

## **S.T.C. GURUTALAWA - A SHANGRI - LA**

1. S. Thomas' College an Anglican Church School, sowed its seeds in 1851 in Mutwal. The present site at Mt. Lavinia, was started in 1918.
2. The 2nd World War had its effect on our country, particularly when the enemies attacked Colombo and Trincomalee in April 1942. As a result the British military authorities took over S.T.C. - Mt. Lavinia for a military hospital. One section of the school was shifted to St. Paul's Milagiriya, and another to Kingswood College Kandy, and a smaller section first to Getambe in Peradeniya and thereafter to Gurutalawa in April, 1942.
3. Thus Gurutalawa became a branch of S.T. C. - Mt. Lavinia . The other branches are S.Thomas' Prep. School at Kollupitiya and S.T.C. Bandarawela. The branches at Bandarawela and Kollupitiya started as Preparatory Schools with classes from Kindergarten to Grade 5. They became the feeding ground for Gurutalawa and Mt. Lavinia. Gurutalawa had classes up to the Ordinary Level while Mt. Lavinia catered from Kindergarten to Advanced Level. Kollupitiya and Bandarawela branches subsequently proceeded to have classes from Grade 6 to Ordinary Level and Advanced Level respectively. With the commencement of higher classes by Kollupitiya and more particularly Bandarawela, the supply of students to S.T.C. Gurutalawa came to a halt. In later years Gurutalawa, too commenced classes from Kindergarten to Advanced Level.
4. In the past the intake to the Lower 4th or Grade 6 was mainly from the Prep Schools at Bandarawela and Kollupitiya with a firm foundation on and off the field, thus maintaining the Thomian Grit. Their transition to Gurutalawa was smooth. Such traditions could not be made with the new admissions thereafter, as they came from schools with different backgrounds.
5. Gurutalawa is situated approximately 5 ½ miles from Welimada on the Welimada-Boralanda-Haputale Road. The approach to Gurutalawa itself is through a plateau with the road like a ribbon between the tall pine trees. The village is inhabited primarily by Muslim families. The area is well-known for vegetable cultivation.
6. It is a beautiful place. According to sources a garden of Eden, ideal for studies and sports. The Campus lies under the shadows of the Gonagala and Warden's Hill Mountains. Towards Boralanda, Rahangala is prominently visible. In the evenings, Totapola too is visible. From the Tennis Courts the mountain range from Ohiya, Spreading its wings from Idalgashinna, Haputale and Bandarawela can be seen. In the night anybody could hear the night mail train from Badulla to Colombo negotiating the bends.
7. An unique feature in Gurutalawa is the opportunities afforded for outdoor activities. Its rolling patnas and mountains offer an environment which would be the envy of any school boy from the metropolis. Hiking during weekends is quite popular. The first hike was in 1942; the entire school participated.
8. During early days, at times the seniors, accompanied by Dr. Hayman had walked to Horton Plains and World's End via Ohiya and returned through Pattipola. Leopards were believed to roam here. Hiking was revived by the new Principal.
9. The College is unique in many ways. In February 1942, Mr. & Mrs. Leslie de Saram made a generous gift of a farm consisting of 35 acres to the College. This included a large furnished bungalow, 3 cottages, farm buildings, garages, stores, livestock. The Campus has a beautiful environment.
10. The farm had Fresian cows who supplied milk. Even butter and cheese were produced. At present chicken is a popular animal protein which is served to the Students 4-5 times a week.

11. The orchards were replete with Fruit trees some of them are rare The seedless persimmon was the jewel in the crown. All students eyed the forbidden fruit. There were also oranges, mandarins, guavas, pears and peaches. The Orchards were out of bounds.

12. The gardens were beautifully laid out and flowers were regularly sold. Mrs.Hayman and the Staff tended the garden. Most of the vegetables required were grown and were available for sale.

13. In the early days, the former bedrooms of Mr. Leslie de Saram's house though inadequate had served as dormitories. Corridors served as Class rooms and a dining hall. A wide staircase leading down to a bathroom was used as a science lecture hall. The walls separating the bathrooms at the foot of the stairs had been brought down and the Laboratory was created.

14. On May 12th 1942, school reopened for the second term at Gurutalawa The original students numbered 57, amongst whom were Bradman Weerakoon, S.K. Wickremasinghe, and C.L. Wickremasinghe. There were two day-boys whose parents lived within walking distance. These students belonged to classes from Lower 4th to Upper 6th or Standard 5 to Standard 10 or as presently known, Year 6 to Year 10.

15. The original staff included Dr. R.L. Hayman, as Headmaster and the Reverend A.J. Foster as Chaplain. Dr. Hayman, taught Physics and Mathematics to the Seniors while Rev. A.J. Foster taught English, History and Divinity. Dr. Hayman, was a swimming coach besides being in charge of Scouting and the Outward Bound School. Fr. Foster, coached Cricket and much later initiated Bird-Watching. Fifty different varieties of birds had been identified at Gurutalawa supposed to be an ornithologist's paradise. A few of the pioneer students returned to College and joined the teaching staff, O.E.J. De Soysa and A.K. Chapman among them.

16. Everybody arose at 5.45 a.m. and the school day ended at 9.30 p.m. Everything was done methodically and had to adhere to the bell. There were two periods of 'prep' one before breakfast and the other before dinner. Games were compulsory. On rainy days they had to indulge in cross country runs. These runs were across valleys and mountains. Fr.Foster had initiated these Cross Country Runs and later on students set about it unsupervised. At the beginning, Power had been provided by a generator.

17 P.T., Gymnastics and Swimming were introduced in mid - morning so that the long session of 6 periods in the morning was interspersed with a period of physical activity.

18 Amongst the subjects originally taught were Divinity, Latin, Greek, Classical History, Arithmetic, Algebra, Geometry, Trigonometry, Higher Maths, Applied Maths etc. Agriculture, Wood work and Bee keeping were also subjects that were taught in the early days. Latin continued to be taught even until the 1960s. The College was noted for its excellent standard of English which was the sole medium of instruction until Govt. Policy changed. By 1986 or so 95% of students were from non-English speaking homes, and the clamour from parents was for more and better English. Efforts were made to create an English speaking atmosphere. With the arrival of the Age of Information and Technology, Computer classes and equipment have also been put in place.

19.Sports and allied activities down the years have included Cricket, Hockey, Soccer, Rugger, Athletics, Tennis, Basket Ball, Squash, Boxing, Badminton, Volley Ball, Swimming, Water Polo, Life Saving, Horse Riding, Rifle Shooting, Boating, Mountain Trekking, Hiking, Cross Country Runs, Bird Watching, Scouting, Weight Lifting, Karate, Gymnastics. Cadetting, Scouting, Cubbing, Outward Board School.

20. There were several horses who were used to train boys in horse riding. Those who did horse riding could go on long rides across the mountains and other roads and parks.
21. The lake close by promoted the advent of boating though the sport was not very successful.
22. In most sports activities that the College participated at Inter-School level they fared satisfactorily. Certain teams went across to India, for their sports activities.
23. The swimming pool was officially opened in 1953. Dr. Hayman gave the pool as a present from his wife and himself to the College. He hoped it would spread the knowledge of swimming and life saving.
24. The Masters and the Minor Staff were all resident within the Campus. Each of the Masters took charge or coached some sport or other activity outside of the classrooms.
25. The monthly fees per boy had originally been Rs. 55/- . S. Thomas' became a fee-levying school from 1951. The boarding fees at Gurutalawa were increased to Rs. 92/75 per month. Today almost 60 years later the school fees and boarding fees aggregate to about Rs. 3,500/- per month.
26. The Sinhala Society, in the very early days had staged a musical drama "Rama and Sita". Bradman Weerakoon had played the part of Sita. It later produced a ballet "Bahirawa". H. C. N. D. Lanerol's "Ralahamy" plays were also staged from time to time. In the 1960's an operetta 'A Lad in and Out' was produced.
27. The center for public exams was the Govt. School in the adjoining village of Wangiakumbura. A canteen and a co-operative store supply all the requirements of stationary and short-eats etc. Clothes used to be taken by the dhoby once a week. Presently this is supplemented by the laundry. The barber was available on Saturdays and Sundays. Students are transported for sports activities in the College vans. In the early days, they were taken to Haputale or Hatton and made to catch the Train.
28. The sick room manned by qualified medical staff provide the necessary First Aid and medication. An Isolation room is situated adjacent to house boarders who contact contagious diseases.
29. The students and the staff have their meals in the dining room. The entire requirement of bread etc. is produced in the College bakery.
30. On 3rd November 1948, a fire destroyed almost the entire classroom block. The arsonist was never discovered. Dormitory roofs were replaced with asbestos sheets, and for the first time seniors and juniors were housed separately.
31. In 1944 , the Board of Governors decided that there was to be only one boarding house in the interests of economy and efficiency. This was to be situated in Gurutalawa with accommodation for about 150 boarders. The buildings at Gurutalawa designed by Mr. Shirley D'Alwis, the University Architect blended harmoniously with the surroundings. The material employed was to be stone. What was to be put up at Gurutalawa was to be good and lasting, serving the present generation and many generations to come. Students were privileged to be able to take an active part in the building of their own school. Years later the construction of the Squash Court, the Co-op building and the Basket Ball Court were all accomplished by what was then referred to as "Social Service", which was also performed during games times.

32 The Chapel was dedicated in December 1945. It continues to remain an imposing frontage of the main entrance of the School.

33 New buildings have been constructed for the Laboratory, Library, the Main Hall and several classrooms and dormitories

34 Two questions which have consistently confronted the administrators:

- a. What is the maximum number of students the School should have ?
- b. Will it be appropriate to have A Level Classes and senior boys in their late teens ?

35 The necessity of having classes up to Advanced Level has been stressed. Students leaving for Mt. Lavinia after O.Level drained the school of leadership and experience. Thus Advanced Level classes began in 1980. Graduate teachers were appointed in all science subjects. These classes ensured that there would be fifty to sixty mature boys aged between seventeen and twenty who could provide leadership to the school and exercise disciplinary control of students through a respected prefects body. Further, the brightest students and excellent all round sportsmen were retained by the school enabling it to field Under 19 teams in all Inter School Sports competitions. This had been impossible earlier since students usually passed their O/L at 15 or 16. Although a number of students were able to enter the University, yet on the whole the experiment was not a success. The difficulty was to retain qualified teachers in the school at this level. As a result of this and other constraints these classes were done away with in 1987.

36 From the beginning of 1947 Gurutalawa was considered a separate school in the eyes of the Department of Education. The numbers in the school increased gradually. In 1942 there were 57 students. In 1962, 300 and at present 453.

37 Now there are about 60 , on the tutorial staff.

38 Even up to the 60's one of the regular and most looked forward to events in the College Calendar was the visit to St. Michael's College Batticaloa. It was greatly conducive to communal harmony which has always existed at St.Thomas' and has been part of the Thomian tradition.

39. The format of the Term report contained detailed information on the students performance and the activities in the school. Students had the opportunity to develop mentally, physically and spiritually. Very few schools could boast as much.

40.The Riots of 1958 and the ensuing Emergency resulted in minor inconveniences. The Headmaster was requested by the Authorities to continue school. No student was removed by his parents, and this speaks volumes for the absolute confidence and trust the parents had in the Administration. Although the school escaped the tragic events of 1983 they did affect the school. Nearly 125 Tamil students' homes and parents businesses were destroyed. They were provided with various concessions but the inevitable exodus of Tamil students took place. During the year 1989 there was much unrest in the country which saw the College go through many problems. How ever it survived a bad patch and proved how resilient it could be.

41.The Parent Teacher Association of the College was formed in 1974. Parents have made valuable suggestions which included the need to pay special attention to the teaching of English.

The School will no doubt go from strength to strength with the active co-operation of the students who are the most valuable asset, the staff and the dedicated Old Boys.

ANON

