

Former Headmasters: St. Thomas' Preparatory School and College Bandarawela

Mr. W.T. Keble (1942-1956)

Mr. W.T. Keble was born on the 4th of August 1901 in Staffordshire, England. He obtained his Bachelor and Master of Arts Degree from the University of Oxford and Diploma in Education. In 1923, Mr. Keble took up an appointment as a teacher at St. Thomas' College, Mount Lavinia.

The idea of forming an up country school first entered his mind in 1929 after a visit to Nuwara Eliya, on which occasion he expressed that a school like St. Thomas' should take advantage of the amenities provided in the up country. But he felt that the cold climate of Nuwara Eliya was not suitable for an average low country boy and therefore explored the possibilities of finding a suitable site. He felt that Bandarawela would be an ideal place and set about acquiring land.

As a result the St. Thomas' Preparatory school, Bandarawela branch was started on the 20th of January 1942 by Mr. Keble in a rented house at Walden Place, Welimada Road, Bandarawela. No sooner it was started the war in the South and South Asia intensified and the premises of St. Thomas' Kollupitiya was taken over by the Navy. This situation paved the way for the Kollupitiya branch which was also founded by Mr. Keble to be temporarily shifted to Bandarawela. The small rented house was not sufficient. Mr. Keble bought an empty dairy shed which was for sale in Nugegoda and transferred every bit of the frame and corrugated sheets to a friend's land (Mr. H.A.J. Hullugalle's on Golf Links Road, Bandarawela, and erected a large shed to house the school rooms. The whole school consisted of a Chapel, Office, classrooms and a tiny 2 roomed apartment for Mr. and Mrs. Keble. The house built by Mr. Hulugalle was also given to be used for the school until the land for the school premises was acquired. While the school was thus going on, Mr. Keble was able to acquire 10 acres of land in the patnas nearby on a 99 year lease to put up the Headmaster's house and a farm.

The school was inaugurated as St. Thomas' Preparatory School, Bandarawela. In 1944 construction commenced. The first building of the present school was built with the help of parents and friends of Mr. Keble, who generously helped with gifts of materials and donations to the building fund. Mr. D.R. Wijewardene helped to put up the first building which housed a variety of departments of the school. This building is known as Wijewardene Dormitory now. Since Mr. Keble was a great scholar he wrote two books at this time. "First Term" and "Life of Sir James Peiris" (the latter with Deva Surya Sena). Both these books provided the funds for buildings. The present Peiris Dormitory was such a building. Sir Claude and Lady Corea helped with Corea House (now Corea Dormitory). The late Mrs. P.E.P. Deraniyagala, Mr. Hayes Jayasundera and Mr. J.H. Sri Chandrasekera along with parents were able to raise funds to put up more buildings.

In 1946 an open air theatre, built after the fashion of ancient Greece, was put up. This was the first of its kind built in Sri Lanka. The cost of this was contributed by two parents later this was converted to an agricultural site.

In 1949 the swimming pool was constructed. Mr. Keble was the first swimming coach. Later due to lack of water this site was used to put up the present Edirisinghe Dormitory.

In 1951 the Science Room was gifted by Mr. Sydney Ellawala. The present Upper School classrooms were built. The Headmaster's Office was shifted to this building. On the 17th of August 1956 Mr. Keble and his family left for Canada for good with his parting words "Your children have been my life".

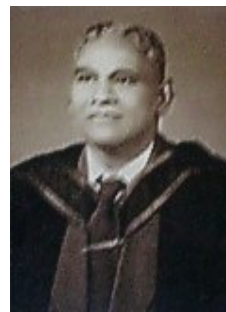
Mr. U. Obeysekera was appointed Acting Headmaster when Mr. W.T. Keble left Ceylon for good on the 17th of August 1956. When Mr. Obeysekera fell ill, Mr. D.N. Edirisinghe took up duties as Acting Headmaster.



Mr. V. D. Paul Raj (1957-1964)

Mr.V.D.Paul Raj was appointed as Headmaster of S.Thomas' Preparatory School in 1957. Here too he threw himself into his tasks and duties with such vigour and determination that in a short time he reorganised the school and put it on a firm footing, after winning over staff and parents with his charm and tact. The present Chapel at St.Thomas' is also another building he helped to put up. Despite all these secular activities, the late Mr. Paul Raj found time to render unto God's by being an active lay preacher in the Methodist Church.

He retired from St. Thomas' College, Bandarwela in May 1964, thus bringing to a close nearly forty years of devoted service as a teacher who had an uncanny knack of finding time to do almost everything he wanted.



The late Mr. V.D. Paul Raj is no more. But his dedication to serve the society in which he lived will remain a shining example to

everyone. As a teacher, he was much more than a copy-book impression of rectitude with cane in hand and corrective punishment at heart; for he packed into one lifetime the service of many. He shall live forever an inspiration to all those who love hard work.

Mr. S.L.A. Rathnayake (1964-1985)

When a small village school at the top of a hill with a 14-member staff teaching 280 students in temporary structures made of timber becomes a grade one collegiate school spreading itself imposingly and impressively upon the landscape, bearing within its lofty portals almost a thousand students excelling in the fields of education and sports it would indeed remain throughout the ages as a monument to what the indomitable human spirit is capable of achieving.

If Samuel Louis Alexander Ratnayake, better known as S.L.A. reflected on how he might serve humanity, when as a school but he cycled from Boralesgamuwa where he lived, to Christian College, Kotte, (whose Principal, Revd. Canon A.C. Houlder he later succeeded, being the first Old Boy Principal) if he vaguely dreamt of showing men the meaning of fine character, conduct and discipline, if he prayed for courage and faith to fight with his back to the wall and to mount the seemingly insurmountable; his dreams came true and his prayers were answered.



Ratnayake, who served for 58 years as an educationist, of which 49 were as Principal, was an outstanding student of Wesley College where he studied from 1924 to 1928. He passed out first in the London Matriculation for which he was awarded the distinguished Hill medal for the most outstanding student of the year.

It is hardly likely that S.L.A. indulged in Hamlet-like procrastinations of "to be or not to be", for he had inherited his vocation from his father a Headmaster, and his mother a dedicated teacher. The only teachers Training College in the island took an annual batch of 40. In 1933, S.L.A. was one of them. When he passed out the Principal of the Training College handed young Ratnayake two 3 rupee increments (added to his Rs. 10/- salary) together with his certificate.

He has since served as Principal of Christ Church Boys' School, Baddegama (1935) member of staff and later Headmaster of the Training colony run by the Anglican Church, Principal in the Central Colleges of Passara and Bibile, and Principal Gadaladeniya Senior School which later became the Pilimatalawa Senior School. Under his guidance the school trebled in size and developed into one of the best schools in the Kandy region. Meanwhile Ratnayake graduated from London University. After being promoted as grade one principal, he went on to his old school, Christian College. Under his guidance and inspiration the College produced the Public Schools Athletics and Decathlon champions and sent a team of athletes to India. The tenure of his office coincided with the heyday of that great C.M.S. educational institution.

On May 1st, 1964, Ratnayake retired from government service and took charge of St. Thomas' Prep. School, Bandarawela, where he served as Headmaster for 21 years. From the time S.L.A. came over to the Prep. School, he began to work with unflinching devotion for its upliftment. Year by year the school began to expand. It also came to be increasingly known throughout the island as an educational institution par excellence. While the school held a unique record of 100% passes in successive G.C.E. 'O' Level examinations, it also became inter collegiate badminton champions for several years running. Young Thomians graduating from S.T.C.S. Bandarawela were gentlemen well equipped for life and work.

Battling against the lack of financial resources, Ratnayake strove tirelessly to build what has come to be one of Sri Lanka's greatest educational institutions. When he left after 21 years of labour, there remained only 3 of the buildings that stood before his time. The additions being new and extended kindergarten and middle school blocks and hostels, an impressive Keble Memorial Hall built in appreciation of the founder of the school, W.T. Keble, and to crown it all, a gigantic gymnasium and indoor sports complex the only one of its kind in any college in the island.

The retirement and passing on of S.L.A. who drew from over half a century of experience removed from the contemporary field of education one of its greatest contributors. Not only the young Thomians but also their parents have been generous in their encomiums

showered on their late beloved master. They have indicated to his wife Constance (who was a constant source of support and encouragement to him) how much they owed to their old Headmaster - a paragon of discipline, integrity and affection, whom they respected and loved. They recognized that within his strict countenance and firm exterior was a heart of gentle care and genuine concern. He rejoiced with the success of his students and staff and shared deeply in their sorrows. He adeptly interwove teacher, student and parent into an effective partnership in the school he lovingly nurtured and tended - a partnership that helped build a healthy community - a community with a true national perspective and understanding. He drew inspiration from, was motivated by, and had constant recourse to the Word of God, recognizing and imparting the truth that, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom."

Would that we had more men of his caliber - great gentlemen of education, men of substance, who never succumbed to the attraction of riches of station, of power or pride, who could not yield to the pressures of power or influence, men with unwavering dedication to the simple yet deep confidence in God and man. It is in the hands of such men alone to redeem our educational system from the maimed and maligned state it often manifests itself in and restore to our beloved country the mobility, which once robbed the teaching profession and bolster the sagging standards of life and discipline in our land.

Mr. D.B. Welikala (1985-1989)

Mr. D.B. Welikala as the Headmaster of the S.Thomas' College, Bandarawela with effect from 1st January 1985.

Mr. Walikala is an Arts Graduate of the University of Peradeniya and has his Diploma in Education from the University of Colombo.

He commenced his teaching at his alma mater, Wesley College, after receiving his professional English Trained Teacher's Certificate from Maharagama Teacher's College in 1985. His teaching career ceased at Royal College, Colombo in 1968 as he served in Wellawaya, Gampola and Mahara in that capacity.

After a brief stay at Wedamulla Maha Vidyalaya, Kelaniya, in 1973 as Principal, Mr. Welikala rejoined the Ministry of Education where he served as Adult Education officer and Officer-in-Charge of the Non-Formal Education Centre of Research and Development at Veyangoda. He also served as the Liaison Officer of the Ministry at the Open University. Later, he was in overall charge of the Adult English Education Programmes conducted by the Non-Formal Education.

A disciplinarian with high principals of conduct and professional attitudes, an his wide spectrum of experience in both in-school and out - of-school educational activities should stand him in good stead to meet new challenges that lie ahead for him as Headmaster of St. Thomas' College.

Mr. R.R.R. Herathge (1989-2000)

Mr. D.B.Welikala retired from the post of Headmaster in 1989. The Chaplain of the school, Rev. D.R.Canagasabey was appointed as Acting Headmaster in February 1989.

From May 1989 Mr. R.R.R.Herathge was appointed as Headmaster. He obtained his Bachelor of Arts degree and Post Graduate Diploma in Education from the University of Peradeniya. During his term of office he was instrumental in initiating most of the Clubs and Societies which are in full bloom at present. The College Cadet Platoon and the Cadet Band was formed during this period. The College Library was completely



refurbished and reorganized with catalogue and index to bring it on par with any other leading library in the country. The Annual Bakthi Gee recital which is a very popular event in the College calendar was initiated under his patronage.

During his term of office much was done for staff welfare such as organizing the Annual Staff Nite, Annual Staff Excursion etc. The Staff Guild was re-organized and much was done to promote more cordial relations among the staff.

Another note worthy achievement was the Annual Sinhala and Tamil New Year Programme which was organized to build closer co-operation between the school and the neighbourhood.

Many buildings were repaired during this period and the play ground was expanded and redone. A very essential source of welfare came into reality by the construction of the four staff quarters built to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the college. It is during this period that students obtained the best A/L results in the year 1993.

Mr. R.R.R.Herathge retired from the post of Headmaster in 2000.