

Aug- Sept 2007



Cochin Chronicle

TRACING 150 YEARS OF THE CITY'S HISTORY

Cochin Chamber of Commerce and Industry newsletter

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HISTORY OF THE LOTUS CLUB

Meeting of minds

It was probably because he had the head of an engineer that Robert Bristow was unfazed by problems. Solutions could be worked out for more than just technical obstacles. So, the fact that the Cochin Club had closed its doors to Bristow and his wife did not mean they would have to remain social pariahs. When Bristow, who was

sent to Cochin from the Madras Presidency to develop the port here in the 1920s, was denied admission to the exclusive Cochin Club in Fort Cochin, he and his wife, Gertrude Bristow, encouraged the idea of a club in Ernakulam, where they could make the acquaintance of prominent Indians. Bristow was a divorcee and Gertrude, was English by descent, but not by birth.

Reason enough for the stuffy Cochin Club to turn them away.

Setting up the Lotus Club, which celebrated its platinum jubilee in July last year, solved the problem of meeting people with common interests not only for the Bristows, but also for Indians, who were denied admittance to most clubs, which remained 'white-only', long after independence. But members consisted only of the elite: members of the royal family, lawyers, doctors and civil servants.

The club was started on land donated by Maharaja Rama Varma of Cochin on Warriam

Road. It admitted men and women, and according to Bristow's account of the time, "the strictly orthodox Indians were shocked at the idea of mixing people with age-long differences of habit and outlook in such a free-and-easy way."

But this was not something that the atmosphere at the club could not cure, particularly over a bridge table or on the tennis and badminton courts. The club, has over the years, sealed its reputation when it received guests like writer Somerset Maugham, Viceroy Lord Linlithgow and the Maharaja of Mysore.



Best bus: P.N. Shivaprasad, one of the first drivers and (right) M.S. Venugopal, the first conductor, pose in front of their ride

Double the fun

A ride that gives a sense of romance? Apparently, red sports cars are what all film-makers would put their money on. Even trains may be considered to have some romance about them. However, a bus commute is hardly ever anything more than prosaic. But all that changes when you think of the double-decker. Then, buses suddenly seem to have oomph.

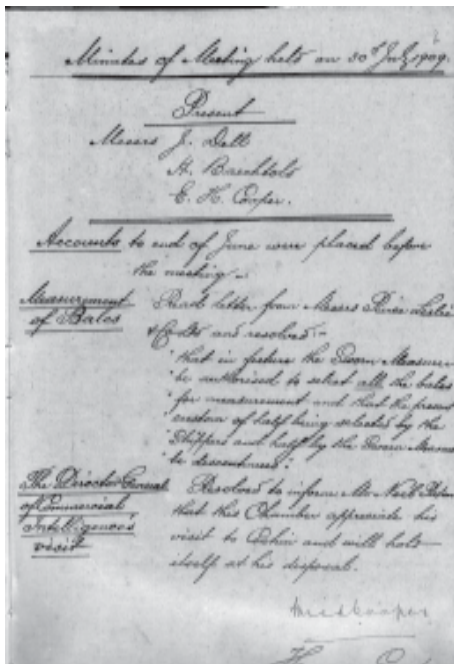
In fact, M.S. Venugopal, an old double-decker hand, says that the buses were introduced in Ernakulam by the then

KSRTC managing director M.M. Cherian to give the city a feel of having arrived. "The corporation had been formed less than a decade back," remembers Venugopal, who was one of the first conductors on the double-decker, which plied the Palarivattom-Willington Island route from 1969 to 1975. "And the double-decker bus was introduced not for the income that it would bring, but because it could lend the city a sense of grandeur." Cherian, who was a senior advocate in the High Court and a dedicated CPI(M) member, was roped into the corporation on a political appointment at the time of the second EMS ministry.

FROM THE MINUTES BOOK

Port of call

The Minutes tracing the genesis of the plan for the setting up of Cochin Port. The participation of Sir Robert Bristow, the brains behind the project, is first logged in the Minutes of April 23, 1920



port service driving the economy of the region. The port's linkages to different industries like oil refinery, cashew, marine, tourism and shipbuilding are extending from their genesis to progress.

Meeting held 20th November 1911 at 8 AM.

Present:
Messrs A. Bkeler
H. Day
N. Anderson
J. Dell
C.L. Mowbray
A. Campbell

The following resolution was unanimously passed:

Resolved that in view of the constantly increasing difficulties of landing and shipping here, the government be advised through the collector of Malabar to again consider measures for the opening of the bar at the entrance of the Cochin Harbour and that the Chamber hereby expresses its willingness to introduce the landing and Shipping Dues Act at this port to assist toward meeting the charges which such a scheme would involve and that a copy of this resolution be forwarded to the executive engineer of Malabar for his information.

Mr Bell proposed and the Honorary Secretary seconded a vote of thanks to Mr A. Campbell, the executive Engineer of Malabar for the trouble which he has taken in connection with their question.

Minutes of Special Meeting held on 20th December 1911 at 4:30 PM

Collector of Malabar gave Chamber short history of what has already taken place in connection with the question of opening the bar and proposed that he should address the government on the subject of an expert being sent out from home to study the question...his expenses to be paid by the Landing and Shipping Act being imposed on the port.

Meeting held Friday 23rd April 1920 at 9 AM

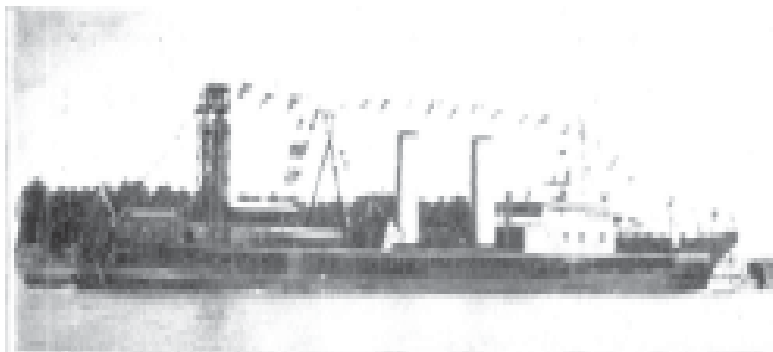
Visitor: R.C. Bristow, Special Harbour Engineer

.... He would be proceeding to Ootacamund at an early date for discussion of the subject with the government. He expected to be returning for a short time within two or three weeks and for a longer period during the monsoon for examination of conditions at that important time. He agreed with the proposal that it old be desirable to call a special meeting of the Chamber to hear what he might further have to tell them after his discussion on the subject with the government.

When Robert Bristow came as a young engineer to Cochin in 1920, it was a port where ships were berthed offshore. Cargo was loaded and unloaded using lighters and the ships were exposed to the violent forces of the sea.

Bristow was a visionary who foresaw that ports which would take ships alongside the berths were the way to go. When he left in 1941 he had transformed Cochin as the safest harbour in the peninsula, where ships berthed alongside the newly reclaimed inner harbour, equipped with a long array of steam cranes. Bristow himself thought of it as the "finest harbour in the east."

Thanks to the port, the industrialisation in Kerala has taken place mainly around Cochin, with the an effective



OLD STORY Tales tiles tell

Cochin's history is made up of an interesting mosaic of stories, like the one about how the Jewish synagogue in Mattancherry got its willow-patterned Chinese tiles. The Chinese floor mosaic was, in fact, brought for the palace. There was a lot of interest over it, but apparently, the Jewish merchants heard about it and wanted it for themselves. So they confidentially told the king that they had learnt from the Chinese that cows' blood was mixed with lime to make the tiles.

The 'inside information' had the necessary effect: the palace wanted nothing more to do with the offensive tiles. A Jew bought them and now the 1,100 handmade tiles, each one unique, lines the floor of the synagogue.



BUSINESS OF PLEASURE

Now Showing: At a Shenoy theatre

The Shenoy family has always treated the business of entertainment with the utmost seriousness, pioneering the first air-conditioned cinema in Kerala to perhaps bringing the first multiplex, scheduled to open in 2008-09.

The story of the business starts with Guna Shenoy, who came to Cochin during the exodus of the Gawda Saraswath Brahmins following the Portuguese invasion of Goa in the 15th century. The family, like the majority of Konkans who came to Kerala and

settled here, got into business, starting out as hardware merchants in the 1840s. Nearly a century later, when business started dwindling in Mattancherry, the hardware sector took a backseat and the family turned to building cinemas.

Cinema royalty and some real ones: *Tamil superstar Shivaji Ganeshan and other stars at the opening of Sridhar cinema; (bottom) Sri Chitira Thirunal Balarama Varma of the united states of Travancore and Cochin and Sri Rama Varma Parikshit Thampuram with the Shenoy family at the opening of Laxman*



EXCLUSIVE TO COCHIN CHRONICLE

In Kerala, the Shenoy's have been pioneers in the business of entertainment. Now, plans are afoot to introduce multiplexes to the state. If everything goes to schedule, the Shenoy's are hoping to inaugurate it in 2008-09.

Laxman, which was opened in 1946, was the first in the Shenoy stable of theatres. The inauguration was a royal affair and the honours were done by Sri Chitira Thirunal Balarama Varma of the united states of Travancore and Cochin and Sri Rama Varma Parikshit Thampuram of Cochin.

Apart from the regular seating, the cinema hall had a luxury box of about 15 seats, which were reserved for members of the royal family. They would inform the theatre in advance if they fancied an outing to the cinema, and the luxury box offered them total privacy.

Laxman was followed up by Padma on MG Road a couple of years later and in fact, with the coming of AC cinema halls, people stopped going to Laxman, which was closed in the early 90s. Sridar, Shenoy's and Little Shenoy's, which today are an integral part of the cityscape soon followed, setting the standard in cinema viewing in Kerala. Sridar was the first air-conditioned theatre and also the first to install the Dolby stereo sound system. Shenoy's had the first Vistarama projection in Asia and Padma was the first with a DTS sound system.

The cinema business has seen great changes over the years. In fact, it is almost difficult to believe how the theatre business has evolved. Tickets used to cost only "a pittance" and there were only two shows: one in the evening and the second at night. The matinee was a 60s phenomenon. "Audiences, too, are very different from what they were in the 60s and 70s," says Suresh Shenoy, one of the present generation managers from the family. "In the early days, families would come to the cinema together and any Prem Nazir or Satyan film

Continued from page 1

He introduced a few new routes from Ernakulam (to Kozhencherry), but it was the double-decker that was his most interesting effort.

Drivers were given special training when the two buses, DD1 and DD8, were brought in, because the gears were different. Charges on these buses were the same as on the regular ones, but commuters remember the journey being more comfortable. Generally, standing was not allowed.

"We used to wait for this bus to travel to the Ernakulam Shiva temple from Palarivattom," say retired couple Sarla and K.G. Nair, who used to work at the naval base. "Our three-year-old daughter used to enjoy sitting on the top deck."

The double-decker service, unfortunately, had to be discontinued in 1975, when MG Road was dug up to put in the new sewage pipes.

Apparently, it was felt that the roads could not then take the weight of the buses. One of the buses was sent to Thiruvananthapuram, which still has a double-decker service from Thycad to Vazhuthacaud.

would run to packed houses." With the changing business, the actors, too, were bound to change. They have now become stars and celebrities. "When we were children, we would come home from school to find big names like Prem Nazir, Satyan, Adoor Bhasi or Sukumari having coffee with our father," says Suresh, who lives in a majestic, old house on Banerjee Road. "They were not celebrities, they were just ordinary people like us. That attitude has certainly disappeared." Apart from setting up cinemas, the Shenoy's also moved into production and distribution under the Saga banner. "The Tamil and Hindi industries have changed for the better," says Suresh. "They tell better stories using superior technology. Sadly, the Malayalam industry has witnessed a dip in standards since the 80s. Our industry will have to reinvent itself to regain the standing our films once had in India."

COMMUNITY WISE

Wanderers with a whirlwind history

The Konkans have had a love-hate relationship with the Kerala maharaja's, but they have always managed to land on their feet

The Gowda Saraswath Brahmins, who form the Konkani community, have perhaps had the most see-saw relationship with Kerala, as compared with any of the foreign communities that have adopted the state as its home. And perhaps it is a tribute to the community, that none of the downs have kept the GSBs, as they call themselves, low for too long. In fact, as in the rest of the country, members of the GSB community are some of the biggest names in trade in the state. The GSBs seem to have an irony intrinsic to them. As a coastal people from Goa, they excused themselves from the rigid vegetarian norms of their caste and are the rare Brahmins who eat fish. Though this dietary quirk does not come without its share of guilt. Apparently, there is a custom where they join the head and tail of the fish and put it back in water after chanting a prayer.

When the GSBs settled in Kerala in the 15th century, they were bestowed benefits available to few other communities, but they were also subject to perhaps one of the most unfair instances of persecution. But it seems that the community was made of sterner stuff and one of the the unchanging characteristics of the Konkans in Kerala seems to be their prosperity.

The most illustrious GSBs were perhaps the Nehrus. But to start at the beginning, the GSBs were originally from Kashmir and were settled around the banks of the mythological river Swaraswathi, from

which they took their name. The first wave of migration began when the river became extinct. In the 12th and 13th centuries, they moved south to Bihar, Punjab and Maharashtra, and then further down to Goa, making two western provinces their settlement.

A little known fact is that the first Konkans came to Cochin as early as in 1294 in the wake of Allaudin Khilji's conquest of the Deccan. They obtained grants of land and promises of protection from the Cochin king, and formed themselves into a community which they named 'Conkanastha Mahajan'.

The bigger exodus from Goa took place with the arrival of the Portuguese, who destroyed temples and built churches in their place. In 1559, about 12,000 Saraswat families fled from their native Salcette district in Goa and settled in Maharashtra, Indore and in the south in Karwar and South Kanara.

They first came to Calicut in big canoes, but a less than friendly reception from the Zamorin drove them further south to Cochin and Travancore. "The Moopans were also a community that came from Goa with the Konkans," says Balagangadhara Menon, former Ernakulam High Court advocate, who is writing a history of the Konkans in Kerala. "They were the luggage carriers of the Konkans."

The mainstay of a Konkani settlement, which largely comprises of Vaishnavites (followers of the Vishnu sect), is the temple to the Tirumaldeva, of which there are three in Ernakulam district today. "Each gothra has a different deity and they construct



temples to their deities and their habitats grow around the temple," says Menon. "This is one community who, like the Jews, have kept their customs and manners intact."

In Cochin, luck, or rather the king, favoured the Konkans. They were given rights and privileges, such as exemption from a succession fee, permission to construct brick and wood houses, perhaps because they were Brahmins and this was a right allowed to native Brahmins, and also to conduct business with foreign countries. This edict was given in writing on copper plates, the first such in Kerala.

It seemed like an environment conducive to growth, and it is not surprising that the community took to trade with gusto and soon prospered. They also worked with the Europeans and were managers in

Dutch and English businesses, and this, by default, gave them great influence.

The Konkans brought organised business to Kerala, and were the first to bring iron trade into the state. They also introduced trade in a more precious metal: gold. The Malayali seemed to truly get a taste of the good life with Konkani businesses affecting a lifestyle change in a people who were used to an almost austere life.

Konkans were the first to deal in the diamond business and the first to introduce an AC cinema in the state, two businesses that they are leaders in even today, with Geeri Pai dominating the former and the Shenoy's the latter. They also brought in dyers from Tuticorin and introduced the dyeing industry in the state.

Soon, they took on nicknames that were reflective of their trade, so there are the *irumbukarrans* in the

In 1559, about 12,000 Saraswat families fled from their native Salcette district in Goa and settled in Maharashtra, Indore and in the south in Karwar and South Kanara. They first came to Calicut in big canoes, but a less than friendly reception from the Zamorin drove them further south to Cochin and Travancore.

CHURCH WITH A HISTORY

Favoured by faith



'Protected' structures: The Pallipuram church which was saved from Tipu Sultan's demolition drive by an unseasonal mist; Ayyakota, the Portuguese watch-tower; (far left) and a plaque at the site



Even small miracles evoke great devotion. The region of Pallipuram, about 5 km from Cherai, traces its Christian roots to the arrival of St Thomas, the disciple, at

Maliankara, which is separated from Pallipuram by the Mullaperiyar river. Apparently, Christians used to lead a pilgrimage to north Pallipuram, where according to tradition, St Thomas landed when he reached Kerala.

But the church of Our Lady of Snow (*Manjumathavu*), which is celebrating its 500th anniversary, gets its name from a legend that explains how Tipu Sultan of Mysore was thwarted. Tipu destroyed many temples during his campaign in Kerala in the late 18th century, but when he arrived in Pallipuram, it is believed that the Virgin Mary protected the church by shrouding it in an unseasonal, thick mist. Ever since, the church, situated in the fishing area, has attracted thousands of devotees.

And it was not for the first time that the church was spared. The Portuguese, who found that Pallipuram housed a strong Christian community, built the church in 1507. They erected the Azzhikode fort or Ayyakota, which served as a watch tower overlooking the Mullaperiyar, less than a kilometer from here.

When the Dutch came, they overran Portuguese forts at Cranganor and Ayyakota. The ceiling of the 40-ft high Ayyakota was blown off into the river during the Dutch bombardment. Apparently, in the summer, when the



water level goes down, one might catch a glimpse of the top of the fort lying in the riverbed. When the Dutch defeated the Portuguese in 1622, they notoriously razed most Portuguese institutions, but left Pallipuram church alone, apparently because they Dutch needed the support of the local Christians.

The Cochin king had granted the Portuguese permission to start a Jesuit seminary here in Vaipencotta. The seminary is

believed to have operated the first printing press in south India, issuing a Tamil Bible in 1579. The Dutch converted the seminary at Vaipencotta into a leprosy asylum. The site passed into British hands in 1795. Today, all that remains of the old church structures in Pallipuram is the cemetery chapel, which served as the church in 1823. Ayyakota, which was purchased from the Dutch by the astute Diwan of the Travancore court, Raja Kesavada, for Travancore court, in 1789. It is now a protected monument.

"The 500th anniversary celebrations are on for a year," said parish priest, Fr Thomas Kolarikal. "It started in November 2006 and will go on till this November. We have organised a special programme every month. About 1,700 families belong to this parish, and every house will bear a flag this year, commemorating the 500th anniversary."

community, who trade in iron, or the *pinnakukarru*, who have made money in the fodder business.

They were as astute in business as the Malayalee was clueless, and even helped the Cochin king out of a financial crisis by granting him a loan through the Thirumala Devaswom. It went to the rebuilding of Cochin in the wake of the devastation that Tipu Sultan caused when he overran the region in 1780.

But money can throw relations off-kilter and 1791 is marked by a strain in the friendship between the Konkans and Cochin's Raja Rama Varma, who was also known as Shakthan Thampuran. After coming to power, he demanded a contribution of jaggery from the merchants. They refused to comply and he arrested a number of traders and imposed a customs duty on them in violation of the agreement made with the Dutch.

To get even, the Konkans shut shop, thus cutting of supplies to the palace: perhaps the first historical record of a hartal.

The story goes that Shakthan Thampuran demanded the head of Devarasa Kini, a leading merchant, as a *kanni* (the first thing auspicious sight he would set his eyes on when he awoke). Kini was killed and the persecuted Konkans fled to Thuravoor and Alleppey. It was only when English power was firmly established that they returned to Cochin.

The tragedy in Cochin had made refugees of the community again, but did not kill their spirit. Alleppey prospered with the coming of the Konkans and it was during their stay here that the new port was established with better facilities. "Wherever there is money, the Konkans will go," says Menon. Fortunately, wherever there is money, there is also development.

And some others

While the Konkans have distinguished themselves in business in Kerala, there are some community members who have earned a name for other achievements.

The most active campaign for recognition of Konkani as an official language in the constitution was waged from Cochin. Prof N.

Purushothama Mallaya, 78, a literary and history scholar, has fought for the cause since the early 1960s. It was over a decade later, in 1975, that Mallaya's unstinting efforts were rewarded and Konkani was accepted as an independent literary language in 1975 by the Central Sahitya Akademi.

At 59, **Pushpalatha S. Pai** has the energy and enthusiasm of a 20-year-old. So, it is not surprising that she was the first woman to obtain a two-wheeler license in Kerala in 1975. "I started out driving on my husband's Lambretta," she says. "And that was a scooter with gears; not the easy rides that two-wheelers provide today." She remembers how boys used to hoot when she drove past. "But I didn't care and they finally stopped," says Pai, who used to be known as 'scooter amma'.



Refreshing memories

Tom Peirce, former director of tea brokering firm Forbes, Ewart and Figgis, remembers life and work in Cochin 30 years back

Sitting around with old colleagues, sharing the brew that once united them, conversation slipped into nostalgic mode. It had been over 35 years since Tom Peirce, the former director of Forbes, Ewart and Figgis, had walked into his old office in the Sebprof House building on Willingdon Island.

But the years seemed to evaporate like the steam in their cups of tea as Peirce shared memories with the present

directors, WC Thomas, Mohan Thomas and Paulose Joseph. "The welcome I received has been amazing," said Tom, who visited Forbes with his two sons, Robert and James. "It was as if I had never left."

Indeed, centuries-old ties are difficult to snap. Tom's great-grandfather, Robert Hodges Peirce, founded Peirce Leslie in 1861 and his great-uncle, Harry Peirce was an engineer with the Madras PWD, which worked on the Periyar dam. Tom was born in

TASTE OF THE PAST

Calcutta, where his mother's family has been based since the late 18th century. They were in the engineering business and his great uncles were pilots on the Hooghly river, which is reputedly the most difficult pilotage in the world.

When he was five, he left for England with his mother. His father, HRG Peirce, remained in India and was appointed tea controller for south India. It entailed making contracts for purchasing tea on behalf of the UK's Ministry of Food. He received an MBE for this work.

While working as tea controller, he conceived the idea of holding tea auctions in Cochin. Before the war, south Indian tea was mostly sent to either Colombo or London for auction. He obtained the backing of Forbes and Walker in Colombo, Ewart Macaughy in London and A.W. Figgis in Calcutta and the first auction was held in 1947. HRG Peirce was a bon vivant and, apparently, caused a stir in Cochin when he swam from Fort Cochin to Bolgatty to seduce wife of the collector, Murphy. He later married her. But Tom dismisses the story, "I would not be surprised if my father made up the story to romanticise himself."

It seemed inevitable that Tom was to join the tea trade. He had turned down a job offer as a tea planter soon after he had left school, much to his father's annoyance. So subsequently, when he

was offered an apprenticeship as a tea taster and broker through the good offices of an old friend of his mother's, he accepted it and spent one year training with Thomas, Cumberlege and Inskipp in London before joining Forbes and Walker in Colombo, having given up a place at Cambridge University.

He came to Cochin in 1960 to join his father and become a director at Forbes, heading the company till he left India with his family a decade later.

The family has fond memories of the city. "I lived with my wife and four children in Fort Cochin, in houses built in the early 50s," says Tom. "It was much quieter then, with no hotels and no tourism. Mattancherry was where the action was, with traders in spices, coffee, pepper and tea." Cochin Club was the hangout for the Peirces and a small crowd of about 35 British people based here.

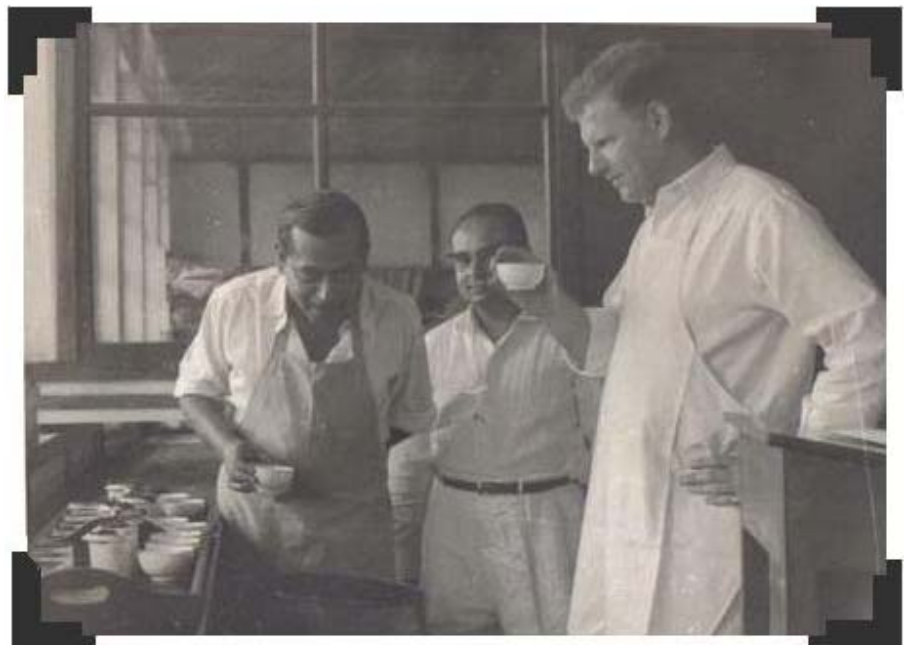
"Work took me to the tea estates, but we also enjoyed a good social life, playing tennis, golf and sailing," says Tom, who sold his shares to go home for the education of his children. "When we were based here, we went back to England every 18 months."

After a few years in London, Tom went to Mombasa, where he helped start up a firm of tea brokers called Combrok, and was managing director there for nearly five years.

WC Thomas, who had trained as a tea broker with Tom when they started their careers, remembers a curious personality trait. "He spoke with a stutter," says Thomas. "But that seemed to disappear when he conducted a tea auction." It was perhaps because Tom was in a career that suited him to the T.

From the old days: Tom Peirce with his family in Cochin; (below left) Tom, on left, at a tea auction; apparently, he lost his stutter when he conducted an auction; and at a tea-tasting session

Indeed, centuries-old ties are difficult to snap. Robert Hodges Peirce, Tom's great-grandfather, founded Peirce Leslie in 1861



THEN...



AND NOW



Men in white

Though women largely still dress to the nines in six-yard saris, braving the heat and crowded buses, men have abandoned the comparatively less cumbersome mundus to adopt a western style of dressing in the corporate world. In fact, even a recent, controversial government directive that sought to persuade government employees to look traditional received a lukewarm response. The new rule that said that men had to come to work in mundu on Fridays was largely ignored..

Nowadays, a man in a mundu is most likely to be a politician or a wedding guest. Or probably someone in the 60-plus age-bracket.

It's difficult to keep it looking crisp and white at the end of a long day, but there is not denying that the mundu has a certain socialist charm.

Old tastes die hard

Speak of melting pot. One could almost slice Kerala into regions based on food habits, with moplath cooking in the north and the very distinct Christian and Hindu preparations, in central and south Kerala.

The prosperous Syrian Christian community, which makes up nearly a quarter of Kerala's population, is centred in the regions south of Kochi, Kottayam and Alappuzha. They were leaders in modern education, introduced by European missionaries in the 19th century. They also took over from British planters and dominated the plantation economy of cardamom, coffee, rubber, and tea plantations, making them affluent.

The cuisine of the 2,000-year-old community blends the Indian and European. In fact, some of the best-loved cookbooks for a generation of young housewives in the 1970s and 80s were penned by Syrian Christian names, like Mrs KM Mathews and Mrs BF Varghese and, of course, Thangam Phillip. Here are a selection of central Kerala Christian recipes. We know this is off-season for pre-Easter recipes, but we decided that the fish moilees and the beef ollarthiyathu are easy enough to find. So, here are some festival specialities.

Pesaha Appam (Passover Bread, Kerala Style)

Ingredients

1. Rice Flour (not roasted)- – 1 kg
2. Coconut, grated – 3 cup (Blended)
2. Urad Dal(Uzhunnu)-200 gm
3. Red or small Onion, White onion, Cumin, Salt - As needed

Directions:

Soak the urad dal (Uzhunnu) for a few hours. Grind the urad dal, red or small onion, white onion, and the cumin powder separately. Add everything together and mix well. Make a dough (same consistency as that for making idli).

Grease steel plates (You can also use plantain leaf if available). Shape the dough into medium round shape on the plate or leaf.

Christian families usually make a cross of palm leaf obtained on Palm Sunday and place on top of the dough, before it is cooked. Then it is steamed till well done.

Pesaha Bread Sauce (Pesaha Pal)

Ingredients

- Roasted rice powder-1 cup
- Sarkkara(molasses)-1 cup
- Cardamom powder, Chukku- As needed
- Coconut-1
- Sliced banana

Directions:

Mix all ingredients together. Boil it in Clay vessel. The tradition is to use new clay vessel for preparing Pesaha pal. When it get boiled, put in the sliced banana pieces .

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We made news



Cochin Chronicle was in the limelight with *The Hindu* (May 3, 2007) and *Malayala Manorama* (May 5, 2007) lauding the debut issue.

"We wanted to do something different to celebrate the 150th anniversary of The Cochin Chamber of Commerce and Industry, and felt the ideal thing would be to focus on the city, rather than on the Chamber's activities," said Jose Dominic, president of the Cochin Chamber. "The fact that it was so well-received is a real shot in the arm."

The Cochin Chamber would also like to thank all those who wrote in with suggestions and letters of appreciation. We look forward to your valuable comments on the second (June-July) issue.

BACK IN TIME

News of a newspaper

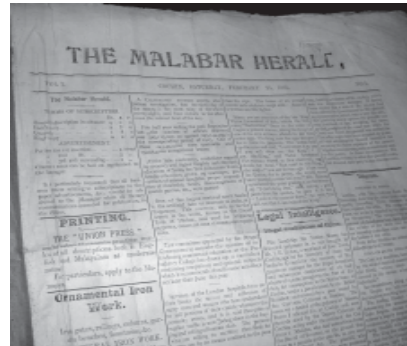
The *Malabar Herald*, Kerala's first English language newspaper, tells stories that many have forgotten

Old newspapers go for Rs 4 a kg and even that is after an argument with the vendor. But John Mampilli's stock of old newspapers is hardly something that can be sold off to scrap dealers. "I used to have copies of *Malabar Herald* sent by John Mampilli as I was preparing to write the history of Cochin Port," says Dr Babu Paul, former additional chief secretary of state and writer. "I discovered that the archives of *Malabar Herald* were a real treasure trove. I spent evening after evening in Mampilli's place and the book, *Cochin Port: A Queen's Story*, certainly owes substantially to what I found in Mampilli's archive."

The past can sometimes be a curious mix of truth and legend, and what better than an old newspaper to tell us as it is. Ittoop Mampilli, who founded the *Malabar Herald*, started his career as a reporter in *Cochin Argus*, a fortnightly newspaper printed from Fort Cochin.

He resigned from the job over an issue about his salary and he started the Union Press in 1902, which undertook printing work from British firms. It was in 1905 that he moved on to the more ambitious mission of launching the newspaper, which was printed at his press.

It started out as a tabloid-size newsweekly with no logo, a simple



The patriarch and his paper: Ittoop Mampilli, who started the *Malabar Herald*; a copy of the first edition of the newspaper

masthead and a uncomplicated four column layout, that stayed untouched till the newspaper final run in 2000. It sported the slogan, "Independent weekly of nationalist outlook", in the 1960s. That motto evolved to, "We print what should be read," in the 1970s.

The first issue, which hit the stands on February 25, 1905, consisted of four pages and a copy cost 2 annas. An annual subscription set one back by Rs 4. In the latter years, special issues were printed in colour. The paper started out with a staff strength of three, including a "Negili saipe

(Englishman)", who used to write the editorials.

"News was gathered by meeting people in coffee shops and medical stores," says Joseph, Ittoop's grandson, who managed the newspaper when it was in its last leg. Libel suits go hand-in-hand with the newspaper business, and Joseph remembers one that struck a financial blow to the *Herald*.

In the 1930s, the newspaper published a story about a doctor who had botched up an operation at the government hospital in Fort Cochin. There was a cover-up and the doctor took the newspaper to court. Ittoop could have

wriggled out of the situation by revealing the source from whom he had obtained the story, but those were the times when work ethics were cardinal. Ittoop lost the case and had to sell his properties in his hometown, Njarakkal, to keep the paper afloat.

Some things do not seem to change, though; like the weather. Interestingly, there is a news item in the March 19, 1957 issue, which seems to suggest that the heat is killing. Under Quilon Notes, it says, "The weather here is getting day by day quite unbearable... both man and beast are anxious for an early visit from Jupiter Pluvius." It could just be an item from papers of our current 'globally warm' times.

Also, Joseph does not recollect the reason, but for a while, Diwan C.P. Ramaswamy had the newspaper banned in Travancore. The paper was a crusader for the cause of the development of the Port Trust, carrying extensive reports on it. It also covered many issues about the Jewish community.

"It was a small-town newspaper, but had a name and respectability," says Joseph. "In fact, one of the 12 copies of Robert Bristow's *Cochin Saga*, which came to India, was sent to Ittoop." It is unfortunate that in today's cutthroat world, the small players are written off so casually.

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