of remaining on Thursday Island after the termination of their contracts, if their work was satisfactory and that was their wish.¹⁶

This was a period of expansion for the pearling industry, which was chronically short of labour. The 1880 Pacific Island Labourers Act and its amendments had signalled to the shellers that they could not rely indefinitely on indentured Melanesians and Polynesians as their chief labour source. In 1881, two events — passage of the Pearl Shell and Beche-de-Mer Fishery Act and discovery of a vast new pearl bed to the south-west of Mabuiag — also changed the legal and social context of labour procurement. Mindful of the likely deleterious effects on the Islanders, the Government that year created several reserves for their exclusive use¹⁷ and granted officially registered leases to selected shellers, for the first time guaranteeing them limited security of tenure. These onshore stations, consisting of houses for the manager and men and ‘storehouses for shell, diving gear, provisions, kitchen, etc.’, were the centre of operations, where ‘all stores are kept for the men and boats, all repairs done, and the shell is received, cleaned, and packed’.¹⁸ Men were required to erect the buildings, jetties and slipways of the new stations, dig the wells, man the diving boats and clean and pack the shell. Ancillary staff was also required to provision and cook for the men, row the whaleboats to and from the stations to Thursday Island and act as house servants for the European owners and managers. Efficiency demanded a continuing and dependable supply of workmen and, with the Pacific closed as the primary source of cheap labour, the shellers turned their attention to the possibility of mass indenture from Asia.

In October 1883, the shelling population was concentrated on the islands adjacent to Thursday Island, which, apart from six government buildings, comprised merely ‘two hotels, one store and four private houses’.¹⁹ John Douglas, who arrived as Government Resident in 1885, is credited with encouraging the shellers to move their headquarters from the nearby islands and thus increase the township’s population and commercial base.²⁰ Among the 307 inhabitants of Thursday Island about 1885, 160 were Asians, including 20 ‘East Indians’, mostly Sri Lankans. Five were crewmen on a British India Company vessel then in port. Of the 15 others, only one is mentioned by name, De Sylva (likely James Appu De Silva). Five were storehands working for De Silva; five were living in Tommy Japan’s (Tomiji Nakagawa) lodging house and two in Ah

Sue's lodging house; one was employed by and lodged with Humphrey Davy Mills, the local boatbuilder; one was working as a storeman in Burns Philp & Co.'s Native Barracks; and one was in prison.²¹ Not recorded in that census, however, were Sri Lankans living on islands of the Prince of Wales Group or on board their vessels. During 1885, of the 1,144 seamen engaged through the Shipping Office and the 980 discharged, 75 were Sri Lankans.²²

Despite assertions that the turn-of-the-century population numbered some 100 families, historical evidence does not support this number. The most comprehensive statistics available enumerated marine workers (pearl shell, *bêche-de-mer* and trochus) by ethnicity, but Sri Lankans were too few to warrant a separate category. Table 2.2 (in Chapter Two, this volume) charts the decline of the Sri Lankans on Thursday Island from about 1885 to 1914, but those who resided on the nearby stations or on boats were not counted. In 1890, the Sri Lankan Thursday Island population was recorded as 22 males out of a total of 526; in 1892, it was 43 out of 1,067; by 1893, it was 32 males out of 1,441; and, in 1898, 40 out of 1,702. By April 1901, there were 54 males (52 adults and two children), a figure unchanged a year later when the total population was 1,695.²³ This was the heyday of the Thursday Island Sri Lankan community, which declined rapidly after Federation in 1901 and a major collapse of the pearling industry in 1904. By 1918, only 12 Sri Lankans were living either on Thursday Island or the neighbouring Prince of Wales Group of islands.²⁴

First Settlers

Many of the early Sri Lankan indents became 'watermen' (boatmen) and appear to have had a monopoly over that occupation. The pilot station and harbour-master's office were at that time located on Goode Island, a few kilometres away from Thursday Island, and required boatmen for all transport and transshipment between the islands.²⁵ In 1887, the Government established a lazaret and quarantine station on Gialag (Friday Island), which, until the former's closure and the latter's transfer to Thursday Island in 1907, also required boat transport.²⁶ The two Thursday Island jetties were not completed until 1893 and all passengers and cargo destined for the port had to be rowed ashore in watermen's skiffs from the hulk, which lay offshore. At Federation, there was a permanent customs post on Thursday Island, which was manned at one stage by a staff of 28, most of whom were launch crew.²⁷ Whether the watermen worked under government contract or were self-employed, they were relatively well paid and possessed greater independence and opportunity for engaging in commercial activity than their indentured countrymen.

Thursday Island Court of Petty Sessions and Police Summons Books identify some of the first settlers and their circumstances. They fill the gap between the first arrivals and the establishment of the earliest small businesses.²⁸ We have tentatively identified about 60 of those early arrivals, who are recorded as being of ‘Cingalese’ origin in Thursday Island court and other records between 1883 and 1907:²⁹

Ahmat, L. K. Amaris, Simba K. Amadoris, Gostene Waduga Andris (George William Andris), Androsami, Allis Appu, Charles Appu (possibly K. N. Saris Appu), Dionas Appu, Don Singho Appu (John Ceylon), Arnolis, Singho Babu (S. K. Babunappu), M. W. Bastian, Peter Brown, Assan Ceylon (B. Assan), Usop Ceylon, Charley Cingalese, Conieham, Cornelius, Danolis, Denishamy, Didwan, Dionysius, Elias, P. H. Endoris, Frank Gabriel, J. Harmanis, Idroos, J. P. James, M. W. James, Billy Jetsunamy (Billy Cingalese), Henry Louis Johannes, Bob Kitchalan, Peter Kuruneru, Matho (Matthew Appu), Charles Mendis, W. V. Mendis, Menzies, Miskin, Thomas Roderick Morris, Katta Nandoris, Henry Odiris, Samuel, Charles De Silva, H. L. De Silva, James Appu De Silva (Jimmy Cingalese), S. A. De Silva, William De Silva, Simon,³⁰ Henry Louis Simon, L. D Simon, S. K. Simon, K. P. Appu Singho, Punchi Singho (James Cingalese), Abdula Siyadoris, Thadeus, Theodorus, L. H. Trolis, Thomas Weerasooria (who also signed as ‘W. S. Thomas’), William De Silva, Bala Williams, H. Wimalaratna.

To the above list can be added the 10 Sri Lankans who were brought before the court by the pearl-sheller, Edward Morey, for breach of agreement in January 1901. The case was adjourned and then withdrawn, presumably because the men returned to work. Their names were: John Jayasuriya Gunawardene, Hatharasingha Widanage Thomis, Widane Gamage Charles, Lamahewage Johannes, Ratneweera Patabendige Andrayas, Kukunhenego Matho, Hewanamage Simon, Don Charles, Adoris, Geedrick.³¹

Most of the men were either watermen or crew; i.e., they ranked towards the middle of the hierarchy of marine workers in terms of skill level, wages and ethnic origin. The majority were Buddhists, some very devout,³² although a small number were Muslim, such as Assan Ceylon and Ahmat, and possibly — judging by his name — Usop Ceylon.³³ Many were literate in Sinhalese, could read Buddhist texts and signed their names in Sinhalese script (more rarely in English) to their witness statements. When giving evidence in court, they swore to tell the truth on their ‘sacred volume the Cingalese bible’. During their time ashore, they lived at the ‘Cingalese’ lodging house on Victoria Parade or in houses close by, bought provisions at the Sri Lankan store, drank with countrymen and other workmates in the local hotels,³⁴ played billiards in the



Victoria Parade, Thursday Island, 1895.
 Courtesy of John Oxley Library, Brisbane (Item No. 121658).

Sri Lankan billiard room, visited their countrymen at home or in the boarding house, and gambled in the Chinese-run establishments. They probably also visited the Yokohama brothels. No Sri Lankan women are mentioned and only a few of the men are recorded as being married, although some are known to have lived with local Indigenous women and/or had families in Sri Lanka.³⁵

At the apex of the marine-worker hierarchy were the divers, who were the best paid and most highly respected. They captained their boats, being solely responsible for each trip and answerable only to the owners or managers.³⁶ Sri Lankans were rarely employed as divers, but we have found evidence of two: Assan Ceylon and Thomas Morris.

Assan Ceylon began diving for pearl shell about 1879 and worked as a diver for more than 20 years. In 1901, he was employed by the Filipino pearl-sheller and businessman, Heriberto Zarcal, as diver and captain of his ketch *Lacandola*. Although generally known as Assan Ceylon, he was registered on articles of the schooner *Ethel* and other boats as B. Assan, No. 179. He was found to be partly responsible for the death of Cypriano Trinidad, one of the Filipino crew of the *Lacandola*, in that he had allowed Trinidad to dive without a diver's licence, and was fined the large sum of £10.15.6.³⁷ Two years later,

perhaps because of his conviction or because he had sustained an injury to his hand, he was working as a commercial fisherman in partnership with Henry Louis Simon.³⁸ Thomas Roderick Morris, born in Badulla, Ceylon, about 1863, may have been of European-Asian descent. His parents are recorded as James Morris, a coffee planter, and Caroline. In 1890, he was working as a diver for the pearl-sheller, John Tolman;³⁹ and, on 31 January, 1891, he gave his occupation as diver when he married a mainland Aboriginal woman from Cape Grenville named Kate Paremah.⁴⁰ Another putative Sri Lankan diver was Yusuf (a Muslim known locally as John Joseph Bombay), who was in charge of the *Lily* in 1885.⁴¹

With few exceptions, little is known about the fate of most of these early seamen. Simon Silva, a man 'of an excitable nature', was likely the coxswain of the first transport between Thursday and Goode Island in 1884.⁴² At the outbreak of World War I, Simon was listed as the only 'Coloured' man on Thursday Island possessing a service rifle.⁴³ He survived to become the oldest man on the island.⁴⁴ According to Amara and Mahendra Mendis, who knew him towards the end of his life, he used to live behind the Saranealis family, who cooked his meals as he grew older and more infirm and gave him fish after their fishing trips. His last years were spent in hospital, where his friend, the doctor, provided him with a glass of whisky after their evening walk together.⁴⁵ Three long-term residents died intestate on Thursday Island: Allis Appu in 1891, leaving the sum of £103.3.4;⁴⁶ Gostene Waduga Andris in 1900, leaving an estate of £60;⁴⁷ and M. V. Mendis in 1913, leaving assets of £5.12.6.⁴⁸ James De Silva and Simon Silva appear to have become indigent in old age. The waterman, Miskin, who was often in trouble with the law, was born about 1853 and may have been one of the original indents. He died on Thursday Island on 31 July, 1908.⁴⁹ At least three Sri Lankans required hospitalisation due to temporary mental illness.⁵⁰

The 'Cingalese Quarter' of Thursday Island

To cater for the needs of the growing Sri Lankan workforce, a 'Cingalese boarding house' was established, probably during the second half of 1885. It was run by James Appu De Silva.⁵¹ James De Silva was the proprietor, not only of the boarding house but of a billiard room that was under the same roof and was joined to the boarding house by a verandah.⁵² He employed his countryman, a former waterman named Andris, as a billiard marker. By April 1886, he also ran a 'Cingalese store' on the same allotment.⁵³ Close by was the house which the Sri Lankans used as a place of worship before the construction and dedication of 'a tiny tin Buddhist temple'. For many years, the temple, 'an equally small

Chinese Joss house' and two Christian churches were the only places of worship on the island.⁵⁴

The section of Thursday Island where the Sri Lankans congregated was referred to as the 'Cingalese quarter'. It consisted of a cluster of buildings on Allotments 1 and 2 of Section 5 of the town plan towards the eastern end of Victoria Parade near the Post Office, separate from the Asian quarters (see Map C).⁵⁵ This was the locus of their community, a predominantly masculine world of work, recreation and prayer. It was centred on their lodging house, billiard room, store and Buddhist temple and included at least three houses, two located in a passage from Victoria Parade to Douglas Street and the other fronting on to Victoria Parade.⁵⁶ However, neither the Sri Lankans (nor other 'Coloured aliens') owned the buildings or land they occupied. Property on Thursday Island at the time was exclusively in the hands of Europeans: the boarding house, billiard room, store and houses belonged to Burns Philp & Co. Once a Sri Lankan house tenant left, however, he generally found a countryman to take his place.⁵⁷

The tendency of the Sri Lankans to work and live together, to exploit a specialised economic niche in the local economy and to behave as a cohesive ethnic group in the event of disturbances conforms to the general pattern of the Thursday Island Asian communities during their early formation. To these factors can be added the Sri Lankans' 'exotic' (to European eyes) appearance, apparel and general demeanour. Although they kept largely to themselves, there were occasional fights with their main economic competitors, the Malays,⁵⁸ and later the Japanese.⁵⁹ Each side accused the other of being the instigator of these affrays, but the police considered them equally to blame.⁶⁰

More covert was Sri Lankan participation in the shadowy world of Malaytown's gambling and opium dens and brothels. These semi-legal establishments were frequented by seamen of all ethnicities during the lay-up season and remained largely free from official supervision and control provided there were no disturbances. From time to time, however, the police would conduct raids, usually with the help of informers. In 1899, the seaman, Siyadoris, was one of a group of Sri Lankans gambling with Malays and Chinese in Hop Sing's back shop in Douglas Street;⁶¹ in 1901, H. L. Simon was arrested in a police raid against William Sam Hee's gambling room on Douglas Street. He had been one of a 'crowd' of about 25 men, including Europeans, Japanese, Chinese, Malays and three of his countrymen — one was the waterman, Bala Williams, another the hawker, Weerasooria Thomas.⁶² This world was depicted by novelist Colin Simpson, who based his fictionalised hero's adventures on his own experiences on Thursday Island during the early 1890s. Recalling his impressions of a Chinese-run gambling room, he wrote:

A few of the men there he knew. The big Dane was Ewald, who had a beche-de-mer fishery. The West Indian with thin gold rings in his ears was the bosun of Pymont's luggers. Kono, the 'king' Jap diver who had brought in the biggest shell-take the previous season, was at the table ... De Silva, the little Cingalese storekeeper, was at the gaming table between an old Chinese and a red-bearded engineer named McGowan, who was working on the construction of the new jetty.⁶³

Refugees from Normanton

The early community gained an unknown number of new members in July 1888 as a result of the influx of 84 refugees from anti-Asian riots in the remote township of Normanton on the Gulf of Carpentaria. The riots had broken out in response to three murders by a 'Malay' named Sedin, but they brought to a head several years of tension between the Asian newcomers and the predominantly European townspeople, which was fanned by articles in the local press.⁶⁴ The majority of those involved were 'Malays', a general term for 'Coloured' people, but Sri Lankans were included among those who fled to Thursday Island in the vessel, *Birksgate*.⁶⁵ In an article headed 'The Normanton disturbances', the *Queenslander* of 7 July, 1888, reported that:

Sedin, a Malay, was charged yesterday week at Normanton for the murder of John Fitzgerald and Christian Muynga. He insisted on describing how the murders were committed. He was committed to stand trial for wilful murder. He was also charged with the murder of J. P. O. Davis.

The 'Malays' and Sri Lankans had reportedly 'dribbled down in twos and threes' from Thursday Island over a number of years, hence the decision to send them back there. On a lagoon near the town they had constructed their own village and some had gone into service as cooks and house servants. Their presence was increasingly resented and the climax came with the murder by Sedin of three Europeans, two of whom may have gone to the Malay village to cause trouble, but one, a ship's carpenter, seeking to make peace.

Immediately the townspeople decided on direct action. With strong ropes they pulled down every structure in Malaytown. The terrified Malays fled to the bush, but about one hundred of them were captured and put on board the sailing ship *Rapido*.⁶⁶

Reports of the happenings in Normanton eventually filtered through to Ceylon and evoked a storm of indignation, which found an echo in Queensland. The 12 October, 1888, issue of the *Queenslander* contained the

following article, datelined Thursday Island and headed 'The deported [sic] Cingalese':

A letter from Louis Mendis, a leading Cingalese resident of Colombo, has been received by a Cingalese man here, who came away from Normanton with the other coloured deportees in June last year. Mendis says he will spare no pains to get justice done for the men through the Ceylon Government; he will get all the papers necessary to back him in his efforts; he will get the Cingalese representatives in the Legislative Council to move in the matter in the Council, and he will do all in his power to obtain redress. Mendis asks to be supplied with full information concerning the case, and also newspapers containing the narrative or comments thereon; and he offers to be responsible personally for all expenses incurred in keeping up the correspondence, which he says will have to be pursued until something is done for his countrymen.

Whether Louis Mendis's efforts bore any fruit is not known, since the newspapers remained silent on the subject.

Contemporary Observations

Despite their relatively small numbers, the Sri Lankans were singled out for comment from the beginning. In an 1883 petition to the Colonial Secretary of Queensland, the Torres Strait pearl-shellers wrote that 'Arabs, Egyptians, Malays and Macassar men, Javanese, Cingalese, West Indies, and natives from almost every island in the South Pacific' were employed in the marine industries.⁶⁷ At the end of the next year, they complained that they were 'continually engaging men from Sydney, Brisbane, Singapore, Batavia, Ceylon and Japan for various terms; and at the highest port wages; paying all expenses, and passage here, and frequently home again', only to see their employees fleeced by others at no profit to themselves.⁶⁸

The Church of England priest, Thomas Eykyn, who began visiting Thursday Island in 1885, specifically mentioned 'Hindoos, Cingalese, Malays, Siamese, Javanese, Japanese, Poles, Irish, Scotch, and a few English and Germans' among its '32 different nationalities'.⁶⁹ The Moravian missionaries established Mapoon Mission as a refuge for Cape York Aboriginal people in 1891 to protect the men and women from abduction by 'Whites, Malays, Cingalese, Japanese, and Manilla men'.⁷⁰ Visiting Thursday Island in 1892, the painter, Ellis Rowan, was struck by the 'medley of tongues and faces' belonging to 'Britons, Italians, Spaniards, Maltese, Hindus, Cingalese, Negroes, Malays, Kanakas';⁷¹ and, according to a visiting Sydney journalist, who attended a local

theatrical production in 1899, the audience included ‘Cingalese ... mostly in cool garb of singlet and dungaree trousers’.⁷² The growing commercial success of the Sri Lankans and other non-Europeans infuriated their Anglo-Australian business competitors, one of whom penned the following verses about 1900:

*Up in regions equatorial,
Blest with scenery pictorial,
Pursuits mainly piscatorial,
Lies an island known to fame.
Pearling lives and pearling thrives there,
Coloured races live in hives there,
White men risk their lives there
Thursday Island is its name.
Every race it opes its gates to,
Every country it relates to,
Key to Hell and Torres Straits too,
Though a speck upon the map.
What though whites first trod upon it!
What though Anglo-Saxons won it!
Chows and Cingalese now run it,
Aided by the wily Jap.⁷³*

From Indents to Entrepreneurs

The beginnings of commercial activity among the Sri Lankans occurred soon after the arrival of the first indentured workers. The earliest entrepreneurs were two watermen, James De Silva and Henry Louis Simon. By 1885, the energetic De Silva was the proprietor of a newly constructed lodging house, to which, by 1888, he had added a billiard room and general store. He advertised his various services in the first issue of the *Torres Straits Pilot and New Guinea Gazette* on 2 January, 1888: ‘James Silva, General Storekeeper, Boarding House Keeper and Waterman, Victoria Parade, Thursday Island.’ Silva offered ‘good accommodation for boarders at lowest rates’ and ‘boats for hire at all hours’. In the same issue was an advertisement for De Silva’s business competitor, H. L. Simon of Victoria Parade, who, in addition to his stock of ‘Ceylon Curios’, also kept ‘boats for hire at any time of day or night’. Other licensed watermen followed their example in hiring out their boats and services: M. W. Bastian in 1889;⁷⁴ J. Harmanis from 1889–99;⁷⁵ Saris Appu and J. Hermanis in 1898;⁷⁶ Ahmat from 1892–99;⁷⁷ and J. P. James, who, in January 1902, had a boatshed near the Grand Hotel.⁷⁸ All had lived for some time on Thursday Island; some may have been among the original indents. Becoming boat-owners was a



Saranealis family graves, Thursday Island.
 Courtesy of Stanley J. Sparkes.

natural progression for thrifty boatmen, who had saved enough out of their wages to start their own boat-hire businesses.

Buoyed by their successes, De Silva and Simon expanded into other commercial ventures, notably the burgeoning tourist trade in jewellery and curios.⁷⁹ In 1888, James de Silva was one of several Sri Lankans recorded as having been granted a hawker's licence. In his application, he listed as his sureties Henry Dubbins (a European pearl-sheller then Chairman of the Torres Divisional Board and a Justice of the Peace) and Moyden (a Muslim Indian waterman from Madras).⁸⁰ This suggests he had begun to establish personal and business contacts beyond the confines of the Sri Lankan community. In 1890, he married May Scott Mosa, a local shopkeeper, and with her help continued to expand his business interests. That same year he advertised himself as a blacksmith⁸¹ and, in August 1891, he kept at least two shops, one of which he sub-leased to a Greek storekeeper, George Machal.⁸² By May 1892, he had become a pearl-sheller, purchasing the lugger, *Mobiag*, and employing as his agent the European, Patrick Joseph Doyle. On 20 July, 1892, he successfully sued William Price for refusing to go to sea in his boat, despite the latter's having signed on articles and received an advance of £5. De Silva testified that not only had he lost the money he had advanced to Price, but two or three days' time, the cost of which he estimated at 'about one pound per day'.⁸² It was

during this difficult time that he was brought before the court, convicted of obscene language, required to provide sureties of the peace for six months at a total of £50 and fined £6.10.6. Despite this setback, he continued as a pearl-sheller until at least January 1895.⁸⁴ He had, however, withdrawn from pearling by September 1900 when he gave his occupation as fisherman during his trial for disorderly conduct. He had gone to Esteban Filomeno's house to get money owing to him for fish, had been roughly treated by a group of Filipinos, Filomeno's countrymen, and reacted by shouting and throwing stones.⁸⁵ The next month he was charged with being mentally unsound, but was released almost immediately.⁸⁶ De Silva remained on Thursday Island at least into the 1920s: in 1927, he was twice convicted of refusing to vacate premises he occupied on Arthur Filewood's property.⁸⁷

Henry Louis Simon's career followed a similar trajectory. On 15 January, 1885, he married a European woman, Annie May Holmes, and they rented a house close to Odiris and Theodorus.⁸⁸ On 12 May, 1888, Annie complained to the court about the actions of James De Silva, her husband's business rival.⁸⁹ Both men advertised boats for hire from 1888 and, in 1888–89, both held billiard licences for one table each, located in premises on Victoria Parade (presumably the billiard room run by James De Silva until 1896).⁹⁰ Simon did not renew his billiard licence after 1889, the year he advertised a jewellery partnership with P. H. Endoris.⁹¹ In 1892, he was granted a licence to deal in pearls (one of two held by Sri Lankans and which he held until at least 1896), a hawker's licence and a pawnbroker's licence.⁹² In 1893 and 1894, he advertised his services as a jeweller and watchmaker.⁹³ In October 1901, however, Simon was arrested and fined for gambling illegally with a group of his countrymen in William Sam Hee's room on Douglas Street.⁹⁴ Since only men of the highest probity were permitted to hold licences to deal in pearls, his gambling conviction may have precluded him from renewing his licence. By 1903, he, like De Silva, was working as a licensed commercial fisherman in partnership with the ex-diver, Assan Ceylon,⁹⁵ and thereafter disappears from the historical record.

James De Silva may have been the first Sri Lankan to have been granted a hawker's licence (in 1888), but he was followed shortly thereafter by H. L. De Silva in 1889 and K. M. Saris Appu in 1890. The next year, Odiris gave evidence that he, too, was a licensed hawker with 'money and jewels'; and H. L. Simon followed in 1892.⁹⁶ They may have been among the Sri Lankans who rowed out to visiting passenger steamships and were described by Boothby during his visit to Thursday Island in December 1892:

No sooner are we at anchor than our decks are covered with strangers of all descriptions. Arabs, Chinese, Cinghalese, Japanese etc. clamber over the side, everyone with something to sell, and everyone with a tremendous amount to say.⁹⁷

Boothby cast a cynical eye over the sale of 'pearls' to unwary tourists:

For even this self-same tourist, so ignorant in other matters, knows that it is not wise to buy pearls from the smooth-spoken Cinghalese who crowd the ship's deck. To this end these simple children of fair Ceylon manufacture pearls that would deceive even the mother oyster herself and dispose of them on advantageous terms to their darker skinned brethren.⁹⁸

From the mid-1890s, coinciding with a general downturn in the Torres Strait marine industries, the completion of the Thursday Island jetty, the ageing of the original watermen and the community's fears about the consequences of Federation, we see a greater range of occupations embraced by the remaining members of the Sri Lankan community. For example, in 1895, George William Andris was working as a carpenter; and, in 1899, Simba K. Amadoris (who was to become a jeweller and business rival of Y. B. Saranealis) was employed at Brown Campbells store on Thursday Island; in 1906, Henry Louis Johannes was a general labourer.⁹⁹ Shortly after Federation, a few of the older men, former watermen who had chosen to remain on the island, took out commercial fishermen's licences from the Shipping Inspector. Demand for their previous services had all but ceased and, with declining physical strength, they no doubt sought to take advantage of their long experience of local currents and conditions, selling their catch from Thursday Island. Among ex-watermen and ex-seamen recorded as licensed fishermen carrying on business on Thursday Island were Matthew Appu, Assan Ceylon, Miskin, James De Silva, S. K. Simon and Henry Louis Simon.

Leaving aside the gem traders discussed below, various other small entrepreneurs appeared from time to time on Thursday Island, some setting up on their own and others buying established businesses. On 27 June, 1901, H. Fernando put the following advertisement in the *Pilot*: 'I, the undersigned, have this day disposed of my business as a laundryman carried on in Douglas Street to P. H. James on whose behalf I solicit the patronage of the public of Thursday Island.' The advertisement was repeated for some weeks. A few years later, the Queensland Oriental Trading Co., General Merchants, Douglas Street, began to advertise 'Sinha Tea' among a list of other groceries. They stated they were 'importers of Best Ceylon Tea, Hand-made Ceylon Lace, Curios etc'.¹⁰⁰ A mail-order entrepreneur appeared briefly on the scene in 1907. The following advertisement appeared in the *Pilot* on 14 February, 1907, and was repeated on 14 March:

Ceylon Precious Stones. Direct from the Gemming District to Jewellery Manufacturers. Sample packet of 100 Cut Stones, Rubies, Sapphires, Etc., £5.0.0. Send P.O. Money Order to J. Wickramanayaka & Co., Kalutara, Ceylon, and try a packet, it will lead to good business. Best references. What other goods do you require from Ceylon?

The Gem-Trading Enterprises

All local memory of the first Sri Lankan settlers has been lost, but the gem-trading enterprises, established during the closing years of the 19th century, remain part of the island's historical record. Commerce in pearls (genuine and manufactured) became the main stimulus for a 'second wave' of Sri Lankan migrants to Thursday Island. The first indenters, some of whom had already entered the gem trade as hawkers and pearl dealers, were joined by the professional jewellers and gem dealers who are remembered today. They were part of a move by Sri Lankan jewellers to seek outlets in ports abroad, which were visited regularly by passenger vessels. The new arrivals exploited the profitable middleman trade in jewellery, particularly pearls, pearl blisters and items manufactured from pearl shell for which Thursday Island was famous. It was a natural commercial target for Sri Lankan jewellers whose expertise already embraced pearls from the beds of the Gulf of Mannar. According to Swan, several of these men were sponsored by Mudaliyar B. P. De Silva, 'a well-known entrepreneur in the gem trade in Ceylon'.¹⁰¹ Moreover, those who could afford to returned home periodically and their success stories encouraged others to try their luck on the same turf.¹⁰² This 'second wave' contributed to the more complex ethnic specialisation that was emerging within the marine industries. By the 1920s, observers noted that there were 'Japanese agents for trochus shell, Chinese agents for bêche-de-mer and Cingalese who specialise in tortoiseshell'.¹⁰³

Most of the stores were mixed businesses, offering services as watch and clock repairers and jewellery manufacturers, along with all manner of imported and locally fabricated curios made from pearl shell and tortoise shell — spoons, pen handles, paper knives, necklaces, pendants, bracelets and watch cases — as well as Ceylon tea, Parker pens, gas lighters and lottery tickets.

The first of these stores to be recorded was opened on Victoria Parade during the late 1880s by the enterprising waterman and boat owner, Henry Louis Simon. In January 1888, he advertised a second trade as 'Practical Jeweller and Goldsmith' and 'Dealer in Ceylon Curios and Jewellery'. He formed a partnership with P. H. Endoris, which was advertised between 1889 and 1893.¹⁰⁴ By 1890, Simon and W. E. Wimalasundera operated jewellery stores on Victoria Parade.¹⁰⁵ Two years later, Simon was so well established,

professionally and personally, that he had obtained one of the seven licences to deal in pearls — licences that were issued at the discretion of the Police Magistrate of Thursday Island only to ‘reputable persons’.¹⁰⁶ Also in 1892, S. A. De Silva advertised himself as a jeweller and watchmaker with an establishment in Normanby Street. He continued to advertise his services, which grew to include a ‘manufacturing department’ for customers wishing to design or alter their own jewellery, until 1897.¹⁰⁷

H. L. De Silva, the second licence holder in 1892, became successful enough to employ a second jeweller, his countryman Deeris, who was possibly, like many others throughout that period, brought out under indenture.¹⁰⁸ L. D. Simon also briefly advertised himself as a jeweller and goldsmith from 1895–96;¹⁰⁹ and Y. B. Saranealis carried on a jewellery business in Normanby Street from 1896–1919.¹¹⁰ Towards the end of 1900, J. C. Amadoris opened a similar business, also in Normanby Street, under the name, James Charles; and, about the same time, Simba K. Amadoris (who had been employed at Brown Campbells store on Thursday Island in 1899) set up in business as a jeweller and watchmaker. He purchased the business of Y. B. Saranealis in 1900 after the latter’s bankruptcy, but they later became rivals. Amadoris was periodically in trouble with the law and, in 1900, was convicted of manslaughter. After serving his jail sentence, he returned to Thursday Island and went into partnership with H. L. Mowlis. On 13 October, 1906, Amadoris described himself as a pearl dealer and jeweller with a shop in Douglas Street; in 1908, he appears to have transferred his pearl dealer’s licence to Mowlis, but nothing is recorded about that association after 1915.

The Major Gem Traders: Saranealis, Charles, Mowlis and Mendis

In 1896, the young Yanandaygoda Buddalegay De Costa Saranealis arrived on Thursday Island and immediately set himself up as a jeweller and watchmaker in premises in Normanby Street.¹¹¹ Announcing that he had commenced business, Saranealis advertised himself as a ‘Pearl Merchant and Buyer, Watchmaker and Manufacturing Jeweller ... prepared to execute every description of work entrusted to him’. He added that he kept a ‘large stock of all kinds of precious stones and jewellery’, manufactured every description of jewellery to order and repaired watches and clocks.¹¹² On 31 March, 1897, he was fined 5/- for a minor breach of local by-laws, probably in connection with his business.¹¹³ In the 7 January, 1899, issue of the *Pilot*, Saranealis advertised that he was now a licensed pearl dealer and court records reveal that in April of that year he was sworn in as court interpreter, a sign of his high standing in the general community.¹¹⁴ His advertisements continued throughout 1899, but he

was declared bankrupt on 6 December, 1899, with debts of £374.11.10 and assets of only £231.6.¹¹⁵ He sold his business to his countryman, S. K. Amadoris, in 1900 but was soon back in business. On 10 December, 1903, he advertised the availability of 'Ceylon Lace and Precious Stones, Watches and Jewellery' for sale. On 26 December, 1903, he advertised again, stating 'New and Expensive Machinery for Electroplating and Gilding has been received and all orders can be completed equal to the best English and Continental work'. After the disastrous fire, which, in April 1905, destroyed 14 buildings on Thursday Island's main commercial block, most of the Sri Lankan shopkeepers, Saranealis among them, moved to Douglas Street. By 30 September, 1905, he was back in business: in addition to his normal weekly advertisement on the front page of the *Pilot*, he advertised that he was still prepared to buy and clean pearls as usual. On 13 October, 1906, just four days before an assault by Amadoris, Saranealis advertised the arrival of a consignment of Ceylon lace. In 1909, in the issue of 26 June, Saranealis added to his regular advertisement with an Australian coat-of-arms and the words 'Under the Patronage of His Excellency the Governor-General of the Commonwealth of Australia, Lord Northcote'. He kept Lord Northcote's patronage until at least 1913.¹¹⁶ Saranealis continued as a pearl buyer and cleaner, watchmaker and jeweller until his death in 1919, when his widow and sons took over the business.¹¹⁷

On 29 December, 1900, James Charles (formerly James Charles Amadoris) advertised his services as watchmaker, jeweller and engraver with a shop in Normanby Street, which he may have taken over from S. K. Amadoris during his term of imprisonment.¹¹⁸ He claimed to be well known in many places in Australia. On 12 January, 1901, Charles's regular advertisement began appearing on the front page of the *Pilot* and continued to do so for some years. He married Florence Elizabeth Murton on 6 July, 1902, and, by 1903, had moved his jewellery establishment to Douglas Street.¹¹⁹ He and Y. B. Saranealis were the only Sri Lankans to hold any of the nine pearl dealer's licences issued for 1907.¹²⁰ He ceased advertising in 1909 after an attempt on his life and may have left Thursday Island.

Hikkadawa Leana Mowlis, also from Galle, arrived on Thursday Island in the early 1900s. He established a jewellery business in partnership with S. K. Amadoris, after the latter's release from jail, and, in 1908, held a coveted licence to deal in pearls. On 19 June, 1909, the following advertisement appeared in the *Pilot*: 'Amadoris and Mowlis, Pearl Dealers and Manufacturing Jewellers. Splendid Assortment of Ceylon Lace Received.' On 1 February, 1913, Mowlis advertised in *The Parish Gazette* without mentioning Amadoris and again failed to mention Amadoris in his advertisement in the *Pilot* of 24 January, 1914:

H. L. Mowlis. Pearl Merchant & Manufacturer of Mother-of-Pearl Goods, Thursday Island. Having acquired from Mr. H[eriberto] Zarcal his business with stock-in-trade etc., at Thursday Island, H. L. Mowlis will now continue the business in his own name. The fine selection of pearl and pearl-shell goods, jewellery, watches and other time-pieces, electroplate ware etc., will be kept up to the present high standard; and my usual fine stocks of Ceylon Lace will be added to, and satisfaction to all patrons so guaranteed, prices also being most moderate.



Punchi Hewa Mendis, c.1950s.
Courtesy of Mahendra Mendis.

In 1915, however, Amadoris and Mowlis advertised together as pearl cleaners, an indication that the partnership had been reconstituted at least for that year.¹²¹ That is the last year in which Amadoris's name appears. Mowlis, however, continued to advertise annually in *Pugh's Almanac* as a pearl buyer, watchmaker and jeweller until 1923.

The most successful of all the gem traders was Mendis Punchihewa, known in Australia as P. H. (Punchi Hewa) Mendis. Mendis came to Thursday Island in 1898 as a 15-year-old boy, sponsored by his father's cousin, Mendis De Silva, who had apparently lived there for a time.¹²² Mendis found employment with the *Pilot* as a compositor and part-time reporter — later in life, he recalled delivering the newspaper to Hon. John Douglas and sometimes receiving an apple in return. Beginning as a retailer in small rented premises, by good luck he made a large profit from the sale of an exceptionally beautiful pearl. This gave him the start-up capital to purchase a larger shop on Douglas Street opposite the Metropole Hotel in 1905 from the Chinese businessman, See Kee. There he opened a jewellery and general store and, within a few years, had established himself as an importer and retailer and a leading businessman in the town.¹²³

On 24 January, 1914, Mendis, describing himself as a licensed pearl merchant, advertised in the *Pilot* 'to purchase Pearl Blisters in the rough in any quantity for cash. Highest prices given. Pearlshellers please note.' He placed another, larger advertisement in the same issue, enumerating a wide range of goods for sale:

Oriental Embroidery Work ... also Silk and Crepe Kimonos, Silk and Embroidered Jackets, Silk, Gauze and Muslin Blouse Lengths ... Silk Stockings. Hand-painted velvet Cushion Covers, Silk Fans, etc. A large variety of Antimony Picture Frames, Hair Brushes, Mirrors, Shaving Sets, Trinket Boxes, Inkstands, etc., and a quantity of Damasceine, Cloisonne and Satsum, Hatpins, Buckles, Tiepins, Sleeve Links, Vest and Coat Buttons, Cigarette Cases ... Painted Postcards, Visiting Cards.

Mendis was quick to see business opportunities and astute and courageous enough to seize them. Alexander Corran, whose father had been a printer, taught him the printer's craft¹²⁴ and, during the 1920s, he and Corran's wife (the owner of the *Pilot*) operated the only printery on the island, running off not only the *Pilot*, *The Carpentarian* and *The Parish Gazette* for the Diocese of Carpentaria, but community announcements and items of local interest.¹²⁵ He claimed to have pioneered the trochus export trade from Thursday Island. In response to a request from his brother-in-law, then living in Japan, he sent a shipment of trochus and they began to organise the trade on a regular and systematic basis: it was soon taken over by the Japanese. As he expanded his various enterprises, Mendis brought several members of his extended family to work for him in his various businesses on Thursday Island and, later in Darwin and Brisbane, continuing a long-established practice in the Sri Lankan gem trade. The family also conducted a wholesale and retail business, Galle Stores Ltd, in Sri Lanka.¹²⁶ In 1940, Mendis left for Darwin to set up another store, later moving to Brisbane for the duration of the war. Returning to Thursday Island at war's end, he re-established his business on the same street but closer to the Post Office and, by the end of 1949, he owned jewellery stores on Thursday Island, in Darwin and Brisbane. His gem and pearl buying operations on behalf of American interests alone were 'said to run to £100,000 per annum'.¹²⁷ By the early 1950s, he was reported to own most of the Douglas Street business centre, and operated 'two cafes, one radio-shop, a jewellery-shop and pearl-shell packing houses'. The business was to pass into other hands in 1978 and, soon afterwards, the death of Donsiman Saranealis, who ran the only other jewellery store on the island, brought to an end the era of the Sri Lankan gem-trading enterprises of Thursday Island.¹²⁸

Sri Lankans and the Law

Our corpus of legal data is inherently biased, dealing as it does with instances of law-breaking. However, it contains much incidental detail that allows us to present a more nuanced account than previously of the lives and dealings of particular individuals and their interaction with the wider community. It attests to a number of convictions for assault and petty theft by a minority of Sri Lankans, usually against their countrymen and usually as a result of personal and commercial rivalries. Disputes about money figure prominently as a source of conflict, as does drunkenness, disorderly conduct and abusive language. Yet this should not surprise us: like other Asian communities on Thursday Island, self-preservation and even survival required the Sri Lankans to cultivate reciprocal relationships with their countrymen. As members of an 'exotic' minority, the Sri Lankans were tolerated rather than accepted, despite their contribution to the local economic, social and cultural life.

Our overall impression is that the Sri Lankan community was no more and no less law-abiding than others. Certainly, it was never singled out by the authorities as particularly violent or uncontrollable (as others were on occasion). Indeed, despite its frontier reputation, Thursday Island's prisoners consisted almost entirely of men sentenced for offences such as drunkenness, obscene language and otherwise disturbing the peace, petty theft and 'continued wilful disobedience', i.e., refusal to obey an employer's 'lawful commands'. The offences committed were generally minor and intra-ethnic, the result of tensions among men living in close proximity to one another on a small island. A few involved inter-ethnic assaults, usually fights between rival groups of seamen during the monsoon lay-up times, when the water was too 'dirty' for diving and the men returned to Thursday Island to drink, gamble and visit the brothels.¹²⁹

Criminal cases were rare. One involved three Sri Lankans, who, in October 1885, were charged with robbery with violence against an elderly Singaporean, Mehemet Ali, who 'was left a cripple, almost blind, and very feeble' and was repatriated to Singapore. The men were held in custody for three months, but discharged due to lack of substantial proof.¹³⁰ Five years later, the *Pilot* of 21 July, 1900, reported that Aboo Bacca, an Indian migrant from Simla, had been murdered by gunshot and two Sri Lankans had been arrested in connection with the murder. The men, S. K. Amadoris and Peter Kuruneru, were tried in Cooktown on 5 October, 1900, and found guilty of manslaughter. Each received a sentence of seven years' imprisonment.¹³¹

Four early immigrants account for a disproportionate number of court cases: Miskin, Billy Jetsunamy, Simon Silva and S. K. Amadoris. The waterman, Miskin, was often the instigator and ringleader of fights with Malays and served

various prison terms between 1890 and 1903 for fighting and petty theft.¹³² The seaman, Billy Jetsunamy, was charged with increasingly serious felonies between 1901 and 1903 and was said to ‘all the time make row’ (be very quarrelsome). On 13 July, 1901, he was found guilty of refusing to join his ship and sentenced to four weeks’ imprisonment. On 21 September, he was charged with being armed with an offensive weapon with intent to commit a felony. Evidence was given that he had come to Kate Samuels’ house and used abusive language. He was found guilty and sentenced to six months’ imprisonment with hard labour. Two years later, on 27 October, 1903, Billy pleaded guilty to ‘being armed with axe intent to commit a felony’ against his countryman, waterman Punchi Singho, and served another prison term.¹³³ The ‘excitable’ Simon Silva was convicted on a number of disorderly conduct offences and for selling alcohol to ‘Aboriginals’; and S. K. Amadoris was charged with several assaults before his conviction for manslaughter.

The court data confirm the existence of a social status distinction between the watermen and seamen, who committed most of the minor offences, and the small businessmen, who served as interpreters during the 1880s and 1890s. Interpreters were rarely needed after that: the jewellers who comprised the ‘second wave’ of Sri Lankan immigrants were not only more temperate in their behaviour but spoke and wrote good English, the medium of education in Ceylon. They were also required by law to keep their books in English for inspection by local authorities.¹³⁴

Most of the lawsuits during the early years of the 20th century involved members of the gem-trading fraternity and sprang from interlaced personal and commercial rivalries. In February 1902, J. P. James, a jeweller living in Douglas Street, was called on to show cause why he should not be bound over to keep the peace towards K. P. Appu Singho.¹³⁵ J. P. Charles was bound over to keep the peace towards H. Wimalaratna and, on the next Friday, H. L. Simon was similarly bound over.¹³⁶ The next year, on 14 December, 1903, Charles was arrested and taken to prison. The next day he pleaded guilty to a charge of disorderly conduct in Douglas Street.¹³⁷ Four days later, Florence Charles appeared in court demanding sureties of the peace against H. L. Simon for threatening her. She gave evidence that on the night of her husband’s arrest, H. L. Simon had knocked on the door of their house in Douglas Street saying that he wanted

to take care of the jewellery as a relation of my husband. He wanted to come into the shop and said if I did not give him the jewellery he would force me to. He persisted in trying to get into the shop. He said he would force his way into the shop if I didn’t let him come. I was frightened as I was alone. I was afraid he might do something to me or injure the premises.

Simon returned with four of his countrymen at 3am and tried the back door, but Florence threatened to shoot him if he came in.¹³⁸

A little more than a year later, on 21 March, 1905, Y. B. Saranealis brought a successful action against Charles De Silva for sureties of the peace. The dispute involved two (presumably threatening) letters written by De Silva asking for the return of the pound he had either lent to Saranealis or given to him for safekeeping.¹³⁹ Some time later, on 5 October, 1906, James Charles instituted court proceedings against Saris Appu for using threatening words. He must have thought better of it, because he failed to appear in court and the case was dismissed.¹⁴⁰

A more serious business lawsuit occurred soon afterwards between Y. B. Saranealis, now occupying his new premises on Douglas Street, and S. K. Amadoris, who had completed his term of imprisonment and returned to Thursday Island. The *Pilot* in its issue of Saturday 20 October, 1906, carried the following story:

On Wednesday evening about a quarter past five, the police were called to Y. B. Saranealis' shop in Douglas Street, where a disturbance had been made, it is alleged by S. K. Amadoris, a fellow-countryman and a rival in business as pearl-dealer, etc. Amadoris was taken in charge and locked up; and on Thursday morning was brought up at the Police Court, before Mr. C. D. O'Brien, Acting Police Magistrate, charged with being armed with a lethal weapon.

Evidence was given that Amadoris had gone into Saranealis's office holding a knife behind his back and attempted to stab him. He was prevented by Johannes, a Sri Lankan in Saranealis's employ, and a carpenter named Pryke. The police were immediately summoned and charged Amadoris with being armed with an offensive weapon. According to Amadoris, he had purchased a pearl from a Japanese, which Saranealis had offered to purchase from him for £45, but, the money not being forthcoming, he came twice to the shop to ask for it. On both occasions Saranealis was out. On the third visit, when he saw Saranealis go into the shop, he followed him, asked for his money and was hit on the neck by Johannes. 'While the police were there, [Amadoris] offered Saranealis the pearl and £50 if he would withdraw the charge, but Saranealis would not; he wanted satisfaction for what happened six or seven years ago.' Amadoris made the same offer at the lockup, but it was refused. The zeal and meticulousness with which the editor of the *Pilot* reported the first day's hearing of the case were not repeated when it came to the second day's hearing. The magistrate delivered his verdict in favour of Amadoris, who was discharged forthwith.¹⁴¹ Y. B. Saranealis was the target of at least two other attacks: on

7 July, 1913, he complained successfully against Charlie Saris (possibly K. N. Saris) for assault and sureties of the peace; and he was apparently stabbed in late 1918, although he laid no complaint on that occasion.

A far more serious case involved James Charles. In September 1908, he was the victim of attempted murder by Charlie Madras, either an Indian from Madras or another Sri Lankan.¹⁴² Madras was brought before the court on 2 September, remanded and recommitted to the next Criminal Sittings of the Circuit Court to be held in Cairns on Monday 21 September, 1908.

The Sri Lankan business community, which had not yet assumed its relatively settled inter-war character, was clearly in ferment. We can only speculate as to whether these cases, which occurred during a period of economic contraction, were the result of personality clashes, personal grievances or business rivalries; whether they arose from the struggle to survive in an intensely competitive commercial environment; or indicate attempts by certain individuals to dominate the lucrative local gem trade by forcing out competitors.

Social Integration

Vital registration data, court records and gravestones on Thursday Island reveal something of the personal lives of the Sri Lankans who made the place their long-term home. Despite hysterical reports in the *Bulletin* that, on Thursday Island, 'Chinaman, Cingalese, Manila natives, aliens of all sorts soon discover resting places for themselves upon [female immigrant] British bosoms',¹⁴³ the majority of 'first wave' immigrants survived on Thursday Island without the comfort and support of legitimate family. Even those who were married were prevented by government policy from bringing their foreign-born wives with them to live in Australia and were discouraged from associating with local Indigenous women. Naturally, there were 'irregular' unions that resulted in the births of children who took either the maiden or married name of their mother. Since the natural fathers are not officially recorded in such cases, we have relied on information passed down through families who claim some measure of Sri Lankan heritage, among them: Ahmat, Barba, Cowley, Dan, Doolah, Dorante, Dubbins, Gagai, Mills, Mingo, Randolph, Sabatino, Salam, Walters and Ware (from Torres Strait); Alaniel, Bon, Conboy, Fabila, Natera, Rautoka and Silva (from PNG).

Some of the early settlers did contract legal marriages. James de Silva, who was born about 1875 in Galle, married the widow, May Scott Mosa, on 21 May, 1890, in Cooktown. May was a shopkeeper on Thursday Island at the time of her marriage and was three years older than her husband. She was born in

Samoa to a European father and possibly a Samoan mother. Interestingly, in the light of race relations at the time, the witnesses to their marriage were the Filipino-English couple, Antonio Puerte and Elizabeth Massey Spain.

De Silva's rival, Henry Louis Simon, had married Annie May Holmes in 1885. There were tensions in the marriage and some years later she complained to police that her husband had used threatening language to her. Elizabeth Massey Spain testified that he had accused his wife of sleeping with his nephew and she had been present in their house when:



Joe Warnakulasuriya as a young man, c.1950s.
Courtesy of Mahendra Mendis.

He upset the chair his wife was sitting on and punched her over against the rail and said, go and put me in gaol again — she said I will go and get a separation. He said go. She went and as she was going he said, Come back or I will shoot you. I thought he would take her life and followed her in. She gave him a lot of papers. He tore them all up. He was growling at her all the time.¹⁴⁴

Two other early arrivals who are attested as being married were the divers, Assan Ceylon, who was living with his unnamed wife in John Street in 1900, and Thomas Morris, who married an Aboriginal woman on Thursday Island in 1891 — the only marriage of a Sri Lankan recorded on Thursday Island before Federation.

Despite cultural differences, marriages to European or 'half-caste' Australian-born women conferred personal, social and commercial benefits, and others besides James de Silva, Henry Louis Simon and Thomas Morris made such marriages.¹⁴⁵ James Charles (Amadoris), the jeweller living in Douglas Street, had a European wife, Florence Elizabeth Charles, who, like Annie May Simon, helped in her husband's business and was also subject to

abuse.¹⁴⁶ On 20 January, 1905, Florence took her husband to court for using threatening language.¹⁴⁷

The later marriages between Y. B. Saranealis and English-born Alice Stewart, and between H. L. Mowlis and the young widow, Clara Fabian Santos, the locally born daughter of a Filipino father and Torres Strait Islander mother, appear to have been less volatile. Y. B. Saranealis was born about 1876 in Galle to Yanandaygoda Buddalegay Donsiman and Beuter Anohamy.¹⁴⁸ The young Saranealis arrived on Thursday Island aged about 20 and rapidly immersed himself in mainstream community life. On 30 October, 1897, the *Pilot*, reporting on forthcoming festivities in honour of the Prince of Wales' birthday on 9 November, mentioned that the Wybenia Cycle Club had organised a series of cycle races. Saranealis had entered five races in all and was placed fairly high up on the handicap list. When the races were run, he was able to secure third place in one race. The newspaper also revealed that he was a contributor to the Thursday Island Hospital.

Saranealis married Alice Stewart on 24 September, 1900, on Thursday Island. Alice was a year older, born in London of Scottish descent. Saranealis was naturalised on 26 March, 1902, soon after the birth of his first child.¹⁴⁹ He is said to have been mysteriously stabbed one night in about 1918, although nobody was charged with the assault.¹⁵⁰ Weakened by the wound, he died shortly afterwards during the influenza epidemic on Thursday Island on 30 January, 1919. Alice died on 3 January, 1955. They lie in the same grave along with four of their six children, three boys and three girls, all born on Thursday Island.¹⁵¹

Of the Saranealis boys, it was Eddie who was the best known. Despite his lack of formal qualifications, Y. B. Saranealis had successfully practised dentistry from at least 1900, having studied by correspondence course, and, after his death, Eddie continued to practice from the new premises on Douglas Street, not far from the Metropole Hotel.¹⁵² He is said to have treated the Governor of Queensland, Sir Leslie Wilson, during his visit in October 1933. When the Queensland Home Secretary passed a new act enabling practising but unqualified practitioners to sit for a qualifying examination, Eddie Saranealis left Thursday Island for the first time in his life for Brisbane, where he 'passed the examination with flying colours, and returned to Thursday Island a diplomaed dentist'.¹⁵³ According to Y. B. Saranealis's grandson, the brothers, despite their contributions to the commercial and cultural life of the island, 'suffered from a great deal of racial prejudice' and, with the exception of Buddy, became recluses. All the children were 'gifted artists and musicians', the daughters were also talented painters, and Ruby 'made the most exquisite carvings from mother-of-pearl and tortoise shell using what I must assume are

traditional Sinhalese handcraft methods'.¹⁵⁴ Some of her pieces are held in private collections throughout Australia.

Hikkadawa Leana Mowlis, another immigrant from Galle, was born about 1886, the son of a merchant, Hikkadawa Leana Singho Appu, and his wife, Gagarabamak Balo Hanney. Mowlis, a man of recognised probity, became a naturalised Australian on 19 April, 1911.¹⁵⁵ Mowlis married the widow, Clara Fabian Santos, on 2 June, 1915, on Thursday Island after the murder of her first husband and an unwittingly bigamous second marriage. Clara and Mowlis began living together 'some time' before their marriage, possibly about the time of his naturalisation, which was also the time of the discovery of the bigamous marriage. The legal difficulties were resolved after advice from the Queensland Crown Solicitor. Mowlis, wrote the Protector of Aboriginals on Thursday Island, was in business there 'as a jeweller and pearl dealer' and had 'a good reputation'.¹⁵⁶ The couple had no children and Clara died on 28 June, 1917, at Thursday Island. Mowlis continued to advertise his services as a pearl buyer, watchmaker and jeweller until 1923, after which he disappears from the Thursday Island records.¹⁵⁷

Another family that figures prominently in the Thursday Island cemetery is the Warnakulasuriya/Ahmat family. Punchi Appu (Peter) Warnakulasuriya was born in Tangalla, Ceylon, in 1888 and died on 15 April, 1981. He was a relative of Punchi Hewa Mendis, who brought him to Thursday Island under indenture 'in the early part of 1918'. Warnakulasuriya was educated at St Thomas's College, Mt Lavinia (between Colombo and Galle), and had previously lived in Burma and Singapore. He became a highly proficient pearl cleaner and spent the rest of his long life on Thursday Island.¹⁵⁸ Warnakulasuriya reputedly fathered six children by Amcia Usop Ahmat, the Thursday Island-born daughter of a Muslim fisherman from Borneo and his Cape York Aboriginal wife.¹⁵⁹ After Ahmat's death from tuberculosis, Peter and Amcia lived together, effectively regularising their long-lasting union.¹⁶⁰ Their second son, Joseph (Joe), born on 12 February, 1927, was legally adopted and took his father's name. According to Nissanka Mendis, son of Punchi Hewa Mendis, his father took Joe to Sri Lanka at the age of seven and educated him at Mahinda College, Galle, hoping that he would become a Buddhist monk. However, he returned to Thursday Island in 1949. He died of a heart attack on 4 October, 1973, while closing up Mendis's shop one afternoon, and he is buried on Thursday Island.¹⁶¹

Warnakulasuriya's sponsor, patron and relative was Punchi Hewa Mendis, who was born on 12 September, 1883, in Galle and arrived on Thursday Island on 23 October, 1898, on the S.S. *Duke of Westminster*. He died there on 8 September, 1965. In 1915, he married Mercy De Silva, a niece of Singapore's

famed jeweller and sponsor of jewellers, Mudaliyar B. P. De Silva. Under the immigration restrictions of the time, he was not permitted to bring his wife to Australia but visited her every few years and their union produced two sons.¹⁶² Extremely respected, he and later his family held an ambiguous position in the racial hierarchy of Thursday Island (as did the families of mixed Sri Lankan heritage). His business acumen, personal charm and evident integrity led to social acceptance by a wide cross-section of the community; he also privately assisted other local businessmen in adversity, such as Chinese merchant Tsing See Kee, from whom he had purchased his shop on Douglas Street and to whom he lent money on the strength of their long relationship and a handshake.¹⁶³ The family counted a range of Thursday Island residents among their friends: these included not only members of the European and Coloured business elite, but the families of the old 'Malays', whom Mendis had met soon after his arrival, such as the Ahmats, Bindorahos, Jias and Lobans. Some of these were among the more than 200 guests who attended Amara Mendis's 76th birthday celebration in Brisbane in March 2004.

What emerges from the biographies of these men, apart from their entrepreneurial success, is the manner of their 'recruitment' to Thursday Island — being sponsored by extended family members and sponsoring others in turn — their continued adherence to Buddhist principles and practice, sometimes turbulent commercial partnerships with countrymen, and cultivation of a wide-ranging network of personal and business connections throughout Australia and Asia. People of all ethnic backgrounds and religious affiliations were included among their Thursday Island friends. Indeed, crucial to their success was the extent to which they gained the support of non-Sri Lankan residents of Thursday Island. James De Silva's sureties when he took out his hawker's licence were the European sheller, Henry Dubbins, and Moyden, a Muslim Indian waterman; and the witnesses to his marriage were a Filipino-English couple, Antonio Puerte Spain and Elizabeth Massey. Mowlis acquired the business and stock of the prominent Filipino businessman, Heriberto Zarcal; and his marriage witnesses were Thomas Toulasik, a Timorese pearl shell cleaner and member of the Dutch Reformed Church, and Johanna Mayor, the Catholic daughter of a Filipino diver and Torres Strait Islander mother. Saranealis named his second son for Zarcal, who, like him, had married a European wife. Mendis owed his business beginnings to the confidence placed in him by English-born Alexander Corran, the editor of the *Pilot*, who treated him like a son; the local European bank manager; and the Chinese businessman, See Kee.

The 'second wave' of Sri Lankan immigrants, who came with the intention of participating in the gem trade, put down deeper roots on Thursday Island than their predecessors. However, they immigrated during a period of

intense racism and suffered its emotional consequences. Their children, who were born in Australia to mothers of Indigenous descent, were generally accepted by their mothers' community. The ethnic status of those born locally to European mothers was more problematical: they, in fact, belonged neither to the White nor local 'Coloured' communities. While technically 'Coloured', i.e., not of entirely northern European origin, their parents were prominent, wealthy and well-educated businesspeople, spoke excellent English, were British subjects, entertained a wide range of local people in their homes, provided essential services to the whole community without distinction as to ethnic origin, and their behaviour and aspirations were essentially those of the surrounding Europeans. However, dominant European racial attitudes towards the children of Sri Lankan-European descent were paradoxical, as indicated by the Acting Principal of the State School (not quite correctly) just before the outbreak of the Pacific War:

The races represented on the Island, in addition to Europeans, are: Chinese, Japanese, Torres Strait islanders and mainland Aboriginals ... In addition there are a couple of families, white predominating, containing Southern European or Cingalese blood. These live as white people and are accepted in white society ...¹⁶⁴

Cultural Contribution

Business was the main arena in which Sri Lankans interacted with and were known to the Thursday Island community —

In the distilled sunlight of the streets, with their avenues of almond and weeping fig and light green cocoanuts, are the shaded shops of Cingalese jewellers and Japanese and Chinese merchants selling all that is quaint and delightful, from deftly carved trifles of Australian pearl and tortoiseshell to dugong steak and long soup¹⁶⁵

— but they also shared their cultural heritage in the spheres of religion, sport, music, dance and philanthropy. Even before the construction of the Buddhist temple, between 10 and 12 devout Sri Lankan Buddhists came to Alis Appu's house to pray together on the verandah almost every evening. They called the house a 'temple', since it served that function, but the court insisted that 'temple' be crossed out and 'house' inserted. Evidence was taken in court from Alis Appu in 1890 that 'every day except when steamer in', he prayed in the temple between 6 and 7.30pm. Saris, too, came regularly to pray. Alis Appu described the manner of their devotion as follows:

We sit down when we pray. We no use book at that time. All pray. All people say prayer together. There was not lamp in the room. Every body was outside in the verandah. Nobody get up before the finish.¹⁶⁶

The prewar Buddhist temple was located about four doors down from the Post Office at the end of Douglas Street and near the Chinese quarter. A sacred tree was planted nearby.¹⁶⁷ A Buddhist monk was brought from Sri Lanka to inaugurate the temple and it was visited from time to time by a Sri Lankan priest.¹⁶⁸ Every full moon there was a procession with lighted candles, Chinese lanterns, flags and a drummer; and *Wesak*, the most significant Sri Lankan Buddhist festival, was celebrated annually with a long procession, ‘fervour and festivity’.¹⁶⁹ Sri Lankans may have planted the cluster of vivid pink frangipani trees near the entrance to the Church of England Quetta Memorial Cathedral in memory of their compatriots who died in the wreck of the *S. S. Quetta*.¹⁷⁰ A visitor to Thursday Island remarked that this particular variety of frangipani ‘is found in profusion in Ceylon and is known as the “temple flower”. When we visited any of the rock temples in that country we saw the Singalese placing the vivid blossoms before the shrine of Buddha.’¹⁷¹

Buddhism, which was symbolised by the monthly processions and construction of the temple, was not the only major projection of Sri Lankan culture on Thursday Island. Moreover, while the majority of the Sri Lankans were Buddhist, some were Muslim and there were Buddhists among the Japanese.¹⁷² Despite their vigorous religious and cultural independence, revealed by the absence on gravestones of any Christian associations,¹⁷³ members of the community made many contributions to civic life in their adopted home. Of particular importance was their contribution through performance — in sport, music and dance — to the vibrant, syncretic ‘Coloured’ culture that was evolving at the time. As Neuenfeldt points out (Chapter 11, this volume), the Asian seamen ‘brought their musicianship, music and performance cultures with them’ to Torres Strait, the Sri Lankans contributing their drums and drumming style to the dance band interpretations of popular music.

On 18 May, 1901, the *Pilot* carried a review of a brilliant display of Sri Lankan musical and literary culture at the local School of Arts. Members of the community pooled their resources to present two performances of *Prince Ramlan and Princess Pewlina*, a musical drama based on a traditional story, in English and Sinhalese. The enthusiastic reviewer commented that ‘the whole of the performers did their work with credit to themselves greater than could in many other instances be accorded to amateurs, or some professionals’. This was not the only performance given by the community during its heyday. In early 1902,

some Sri Lankans, who were upset by the noise made during rehearsals for a play and concert at J. P. James's house on Victoria Parade, took the offenders to court. Charles Mendis, who was not one of the performers, told the magistrate: 'They make a great noise every night getting ready for a play.' Those complained of were members of the Sinhalese Opera Club and, at the end of January 1902, they performed a series of operas at the School of Arts, one of which was *Prince Manora and Princess Emlin*. The *Pilot* of 1 February, 1902, commented on the 'curiously oriental' character of the operas and on the fact that few Europeans attended. The Sri Lankans were great supporters of the local hospital and contributed to various charitable funds:¹⁷⁴ on this occasion, the club donated one evening's takings of £1.15 to the hospital.¹⁷⁵

The 'Coloured' culture of music and dance, to which each Thursday Island Asian community contributed, flowered most brilliantly during the inter-war years. Various commentators remarked on its vitality and richness, including the novelist, Ernestine Hill, who wrote favourably of the Sri Lankan contribution during her 1933 visit:

The impression that all is well would be heightened by listening to the Thursday Island Town Band, polychromatic, but full of harmony and vigour, playing upon the jetty on Sunday evenings. Its members, in dapper uniform, are under the baton of a half-caste Cingalese conductor, and the strains of 'Dixie' and other melodies are wafted across the Straits ...¹⁷⁶

The conductor was probably Edward Saranealis, who was also an excellent violinist and composer of violin music.¹⁷⁷ He and his brother Donsiman belonged to the town band,¹⁷⁸ which sometimes accompanied the silent films shown at the local cinema,¹⁷⁹ and both contributed to the Thursday Island Silver Jubilee Celebration of King George V in 1935. On that occasion, at the height of prewar racism, all the officials named were Europeans and only two items were performed by non-Whites: Item 1, the National Anthem, performed by 'Mrs Sullivan and Mr E[dward] Saranealis'; and Item 13, 'a cornet solo entitled *True Love Polka* performed by Mr D[onsiman] H[eriberto] Saranealis, with piano accompaniment by Mrs Sullivan'.¹⁸⁰

Conclusion

Individual Sri Lankans ('Cingalese') joined other foreign seamen in the 1870s Torres Strait pearl rush but a distinctive Sri Lankan community came into existence only after 1882 with the arrival on Thursday Island of 25 indentured seamen. Some became the first watermen who, before the construction of the jetties in 1893, provided a crucial service to the regional economy by ferrying passengers and cargo to and from visiting ships. The shift of most commercial

activity to the township from the mid-1880s led to the establishment of a 'Cingalese quarter' and, for most of its 60-year history, the Sri Lankan community was associated with that section of Thursday Island. The once flourishing community declined precipitously soon after Federation with the departure of most of its members amid widespread prejudice against Asians, fears for what the future might hold and the collapse of the pearling industry.

While their exact numbers are unknown, the Sri Lankans remained a salient group until the outbreak of World War II, distinctive enough to be singled out by contemporary observers. Some of the early immigrants became commercial fishermen and owners of boats for hire; others took out hawkers' licences to sell jewellery and other curios made from tortoise shell, pearl shell and pearls to tourists and visitors. By the early 1900s, the original watermen, known for their quarrelsome behaviour, had declined in actual numbers and as a proportion of the general population, and had been replaced by a 'second wave' of immigrants. More sedate than their predecessors, these small-shopkeepers and businessmen occupied a specialised and profitable niche in the gem trade as cleaners, polishers, manufacturers, valuers and dealers in pearls, pearl shell and tortoise shell. As Swan remarks, 'These middlemen were among the best rewarded although not among the more colourful of the pearling hierarchy.'¹⁸¹

For more than six decades, the Sri Lankan community made significant contributions to the economic, religious, social and cultural life of Thursday Island. All of them have left, the Mendis and Saranealis families being the last to end their association. Little physical trace of their presence remains, but the prominent business families are still remembered. Not only did they provide goods and services not available elsewhere, but, through their acts of generosity and willingness to share their heritage with the entire community, they formed enduring relationships with their fellow residents, regardless of ethnic origin or religious affiliation.

Notes

- 1 This is a revised and expanded version of Chapter Eight of Sparkes, S. J., 1988, *Sri Lankan Migrants in Queensland in the Nineteenth Century*, Brisbane. pp. 75–85. Additional information was provided by the second author from archival and vital registration data and the chapter also draws on Swan, B., 'Sinhalese emigration to Queensland in the nineteenth century: a note', *Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society*, Vol. 67, No. 1. pp. 55–63. Also Weerasooria, W. S. 1988. *Links Between Sri Lanka and Australia: a book about the Sri Lankans (Ceylonese) in Australia*. Colombo: Government Press. Pinnawala, S. 1988. 'Sri Lankans.' In James Jupp (ed.), *The Australian People: an encyclopedia of the nation, its people and their origins*, North Ryde: Angus and Robertson. pp. 805–8. Sparkes, S. J. 2001. 'Sri Lankans.' In M. Brandle (ed.), *Multicultural Queensland 2001*, Brisbane: Multicultural Affairs Queensland. pp. 330–2. Court records, which provide most of the new data, generally specify an individual's Sri Lankan origin and are therefore more accurate regarding origin than the mainland sources examined by Sparkes (Sri

Lankan Migrants in Queensland in the Nineteenth Century, p. 86), who found that death records were compromised by spelling errors and errors of ethnic identification. Difficulties also arise because of the widespread use of the omnibus term 'Malay' for 'men from all over the Malay Archipelago, from Ceylon and parts of India' (Ellis, A. F. 1936. *Adventuring in Coral Seas*. Sydney: Angus and Robertson. p. 76.), and the different categorisation procedures employed by official agencies. For example, Queensland departure statistics for 'Coloured Persons from the Commonwealth' conflate 'Cingalese and Hindoos' as a single category. 'Departures of Coloured Persons from the Commonwealth', NAA/CRS/A/38, National Archives of Australia (hereafter NAA).

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- 2 The term 'Cingalese' is not entirely synonymous with the present-day form of the word 'Sinhalese', since a small number of the immigrants may have been Tamils or Ceylon Moors.
- 3 Ceylon gained its independence from Great Britain in 1948 and became Sri Lanka in 1972.
- 4 'Punchi Hewa Mendis to Amara Mendis.' Amara Mendis, pers. comm., 20 February, 2004.
- 5 Amara Mendis, pers. comm., 21 March, 2004.
- 6 'H. M. Chester, Police Magistrate, Thursday Island, to Colonial Secretary, Brisbane, 4 June 1879.' COL/A284/3725, Queensland State Archives (hereafter QSA).
- 7 'Inquiry into death of Cypriano Trinidad held 3 April 1901.' JUS/N295/01/183, QSA.
- 8 Letter from James Burns to the Colonial Secretary in Ceylon, dated 19 June, 1882, seeking approval for the recruitment of 'Cingalese', reproduced in Sparkes, S. J., *Sri Lankan Migrants in Queensland in the Nineteenth Century*, pp. 3–4.
- 9 Eva Mingo Peacock, granddaughter of Balo and the Danish pearl-sheller, Thomas Randolph, pers. comm., 10 August, 2000.
- 10 Bombay was the father of Rosie, who married Nicholas Albianiel, a Filipino catechist. Both became early Catholic missionaries in PNG (Jeanette Fabila, great-granddaughter of Rosie Albianiel, pers. comm., 1 April, 2004). One branch of the family believes he may have been Sri Lankan.
- 11 Coppinger, R. W. 1883. *Cruise of the 'Alert': four years in the Patagonian, Polynesian, and Mascarene waters (1878–1882)*. London: Swan Sonnenschein. p. 194.
- 12 Swan, B., 'Sinhalese emigration to Queensland in the nineteenth century', p. 55.
- 13 For the full text of the contract, signed by the men before J. D. Mason, Police Magistrate, in Galle on 12 June, 1882, see Sparkes, S. J., *Sri Lankan Migrants in Queensland in the Nineteenth Century*, pp. 75–6.
- 14 Weerasooria, W. S., *Links Between Sri Lanka and Australia*, p. 139.
- 15 'Governor of Ceylon to the Secretary of State for the Colonies in London, despatch dated 12 August 1882'; H. M. Chester, Police Magistrate, Thursday Island, to Colonial Secretary, Brisbane, 31 August 1882', COL A/346/4742, QSA.
- 16 'H. M. Chester, Police Magistrate, Thursday Island, to Colonial Secretary, Brisbane, 5 September 1882.' COL A/346, QSA.
- 17 See, for example, the letter from 'Acting Secretary, Land Administration Board, to Under Secretary, Department of Health and Home Affairs, Brisbane', dated 7 July, 1937, regarding the creation of the Hammond Island reserve. TR1794 Box 142 SL6614, QSA.
- 18 'T. De Hoghton, Lieutenant-Commanding HMS *Beagle*, to Colonial Secretary, Brisbane, 22 September 1879, Reporting on the Pearl-shell Fisheries of Torres Straits.' *Queensland Votes and Proceedings* (hereafter QVP), 1880, p. 1163.
- 19 'Thomas McNulty, Thursday Island, to Attorney-General, 13 October 1883.' COL/A370/5183, QSA.
- 20 '[T]he original policy discouraged pearl shellers to [sic] settle there. So at first the population did not increase rapidly. There was no appreciable increase until 1885, which coincided with the

- arrival of the Hon. John Douglas ... as Government Resident.' Lock, A. C. C. 1955. *Destination Barrier Reef*. Melbourne: Georgian House. p. 75.
- 21 Thursday Island census c.1885, A/18963, QSA.
- 22 'Report from John Douglas, Thursday Island, 1 July 1886.' COL/A457/1583, QSA.
- 23 'Thursday Island: Return of population collected by police on 1st April 1901' and again 'on March 1st 1902', *Fort Record Book, Green Hill, Thursday Island, 1899–1912*, AWM 1/12/2. Canberra: Australian War Memorial Library.
- 24 'Return of population of Thursday Island and the Prince of Wales group of islands on the 24th day of April 1918.' *Fort Record Book, Green Hill, Thursday Island, 1898–1927*, AWM 1/12/1. Canberra: Australian War Memorial Library.
- 25 The correct name is 'Goods Island' but, probably because of a misreading of the final 's' as an 'e', it has been called 'Goode Island' since at least the 1880s. The island was named by Matthew Flinders in November 1802 for the botanical gardener, Peter Good, who accompanied him on his surveying mission. Good, Peter. 1981. *The Journal of Peter Good: gardener on Matthew Flinders voyage to Terra Australia 1801–03*. London: British Museum (Natural History). p. 28.
- 26 At least one Sri Lankan, Jimmy Cook, was a patient of the lazaret. He was the cook on a station west of Townsville and was admitted on 11 August, 1894. 'Report of the Medical Officer of the Lazaret, Friday Island, 31 August 1898.' *QVP* (4), p. 633.
- 27 *Torres News*, No. 32, 19 August, 1986.
- 28 The latter can be traced through advertisements in the local newspaper, *The Torres Straits Pilot and New Guinea Gazette* (hereafter the *Pilot*), which first appeared on 2 January, 1888, and entries in *Pugh's Almanac and General Directory* (hereafter *Pugh's Almanac*), *Queensland Post Office Directory* (hereafter *Post Office*) and *Willmetts North Queensland Almanac Directory*.
- 29 The variant spellings and sometimes illegible handwriting of court records, the similarity of names and the absence of oral evidence make unique identification impossible except in a few cases. An additional problem concerns the Anglicised variants of names: James Charles Amadoris, for example, adopted James Charles as his business name; Gostene Waduga Andris also signed George William Andris. We have regularised the spellings for consistency: thus, Amadoris for Amadorus, Amodoris; Harmanis for Armenis, Hermanes, Hermanus, Hermonious; Siyadoris for Sedoris, Sedorus, Seedoris, Sidorus, etc. Despite the appellation of 'Cingalese' for their owners, some names are not recognisably Sri Lankan, e.g., Danolis, Didwan, Jetsunamy and its variants, Jetuan, Jetuharry, Jetsuany, Jetsunany.
- 30 Probably Simon Silva from Galle, who is said to have been responsible for establishing the Buddhist temple on Thursday Island.
- 31 'Edward Morey vs Ten Singalese for breach of agreement, 8–9 January 1901.' CPS13D/P8, QSA.
- 32 According to Pinnawala ('Sri Lankans', p. 805), this was in contrast with the majority of recent Sri Lankan immigrants to Australia, who have been Christians.
- 33 They may have been the descendants of Indonesians brought to Ceylon by the Dutch to man their garrisons.
- 34 Most of the brawls started after drinking bouts in the local hotels and a minority of the men became alcoholics. One was the fisherman, S. K. Simon, who 'gets drunk every day'. 'H. L. Simon vs S. K. Simon for using threatening language to one H. L. Simon, 17 July 1903.' CPS13D/P11, QSA.
- 35 It would seem that Henry Reynolds' reference to 'Cingalese' women (*North of Capricorn: the untold story of Australia's north*. 2003. Crows Nest, NSW: Allen and Unwin. p. 89) is not supported by the cited source.
- 36 '[T]he management of the boats, the locality of the fishing, the times of fishing, besides the actual gathering of the shell, is entirely left to the divers.' 'T. De Hoghton, Lieutenant-Commanding HMS *Beagle*, to Colonial Secretary, Brisbane, 22 September 1879: Reporting on the Pearl-shell Fisheries of Torres Straits.' *QVP*, 1880.
- 37 'G. H. Bennett (Inspector of Pearlshell Fisheries) vs Assan Ceylon for permitting an unlicensed person to be employed as diver, 12 April 1901.' CPS13D/P9, QSA.

- 38 'H. L. Simon vs S. K. Simon for using threatening language to one H.L. Simon, 17 July 1903.' CPS13D/P11, QSA.
- 39 'Frank Vassou vs John Tolman for claim wages, 21 and 23 July 1890.' CPS 13D/P3, QSA.
- 40 *Somerset Register of Marriages*, 31 January, 1891.
- 41 'Martin vs Johnny Bombay for assault, 18 and 24 February 1885.' CPS13D/P1, QSA. Some of Bombay's descendants claim he was Sri Lankan but there is no direct proof of his origins. He may have died in February 1889 in Cygnet Bay, King Sound, Western Australia. Photograph of death notice taken by Val Burton at Cygnet Bay, WA, in Malay/Koepanger vertical file, Broome Historical Society, Broome, WA.
- 42 Swan, B., 'Sinhalese emigration to Queensland in the nineteenth century', p. 59.
- 43 'List of male inhabitants of Thursday Island having had military service and/or possessing service rifles', [n.d. c.1914], *Fort Record Book, Green Hill, Thursday Island, 1898–1927*, AWM 1/12/1. Canberra: Australian War Memorial Library.
- 44 Simon is thought to have died in the early 1960s, aged in his 90s. There is a photograph of him in Burchill, E. 1972. *Thursday Island Nurse*. Adelaide: Rigby. opp. p. 23., with the caption: 'Photo of Simon, reputedly the oldest man on Thursday Island and probably of the whole Torres Straits. He is a permanent resident of the General Hospital.'
- 45 Amara and Mahendra Mendis, pers. comm., 20 February, 2004.
- 46 'Annual Return of Curator of Intestate Estates, 1 January 1891–31 December 1891.' QVP, 1892.
- 47 'Annual Return of Curator of Intestate Estates, 1 January 1900–31 December 1900.' QVP, 1901.
- 48 'Annual Return of Curator of Intestate Estates, 1 July 1913–31 December 1913.' QVP, 1914.
- 49 *Somerset Register of Deaths*, 31 July, 1908.
- 50 They were Don Singho Appu (John Ceylon), James De Silva and P. Singho (James Cingalese). 'Police vs Singho Appu for unsound mind, 11 April 1892', CPS13D/P5; 'Police vs John Ceylon for protection, 12 April 1892', CPS13D/P5; 'James de Silva on suspicion of being of unsound mind, remanded, 20 September 1900', CPS13D/P8; 'James De Silva on remand charged with lunacy, 11 October 1900', CPS13D/P8; 'James Cingalese for being of unsound mind, 22 February 1905', CPS13D/P12, QSA. Arthur Graham, of Sri Lankan and European heritage, who was living in the South Sea Home in April 1915, was said to be 'half cracked'. *Notes of the Diocese of Carpentaria*, April 1915, back of p. 41, OM.AV/113/1, John Oxley Library.
- 51 'Police vs Andrew Johnston, 1 August 1885', CPS13D/P1; 'Police vs Benjamin Raymondo, 30 June 1888', CPS13D/P2, QSA.
- 52 'Police vs Baboon [S. K. Babunappu], 7 November 1889', CPS13D/P2; 'Police vs Walady, 9 December 1889', CPS 13D/P3; 'Police vs Thomas, 28 January 1891', CPS 13D/P4, QSA.
- 53 'Valuation by E. L. Brown, Valuer, for the Division of Torres, of the ratable properties in the Division of Torres, 22 April 1886.' COL/077, QSA.
- 54 Jones, E. 1921. *Florence Buchanan: the little Deaconess of the South Seas*. Sydney: Australian Board of Missions. p. 18. Since Geil does not list it with the other places of worship on the island, we infer that it was built after his visit in 1901. Geil, W. E. 1902. *Ocean and Isle*. Melbourne: Pater. p. 199.
- 55 'Police vs Tommy Japanese for disorderly conduct on Victoria Parade, 26 December 1888.' CPS13D/P2, QSA.
- 56 At various times the houses were rented by Amadoris, Allis Appu, Singho Babu, Charles Mendis, H. L. Simon and his wife, and S. K. Simon. 'Police vs Odiris for drunk and disorderly, 8 and 9 December 1891.' CPS 13D/P4, QSA.
- 57 The boatman, Amadoris, took over from Allis Appu the tenancy of the house situated on Section 5/Allotment 2 in the township of Port Kennedy, which the latter had occupied before his death in 1891. He in turn shared the house with the billiard-marker, Andris, and possibly other countrymen and all paid rent to Herbert Bowden, manager for Burns Philp & Co. The house, along with two others, fronted on to a passage which led from Douglas Street to Victoria Parade. 'Police vs Odiris on bail for disorderly conduct in Douglas Street, 8 December 1891.' CPS 13D/P4, QSA. There appears to have been a particularly close association between the Sri Lankans and Burns Philp & Co.: Burns organised the first mass indenture in 1882; the firm employed mainly

- Sri Lankan watermen on its hulk, *Star of Peace*; and it also rented its property for use as the 'Cingalese' boarding house, billiard room and store.
- 58 'Police vs Miskin for disorderly conduct in Victoria Parade, 7 January 1890.' CPS 13D/P3, QSA. Miskin was arrested for fighting with a Malay before a crowd of about 70 men, threatening 'a general engagement between the Cingalese and the Malays'.
- 59 'Police vs Kicumato for assaulting one Saris Appu, 21 July 1902.' CPS13D/P10, QSA.
- 60 'Police vs Miskin and Woo Lin for disorderly conduct, 7 January 1890.' CPS 13D/P3, QSA.
- 61 'Abdula alias Siyadoris on warrant charged with assaulting one Hop Sing, 12 January 1899.' CPS13D/P7, QSA.
- 62 'Police vs William Sam Hee for keeping a common gaming house, 18 October 1901.' CPS13D/P9, QSA.
- 63 Simpson, C. 1952. *Come Away, Pearler*. Sydney: Angus and Robertson. pp. 14–15.
- 64 See Evans, R., K. Saunders and K. Cronin. 1975. *Exclusion, Exploitation and Extermination: race relations in colonial Queensland*. Sydney: Australia and New Zealand Book Co. pp. 2–4.
- 65 Sedin was found guilty and sentenced to death in Normanton on 15 October, 1888.
- 66 'Viator', 'The Gulf country'. *Cummins & Campbell's Monthly Magazine*, Vol. 4, No. 44 (December 1930). pp. 73, 75.
- 67 Petition from owners and managers of pearl-shelling stations in Torres Strait, October 1883, attached to letter from 'H. M. Chester, Thursday Island, to Colonial Secretary, Brisbane', COL/370/5183, QSA.
- 68 Report of a meeting of the Torres Straits Pearl Shellers Mutual Association, held 19 December, 1884, and sent to Colonial Treasurer by T. O. Stanton, Hon. Secretary, 29 January 1885, TRE/A30/648, QSA.
- 69 Eykyn, T. 1896. *Parts of the Pacific*. London: Swan Sonnenschein. p. 96.
- 70 Ward, A. *The Miracle of Mapoon*. London: Partridge. p. 65.
- 71 Rowan, E. 1991. *The Flower Hunter: the adventures, in northern Australia and New Zealand, of flower painter Ellis Rowan*. North Ryde: Collins Angus and Robertson. p. 109.
- 72 *Pilot*, 23 and 30 September, 1899, cited in Reynolds, H., *North of Capricorn*, p. 89.
- 73 Quoted in Geil, W. E., *Ocean and Isle*, p. 192.
- 74 'Bastian vs Mendis for sureties of the peace, 22 November 1899.' CPS13D/P8, QSA.
- 75 *Post Office*, 1889, 1892, 1892–93, 1893, 1895–96, 1897–99.
- 76 *Willmet's North Queensland Almanac Directory for 1898*, Willmet, 1898.
- 77 *Post Office*, 1892, 1893, 1895–96, 1897–99.
- 78 'K. P. Appu Singho vs J. P. James for sureties of the peace, 24 January 1902.' CPS13D/P10, QSA.
- 79 At that time, Thursday Island lay on the main sea route between Australia and the Far East as well as Europe and was an important port of call. By 1886, it was visited regularly by ocean steamers of the British India Co., Eastern and Australian Steamship Co., China Steamship Navigation Co. and Gibb, Livingstone and Co.; and, by the turn of the century, the Eastern and Australian Steamship Co., China Navigation Co., Australasian United Steam Navigation Co., Japan Mail Steamship Co. (Nippon Yusen Kaisha) and Queensland Line. *Pugh's Almanac*, 1886, p. 511. *Pilot*, 6 January, 1900.
- 80 'Police vs Humphrey Davy Mills for assaulting one Henry Dubbins in the bar of the Thursday Island Hotel on 10 July 1888, 12 July 1888.' CPS13D/P2. 'Application of H. L. James Appu de Silva for a Hawkers Licence, sureties Henry Dubbins, Thursday Island, and Moyden, Thursday Island, 27 November 1888.' PS13D/P2, QSA.
- 81 *Post Office*, 1890.
- 82 'James De Silva vs George Machal for sureties of the peace, 28 August 1891.' CPS 13D/P4, QSA. De Silva is listed as waterman and storekeeper from 1890–99 in *Post Office*, 1890, 1891, 1892, 1893, 1895–96, 1897–99.
- 83 'J. Silva vs William Price for refusing to proceed to sea in lugger *Mobiag*, 20 July 1892.' CPS13D/P5, QSA.

- 84 'Punchi Singho vs Samuel for assault, 10 January 1895.' CPS13D/P6, QSA.
- 85 'Police vs James De Silva for disorderly conduct, 15 September 1900.' CPS13D/P8, QSA.
- 86 'James De Silva on remand charged with lunacy, 11 October 1900.' CPS13D/P8, QSA.
- 87 'Arthur Clarence Filewood vs Jimmy De Silva for trespass under the *Enclosed Land Act*, 11 and 18 July 1927, 15 August 1927.' QS787/1/3, QSA.
- 88 'Police vs Simon for indecent language in the vicinity of persons passing in Milman Street, 21 September 1885.' CPS13D/P1, QSA.
- 89 'Annie Simon vs James De Silva for sureties of the peace, 14 May 1888.' CPS13D/P2, QSA.
- 90 'Application of Henry L. Simon for a Billiard Licence, one table for premises situated at Victoria Parade, Thursday Island, 26 November 1888', CPS13D/P2; 'Henry L. Simon for renewal of Billiard Licence, one table, Billiard Room, Victoria Parade, Thursday Island, 3 April 1889', CPS13D/P2; 'Application of James De Silva of Victoria Parade, Thursday Island, for a Billiard Licence for one table, 1 February 1889', CPS 13D/P2; 'Application by James De Silva for Billiard Licence, Victoria Parade, 2 April 1891', CPS 13D/P4; 'Application by James De Silva for renewal of Billiard Licence, one table, 6 April 1892', CPS13D/P5, QSA; *Post Office*, 1891, 1892, 1893, 1895–96.
- 91 *Post Office*, 1889, 1892–93. The partnership may have lasted five years and appears to have been the earliest of the gem trade enterprises.
- 92 'Application for Hawker's Licence by H. L. Simon granted, 29 December 1891', CPS 13D/P4; 'Application for Pawnbroker's Licence by Henry L. Simon of Victoria Parade, 24 March 1892', CPS13D/P5, QSA; *Post Office*, 1893, 1895–96.
- 93 *Pugh's Almanac*, 1893, p. 166; 1894, p. 162.
- 94 'Police vs William Sam Hee for keeping a common gaming house, 18 October 1901.' CPS13D/P9, QSA.
- 95 'H. L. Simon vs S. K. Simon for using threatening language to one H. L. Simon, 17 July 1903.' CPS13D/P11, QSA.
- 96 'Ah Wang vs O. McLaverty, 16 September 1891', CPS 13D/P4; 'Application for Hawker's Licence by H. L. Simon granted, 29 December 1891', CPS 13D/P4. Another licensed hawker was Thomas Weerasooria, who gave evidence in 'Police vs Ah Bow and Tommy Low Chong for unlawfully conducting an unlawful game in a common gaming house, 24 October 1901', CPS13D/P9, QSA. While there was a considerable amount of money to be made from selling jewellery and curios to tourists, the penalty for hawking without a licence was severe. In 1888, William De Silva was convicted of this offence and fined £2 with 3/6 costs, in default one week's imprisonment. 'William De Silva for hawking without a licence, 14 November 1888.' CPS 13D/S1, QSA.
- 97 Boothby, G. 1894. *On the Wallaby or Through the East and Across Australia*. London: Longmans. p. 110.
- 98 *Ibid.*, pp. 114–15.
- 99 'Matho vs Amadoris for common assault, 14 April 1899', CPS13D/P7; 'Upon Y. B. Saranealis swearing on information against Simba K. Amadoris for threatening words, 26 October 1906', CPS13D/P13, QSA.
- 100 There was no indication of the name of the proprietor, but the wording of the advertisement and the nature of the merchandise offered suggest a Sri Lankan.
- 101 Swan, B., 'Sinhalese emigration to Queensland in the nineteenth century', p. 59. Some of the men were related: Henry Louis Simon and James Charles Amadoris, for example; and possibly the latter and Simba K. Amadoris. Simon's nephew is also attested as living on Thursday Island in 1885.
- 102 This 'chain migration' of immigrants is a familiar motif in Torres Strait history and prehistory, beginning with the arrival of the earliest inhabitants from the southern coasts of New Guinea.
- 103 Yonge, C. M. 1930. *A Year on the Great Barrier Reef: the story of corals and of the greatest of their creations*. London: Putnam. p. 172.
- 104 In *Post Office*, 1889, 1892–93.
- 105 'W. D. Wimalasundera vs Saris, 24 October 1890', QSA. Wimalasundera's shop was next to that of Francis De Bracey, a waterman, possibly also a Sri Lankan.

- 106 'Inspector of Fisheries vs Thomas Fleming for dealing in pearls without having obtained a licence, 7 December 1892.' CPS13D/P5, QSA. H. L. Simon and H. L. De Silva were the only Sri Lankans to hold licences that year.
- 107 *Pilot*, 3 July, 1897; *Post Office*, 1894–95, 1896–97. The trades of jeweller and watchmaker, a euphemism for 'watch repairer', were allied in Ceylon in those days.
- 108 'H. L. Silva vs Siyadoris for assault, 15 July 1892.' CPS13D/P5, QSA.
- 109 *Post Office*, 1895–96.
- 110 *Pilot*, 7 January, 1899. 'Y. B. Saranealis vs Charles De Silva for sureties of the peace, 21 March 1905.' CPS13D/P12, QSA. *Post Office*, 1918–19. Saranealis died on Thursday Island in 1919 (see below).
- 111 'Police vs Kicumato for assaulting one Saris Appu, 21 July 1902.' CPS13D/P10. Y. B. Saranealis may have been related to the Saranealis who appeared as a witness for the jeweller, W. D. Wimalasundera, in 'W. D. Wimalasundera vs Saris for sureties of the peace, 24 October 1890', CPS 13D/P3, QSA.
- 112 Photograph of Saranealis's store, Normanby Street, Thursday Island, Plate 17, in G. Cocks, and J. Grace, 1990, 'Queensland manufacturing and working jewellers — 1850–1900', *Australiana*, Vol. 12, No. 4, November. pp. 89–95, at p. 95.
- 113 'David Dietrichson (clerk to the Torres Divisional Board) vs Saranealis and others, 31 March 1897.' CPS 13D/S2, QSA.
- 114 'Matho vs Amadorus for common assault, 14 April 1899.' CPS13D/P7, QSA.
- 115 'Report of the Official Trustee in Insolvency, Townsville, for the year 1899.' QVP, 1900, p. 19.
- 116 *The Parish Gazette*, 1 February, 1913.
- 117 *Pugh's Almanac*, 1915–19; 1926–27.
- 118 Weerasooria, W. S., *Links Between Sri Lanka and Australia*, p. 171.
- 119 He occupied Allotment 7.7.6. 'Valuation Appeal Court held 17 April 1905.' CPS13D/P12, QSA.
- 120 'List of Licences to Deal in Pearls Issued in Pursuance of Section 14 of *The Pearl-shell and Beche-de-Mer Fishery Act Amendment Act of 1891 during 1907* ... Royal Pearl-shell and Bêche-de-mer Commission, Appendix VI, p. 268, *Queensland Parliamentary Papers*, 1908.
- 121 *Pugh's Almanac*, 1915, p. 758.
- 122 Apparently, it was his older brother, Marshall Punchihewa, who was given the boat ticket. He was reluctant to leave home but Mendis, having the same initial, decided, much against his parents' wishes, to use the ticket himself and seek his fortune in Australia. Marshall Punchihewa later went to Japan. Amara Mendis, pers. comm., 29 April, 2004.
- 123 Material on P. H. Mendis's life and business career comes from Weerasooria, W. S., *Links Between Sri Lanka and Australia*, pp. 191–209; Lock, A. C. C., *Destination Barrier Reef*, pp. 130–4; 'The pearly way to riches', *People Magazine*, 9 April, 1952, pp. 30–1; Arun, K. C., 'Pearl-shell facade for new Wynnum store of pearl industry pioneer', *Courier-Mail* (Brisbane), 13 September, 1960. And from archival files, interviews and family documents kindly made available by Amara and Mahendra Mendis.
- 124 Mrs Mary Ann Corran bought the business in June 1896 from Frederick Charles Hodel and she and her husband published their first issue on 4 July, 1896. Typewritten notes [unsigned, probably by Rev. W. H. MacFarlane, and undated], MS3373, National Library of Australia.
- 125 Siripala Mendis to Weerasooria, W. S., *Links Between Sri Lanka and Australia*, p. 193. *Pugh's Almanac*, 1920–27. In the *Pilot* of 19 September, 1927, Mendis advertised that he would take orders for personalised greeting cards, 'with Name and Address printed thereon'.
- 126 Letter dated 16 October, 1962, J25/190/1972/66, NAA. In possession of Amara and Mahendra Mendis.
- 127 'Communist Party of Australia activity and interest in Thursday Island, 11 December 1949.' A6122/40/273, p. 11, NAA.
- 128 Swan, B., 'Sinhalese emigration to Queensland in the nineteenth century', p. 60. Mahendra Mendis, pers. comm., 29 April, 2004.
- 129 Bands of Sri Lankans occasionally fought with their economic rivals, the Malays and Japanese,

- and there are examples of inter-ethnic assaults against individuals. The latter may have been occasioned by ethnically charged or personal grievances or both, e.g., ‘Abdula alias Siyadoris on warrant charged with assaulting one Hop Sing, 12 January 1899’, CPS13D/P7, QSA.
- 130 ‘John Douglas, Government Resident, Thursday Island, to Colonial Secretary, 26 October 1885.’ A/443/8337, QSA. Our thanks to Jeremy Hodes for providing a transcription of this letter.
- 131 Rama Soopaya, a prominent Indian trader in the town, and his wife were reportedly assaulted at the same time by some Sri Lankans who used slingshots against them. Soopaya was the Sri Lankans’ main competitor, selling many of the same lines at very low prices and purchasing tortoise shell, then a virtual Sri Lankan monopoly. *Pilot*, 27 February, 1897.
- 132 ‘Police vs Miskin for disorderly conduct in Victoria Parade, 7 January 1890’, CPS 13D/P3, QSA; *Queensland Police Gazette*, No. 73 (12 December, 1903). p. 560.
- 133 ‘Police vs Billy Jetsunamy for being armed with axe intent to commit a felony, 27 October 1903.’ CPS13D/P11, QSA.
- 134 ‘Inspector of Fisheries vs Thomas Fleming for dealing in pearls without having obtained a licence, 7 December 1892.’ CPS13D/P5, QSA.
- 135 Appu Singho and H. L. Simon gave evidence for the prosecution, while J. P. James, Charles Mendis and Saris Appu gave evidence for the defence. James was bound over for a period of six months and was required to provide security in the sum of £10 plus two sureties of £5 each.
- 136 *Pilot*, 1 February, 1902.
- 137 ‘Police vs James Charles for disorderly conduct in Douglas Street, 15 December 1903.’ CPS13D/P11, QSA.
- 138 She told the court that she bore ‘no ill will or malice towards the defendant’. She had instituted proceedings because she was afraid of him. Simon was bound over to keep the peace for six months and ordered to pay a fine of £25 plus other costs. ‘Police (F. Charles) vs H. L. Simon for sureties of the peace, 15 December 1903.’ CPS13D/P11, QSA.
- 139 ‘Y. B. Saranealis vs C. De Silva for sureties of the peace, 21 March 1905.’ CPS13D/P12, QSA.
- 140 ‘James Charles vs Saris Appo for threatening words and required sureties, 5, 15 and 26 October 1906.’ CPS13D/P13, QSA.
- 141 The case was continued on 20 October and its outcome reported in a brief paragraph. *Pilot*, 27 October, 1906.
- 142 ‘Rex vs Charlie Madras for attempting to kill one John Charles, 2 and 7 September 1908.’ CPS13D/P13, QSA.
- 143 Quoted in Evans, R. et al., *Exclusion, Exploitation and Extermination*, p. 357.
- 144 ‘Police vs Henry L. Simon for using threatening language to one Annie Simon at Thursday Island, 29 September 1888.’ CPS13D/P2, QSA.
- 145 For discussion of the benefits of such marriages for Chinese settlers on Thursday Island, see Ramsay, G. and A. Shnukal. 2003. ‘“Aspirational” Chinese: achieving community prominence on Thursday Island, northeast Australia.’ *Asian and Pacific Migration Journal*, Vol. 12, No. 3. pp. 337–59.
- 146 ‘F. Charles vs H. L. Simon (on remand) for using threatening language to one Florence Charles, 18 December 1903.’ CPS13D/P11, QSA.
- 147 ‘Florence Charles vs James Charles for threatening language, 20 January 1905’, CPS13D/P12, QSA.
- 148 Donsiman, the spelling that appears in Australian official records, may have originated as a scribal error for ‘Don Simon’.
- 149 *Registers of Aliens Naturalized 1901–03*, SCT/CF/39, QSA.
- 150 Letter from Walter J. Woods, grandson of Y. B. Saranealis to W. S. Weerasooria, dated 2 October, 1987, and quoted in *Links Between Sri Lanka and Australia*, p. 165.
- 151 The children buried there are: Edward William (Eddie) Saranealis L. D. G., born 2 February, 1902, and died 2 October, 1971; Donsiman Heriverto (Hubby) Saranealis, born 20 May, 1903, and died 3 December, 1978; Stephen Buddalegay (Buddy) Saranealis, born 25 June, 1904, and died 16 February, 1969; Dotchihamy Emma (Dotchie) Saranealis, who died 20 December, 1987. Hubby

- was likely named for Heriberto Zarcal, who sold his business to Mowlis (see Reynaldo Iletto, Chapter Five, this volume). Buddy, who was a well-known boxer, was married briefly, but none of the Saranealis sons, as far as is known, produced children. Two of the three daughters, Ruby Mango and Dotchihamy Emma (Dotchie), never married, but Anohamy Esther married Walter Thomas Woods on 29 November, 1928. The couple moved to Cairns and Anohamy died there on the same day as her eldest brother, Eddie. Weerasooria, W. S., *Links Between Sri Lanka and Australia*, p. 163. *Pilot*, 25 September, 1935.
- 152 Eva Mingo Peacock, pers. comm., 10 August, 2000. Weerasooria, W. S., *Links Between Sri Lanka and Australia*, p. 164. The alternative was to wait for the visits of a mainland dentist every four months. *Pilot*, 12 September, 1928.
- 153 “Curate’s Egg”, ‘Thursday Island’s dentist’, *Smith’s Weekly*, 31 October, 1936. Eddie Saranealis changed his official occupation from ‘jeweller’ to ‘dentist’ during the 1938–39 financial year. *56th Annual Balance Returns*, Thursday Island Branch, Burns Philp & Co., 31 March, 1939, Burns Philp Archive.
- 154 Letter from Walter J. Woods, grandson of Y. B. Saranealis to W. S. Weerasooria, dated 2 October, 1987, and quoted in *Links Between Sri Lanka and Australia*, p. 166.
- 155 ‘H. L. Mowlis Commonwealth Naturalisation: Oath taken this 19th April 1911, before Hugh Milman, P. M., 19 April 1911.’ QS787/1/2, QSA. This was unusual for an unmarried man, but necessary in order to own property. Mowlis’s naturalisation was no doubt facilitated by his being legally a British subject, as was Heriberto Zarcal’s on the grounds of being a Spanish subject (see Anna Shnukal, Chapter Four, this volume).
- 156 ‘Protector of Aboriginals, Thursday Island, to Chief Protector of Aboriginals, Brisbane, 24 February 1915.’ A/58768 (restricted), QSA.
- 157 He may have left the state permanently, as there is no record of his death in Queensland.
- 158 Lock, A. C. C., *Destination Barrier Reef*, pp. 134–5. Swan, B., ‘Sinhalese emigration to Queensland in the nineteenth century.’ Swan, B., ‘Sinhala settlers of Thursday Island.’ *Ceylon Observer*, 3 September, 1978, quoted in Weerasooria, W. S., *Links Between Sri Lanka and Australia*, p. 169.
- 159 Amara Mendis, pers. comm., 6 April, 1999.
- 160 Amcia already had two sons, Arthur and Peter (Petrie) Ahmat, born to her husband before 1919. All the children were raised together and the girls — Mercia (Mercy), named for Punchi Hewa Mendis’s wife, Evelyn, Juliet (Julie), and Portia — signed Ahmat. The couple’s first son, Paul, was born on 18 September, 1923, but died tragically young on 4 January, 1926.
- 161 Weerasooria, W. S., *Links Between Sri Lanka and Australia*, p. 168.
- 162 Siripala and Nissanka, born in Galle on 29 August, 1919, and 2 April, 1924, respectively. Both sons subsequently married into families associated with jewellery in South-East Asia and each pursued a successful career in Australia. See also Weerasooria, W. S., *Links Between Sri Lanka and Australia*, p. 192.
- 163 Amara Mendis, pers. comm., 1 November, 2001. Amara remembers that every week See Kee, who grew vegetables such as Chinese cabbage and lettuce, would send vegetables to her father-in-law ‘as a mark of respect and gratitude’.
- 164 ‘Albert Edward Kelly, Acting Head Teacher, State School, Thursday Island, to Director of Education, Department of Public Instruction, 9 March 1942, re Admission of Coloured Children.’ EDU/Z2676, QSA. The full text reads: ‘The races represented on the Island, in addition to Europeans, are: Chinese, Japanese, Torres Strait islanders and mainland Aboriginals while the crosses comprise: China-White, Islander-White, Japanese-Islander, Japanese-Malay, Malay-Islander, Malay-Aboriginal in varying proportions while many are of doubtful origin. In addition there are a couple of families, white predominating, containing Southern European or Cingalese blood. These live as white people and are accepted in white society together with Chinese and caste [sic] Chinese-White and to a lesser degree the Japanese whose children are not yet matured.’ Despite the authorities’ desire to assign each resident of Thursday Island to a rigid ‘racial’ category, many decisions were ad hoc and mutable. With decisions rarely based entirely on descent or community acceptance, it is the unclear cases that permit a more nuanced explanation than heretofore (see Regina Ganter, Chapter Nine, this volume).

- 165 Hill, E. 'Vignettes of Thursday Island's picturesque scenes: where a happy polyglot people seek for pearlshell.' *The Queensland Times*, 17 June, 1933.
- 166 'W. D. Wimalasundera vs Saris, 24 October 1890.' CPS 13D/P3, QSA.
- 167 Information about the temple location from Punchi Hewa Mendis to Amara Mendis. Amara was shown the tree when she arrived on Thursday Island after World War II, but it had been stripped of its leaves and died shortly afterwards. It had once been quite tall. Amara Mendis, pers. comm., 1 November, 2001, 21 February, 2004. According to Siri Mendis, pers. comm., 31 October, 2001, the Buddhist temple had disappeared by the time of his arrival on Thursday Island in 1937. Its date of construction is unknown but it may have been the first Buddhist centre in Australia.
- 168 Swan, B., 'Sinhalese emigration to Queensland in the nineteenth century', p. 59.
- 169 Ibid.
- 170 The *Quetta*, on a voyage from Brisbane to London via Colombo, sank on the night of 28 February, 1890, off Muri (Mt Adolphus Island) not far from Thursday Island after having struck a submerged rock. Singe, J. 1989. *The Torres Strait: people and history*. St Lucia: University of Queensland Press. p. 94; Foley, J. C. H. 1990. *The Quetta: Queensland's worst disaster: the story of the wreck of RMS Quetta in Torres Strait in 1890*. Aspley: Nairana.
- 171 England, A. 'Thursday Island has memorial Cathedral to the Quetta.' *Telegraph* (Brisbane), 29 February, 1940. p. 11.
- 172 M. Sasaki, presumably a Japanese, served as the Buddhist priest on Thursday Island in 1900. *Post Office*, 1900, p. 540.
- 173 This in itself was atypical of the Sri Lankan migrations to other parts of Queensland. Those 'who settled down on the mainland were soon lost to sight in the cultures that surrounded them, but on Thursday Island they established a community which long retained its identity.' Swan, B., 'Sinhalese emigration to Queensland in the nineteenth century', p. 58.
- 174 In 1897, for example, Saris and De Silva donated money to the Jubilee Benevolent Fund; and, in 1903, the Sri Lankans made the attractive bamboo screens and other decorations for an Arcadian Fête lucky dip to raise money for fencing the Anglican Church grounds. *Pilot*, 3 July, 1897, and 24 January, 1903.
- 175 *Torres Strait Pilot*, 1 February, 1902. p. 1.
- 176 Hill, E., 'Vignettes of Thursday Island's picturesque scenes'.
- 177 Amara Mendis, pers. comm., 16 April, 2004.
- 178 Weerasooria, W. S., *Links Between Sri Lanka and Australia*, p. 164.
- 179 *Pilot*, 8 December, 1928.
- 180 *Souvenir Program* dated 24 May, 1935, 'Federal Hotel Register 10 June 1901–c.1956.' p. 258. Royal Historical Society of Queensland Library.
- 181 Swan, B., 'Sinhalese emigration to Queensland in the nineteenth century', p. 59.



Government Residence, 1897.
Courtesy of John Oxley Library, Brisbane (Item No. 49817).

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