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SANDYS

Career

1 p.

Comments on

1 p

Interview

35^{2/3} pp

MELVILL KEVIN TRELAWNY SANDYS

b. 28 September 1890.

M.A., Oxon.

Military Service.

C.C.S. 1919 - 1952

3 Nov. 1919	apptd. by Sec. of State.
17 Nov. 1919	attached to Ratnapura Kachcheri.
20 March 1920	on leave (war service).
6 March 1922	O.A., Kurunegala.
6 Oct. 1922	Acting A.G.A., Puttalam and Chilaw.
7 July 1923	A.G.A., Mullaittivu.
10 Nov. 1924	D.J., Anuradhapura.
2 March 1926	on leave.
1 Oct. 1926	P.M., Kurunegala.
30 May 1927	Acting A.G.A., Hambantota.
30 June 1927	Acting D.J., Tangalla.
25 Aug. 1927	Acting A.G.A., Matara.
29 Jan. 1929	Asst. Settlement Officer.
7 Oct. 1931	A.G.A., Kalutara.
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4 Nov. 1935	A.G.A., Matale.
23 May 1936	on leave.
16 Oct. 1936	D.J., Badulla.
3 May 1937	Acting G.A., Northern Province.
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Comments on Interview with Mr. M.K.T.Sandys , 12.12.1965

Mr. Sandys is 75 years old. On several points his memory was hazy. Indeed on some questions you could see it coming back, but very slowly. It was only after a time that some of the things I was seeking dawned on him. I have a feeling that the answers might appear confused and inconsistent at times to any listener, particularly regarding land matters. If inconsistent, I would tend to accept his later statement rather than his first. I was expecting a great deal from him regarding the work of the L.S.D. and in this sense I did not get as much as hoped for, though his views were nevertheless pretty useful.

I do not think the tape-recorder affected him much. A good friend of my family he did his best to help me and the interview was preceded by a display of photographs from Ceylon days, purely on his own initiative. An energetic, keen and highly enthusiastic and conscientious officer in his day - as scraps of evidence from other interviews revealed - he brought this conscientiousness into his interview.

In his day Mr. Sandys was an irrigation enthusiast and his views on the chena-licensing question in Anuradhapura indicate that he was willing to move against precedent. He was, also, I think, ready to take on Government in arguing a case. But this would have been only upto a point. On many questions his thinking (today) was on set lines. He does not seem to have probed alternatives etc. on some important matters. Thus some questions I put were almost new to him.

On political questions this was very evident. He was not all that politically minded - i.e. not, or so it seemed today, as deeply interested in the constitutional developments as Newham, Davidson etc., though more so than Bond . Very much the provincial officer here.

But one should note that in the 1950's and 1960's Mr.Sandys was an ardent worker in the Conservative cause. It is not suprising that he tended to think universal franchise unsuited to Ceylon.

Regarding his views on individuals, I do not know which way to express an opinion. By nature, I should think , Mr.Sandys would not be severely critical of anyone.

M.W.Roberts

16.12.65

Extract from letter : G.L.D.Davidson - M.W.Roberts, 19.12.1965

.... you should make a point of seeing M.K.T.Sandys. I should think that, of my contemporaries, he was for the most sympathetic to the Ceylon villagers and was genuinely concerned to do what he could to improve their lot. He was a religious man (which I am not) and I think it was a matter of conscience with him to treat the people for more tenderly than the rest of us would. I believe that the villagers appreciated his attitude, and were fond of him in their way; but this didn't prevent them from taking advantage of his kindness if they could. His methods, as you will realise, were different from mine, and I think you would find it helpful to compare his views on many subjects with those I expressed to you.

INTERVIEW WITH MR. M.K.T. SANDYS

12 DECEMBER 1965

- I. I normally begin by asking people what made them join the Colonial Service?
- S. Oh, well, in my case it was hereditary reasons. My great grandfather and grandfather were all in the I.C.S. in India. And I went into the - I wanted to follow them on the old Home Indian Colonial List; and my preference was India first, Crown colony second and Home third; and the war broke out just as I was doing the exam, 1914; and the only thing was we were asked to go on and finish the exam. We did that. And somehow or other I missed it, missed the Indian by a few places; and my second choice after that was Ceylon. There was Ceylon, Malaya and Hong Kong. And I think I put them down in that order. At any rate I was very pleased to get Ceylon.
- I. Did you find that - were you at a public school in England?
- S. Yes.
- I. Did you find your public school life helped you in the Colonial Service?
- S. Oh, yes, I think it did in general.
- I. In general. In any specific way?
- S. Well, what you learnt of the history of our own country. So it was the thing to do. When I was first - when I first took an interest in anything political it was the 1902 election and the Conservative Party was entirely conservative imperialist in those days. Practically entirely. They won the election on that. 1902, the time of the Boer War. And everyone that could get out did so.
- I. I see. What about military service itself? Did that help you?
- S. Well, in my case it took me out to India.
- I. Oh, did it?
- S. Yes. Took me out to India for about five years. 1914 to 1919.
- I. So the East was not a strange place when you came to Ceylon?
- S. No, no. Yes.
- I. Did you find that as an O.A. you were treated more or less as a dogsbody?
- S. Well, I should hardly call it that. I had very sympathetic
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G.A.'s. I had no grouse or complaint against anyone. But I did find it a little bit too much office routine and not enough getting out into the country.

- I. I think Mr. Stace also has made that point. And he said that sometimes he didn't know what his country work was about and he would have preferred to go out a bit more.
- S. Yes. Yes, that's right. Yes, I felt the same.
- I. Oh, that's very useful to know that. And how did you learn your job initially? Were you supposed to pick the brains of your G.A.? And did you do so or ...?
- S. Well, a lot of it was writing reports to the G.A.; in the office; and making a suggestion; and naturally you learnt that way. Either your suggestion was maintained by the G.A. and he made it a simple order. Or he disagreed with it and wrote something different. In either case you learnt something from him.
- I. Did you learn anything from the service stories and anecdotes?
- S. You mean from the officials there at the spot?
- I. Yes, you know ... And would you say that Civil Servants generally preferred to do administrative work rather than judicial?
- S. Yes, I think they did on the whole. Yes.
- I. Why?
- S. Because it meant more going out in the open and seeing all the people.
- I. Yes, I see.
- S. In the courts you saw them rather at their worst, than anything else.
- I. Yes, I should think so.
- S. It was very trying. The hours were very long too, especially in court.
- I. Did you feel from the revenue administrative point of view that you could have done with more instruction and discussion with your superiors or your colleagues?
- S. No, I didn't find that.
- I. But wasn't it that you, well, really picked up your job through experience and, sort of, very much rule of thumb?
- S. Yes, it was mainly that. Of course, in the Settlement Department I learnt a great deal, a tremendous amount. That work went very much into detail. The most valuable in all administrative work was to learn something about the land and the title - question of title.
-

- I. Yes. What about these sort of courses, theoretical courses that they had in Oxford and Cambridge later on in the 1930's? Would that sort of thing have helped you?
- S. I had no experience of that so its difficult to say. 1930's.
- I. Well, I know - I was wondering whether you would have liked to have learned something about the elements of the law and politics. And also to have perhaps had a six months on the practical side of things like elementary engineering and, you know, irrigation works and things like that?
- S. Oh, yes, yes. There was one case of an A.G.A. who taught himself to make plans of tanks and so on. But to what extent he'd had previous mathematical experience I couldn't say.
- I. Who was that? Davidson?
- S. No. Glanville, I think, was his name.
- I. I know ...
- S. That was very useful. But its the only case I knew about.
- I. I met Mr. Davidson and he said he was a sapper during the war so that helped him quite a lot.
- S. Yes, yes, it would, yes. Yes. But I found - of course the alternative was to take tremendous interest in irrigation as I always did. My favourite subject. And employ the irrigation engineers to do things for you.
- I. Yes, that was open to you. But, of course, at an earlier date in the late nineteenth century these special departments were not as well staffed, and I should have thought that the A.G.A's would have - could have done quite well with some sort of practical training? Even if very elementary?
- S. Yes. It might or it might not. It might not because - scientific thing a tank. As I discovered afterwards. I learnt by experience. It had to be scientifically done. Surveyed first and then after that you drew the plan and then the tank was practically full-proof except in cases of very bad floods and so on.
- I. I was just wondering whether this rule of thumb method was pushed a bit too far? Where it could have disastrous results?
- S. Rule of thumb method? Could you ...?
- I. Well - well, you had to go out sometimes on your own as an A.G.A. And you came across a problem which you'd never had before and which no one had spoken about before but which may have been quite a common thing. And each A.G.A. tackled it in his own way, and some may have done quite considerable harm.
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- S. Oh, yes. Yes, its possible.
- I. What about the directions that you got? Did you feel that there was too much of precedence and routine?
- S. Yes, I certainly found there was - I was doing too much office work, part of the time. Everybody found that especially on routine. There were very good examples of that when the papers took up too much of one's time. One couldn't get out in the country and see how things were being done.
- I. Apart from the very weight of all this office work did you feel that in certain policies people tended to move too much in fixed grooves, and didn't try to think up something new? Not just for the sake of thinking up something new but to improve methods.
- S. I can't remember anything definite in that way. I learnt mostly by experience. In going out and doing things.
- I. Did you find that when you were tackling problems and suggesting repair of a tank, or doing something which you felt was fairly concrete and something with a purpose, that either the provincial headquarters or Colombo tended to be rather obstructionist, or to clamp down on these new ideas?
- S. No, I had my own plan of dealing with the Irrigation Department.
- I. Oh, what did you do?
- S. I had my own plan for tank restoration. I divided them into three groups, A, B, and C tanks and put them down in that order, and gave them precedence in that order. A tanks and tanks already restored, B and C tanks with C tanks (?) on the list. I had a list all the way down and took them up in the order I thought was best. That was not the business of the Irrigation Department. They had to examine the report then. And the report came from me.
- I. Yes, I see. And you had plenty of money and scope in doing this sort of thing?
- S. Oh, yes, entirely, yes. Yes, that was one of the joys of the job. In being out-station places; they were sixty miles from anywhere. Thirty miles from the railhead in Mullaittivu, my first district.
- I. And how did the liaison with the Irrigation Department work out?
- S. Oh, excellently. Very well indeed. In most cases, after a time when we got to know the - how it should work.
- I. Thinking in terms of overall British policy in Ceylon, I
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know you were not at the helm of affairs as such, but did you feel that in the sense of ultimate ideals there was a lack of purpose and drive?

S. No, I don't think that I can say that I felt that.

I. For instance, did you feel that they were making efficiency an end in itself rather than a means to an end?

S. You mean about general policy?

I. Yes, general policy.

S. No. I think I felt things were improving all the time. As recommendations went out I think they were attended to. Taken up by degrees. Certainly we got much better both in irrigation and agriculture, especially in agriculture. It improved enormously while I was out there.

I. Don't you feel that, say in the early 1920's, the Department of Agriculture couldn't - could have been given a bit more priority? Or were they giving it sufficient emphasis in your opinion?

S. Oh, yes, I remember now they had a new school in the West Indies, which was set-up about that time. For the Empire.

I. Oh, I see.

S. And that did excellent work. People were sent out there to them. I had one or two working under me in various branches. That was a very good scheme. I think an ex-director was sent there from Ceylon. And I - he took over for a number of years, I think, in charge of it. That was quite a good move.

I. Regarding land policy, as such, from time to time you got the planters asking that Government should help them to attract the Sinhalese to work on the plantations?

S. Oh, yes, yes.

I. What was the Government attitude to this sort of thing? Or the G.A's and A.G.A's attitude?

S. Oh, we did our utmost to help it, to get the Sinhalese to work.

I. At full-time or ...?

S. This was in - yes, when I was Acting - I was Acting Commissioner for Labour for a short time. That's too modern, isn't it?

I. When was that?

S. That was under - who was the Minister?

I. That was after independence, was it?

S. That was when - it was a late stage. It was about the time - before the second war I think.

I. Oh, I see. What - in what district would this have been? Or

was it in general?

S. What was it about? I forget[what we were talking about].

I. The planters wanting the Sinhalese to work on the ...

S. Oh, yes, yes. When I was in Kandy, I think, it was.

I. Were you A.G.A., Kandy then?

S. I was Additional - yes, A.G.A.

I. That would have been in 1937, or '38?

S. It was '38. Just before the war, yes.

I. But didn't it mean that these Sinhalese who worked on the estates would be entirely divorced from the soil?

S. No. I can't imagine them being divorced from the soil. Sinhalese were never divorced from the soil. They would always go back, wouldn't they? If they had land they'd go to it.

I. Yes, but if they didn't have land or if they had just a fraction?

S. You mean the fact that they could get wages prevented them from doing agricultural ...?

I. Yes.

S. I see. Well, it might have, I can't say. I found that the Sinhalese didn't like working up-country at all.

I. That's right.

S. They preferred being in the warmth. That's what the Tamils - the same with the Tamils. They like working in the up-country (?) districts.

I. Would you say that one aspect of Government policy - at least a tendency in policy - was to try and conserve the land in the native peasantry? And prevent them alienating their paddy fields or even their essential chena lands to planters?

S. Oh, yes, now we come to that very interesting question of policy initiated by C.V. Brayne. Yes.

I. No, I'm not thinking only of C.V. Brayne. I know what Brayne did. But that was with regard to the sale of Crown land on an indivisible basis. I was thinking of private land which the peasants owned and which they were sometimes quite willing to sell for a song to the planters.

S. Oh, yes, yes. Now I'm getting you. Yes.

I. What would the A.G.A. do if he found that a peasant was selling his chena land? Or selling Crown chena land? Or pretending it was - claiming it as his own and selling it to a planter? Either Ceylonese or European?

- S. Well, I don't think we would influence it in any way. What we did eventually was to give out Crown land which was under certain terms and you couldn't alienate it. When that came in it was alright. But before that ... You couldn't do anything with private land. You mean, would I deal with private land?
- I. Yes.
- S. Oh, well, that was the whole trouble, you see. Becoming fragmented all the time, worse and worse. Till a man owned a fifth of a coconut tree and that sort of thing. Eventually. That was very serious.
- I. Yes, that was the problem of fragmentation. But what about the problem of land alienation? Alienating their own land to their own detriment.
- S. Ha-ha, you oughtn't(?) to have said that you couldn't prevent the men from being improvident with his own things that he owned. Quite impossible to prevent him.
- I. Well, in the African countries they passed - as in Fiji, as early as 1870, they passed a law forbidding them from selling land to anyone else.
- S. Oh, yes.
- I. I was wondering whether this had been thought of in Ceylon?
- S. Not that I know of. No, I don't think so. But I was very much concerned in the new land policy started mainly by Mr. Brayne.
- I. Yes.
- S. In fact I saw him and ...
- I. I was coming to that as a side aspect. But I would first like to - I was trying to clear this matter up and then go on to the Land Settlement Department.
- S. Yes, do. Yes.
- I. You see, it could be said that in certain areas - certainly not in all the areas but in some areas - there was a conflict in policy: in the sense that there was a danger that peasants wouldn't have room for expansion because land had been sold to the planters. Either by Government or by the peasants. And so, there was this danger that the village and the villager would suffer either by Government land-sales or by their own imprudent land-sales.
- S. Yes.
- I. And I wonder whether there was any sort of attempt to stop this? What about the Land Settlement Department?
-

- S. Well, the Land Settlement Department: it went out - it took up a certain area.
- I. Yes.
- S. And it found out by its procedure which land was Crown and which land was private. And if the land was private it was marked, 'Private'. And that was the end of it.
- I. That was all? What if you found that some villager had claimed pasture land which belonged to the village but - which belonged to no-one in particular, but which the whole village had been using or several people had been using, and had sold this necessary village land to a planter for some ridiculous sum usually, even though he hadn't got a full title to it? In effect he had sold some Crown land.
- S. Oh, yes, yes. Well, then it depended on the age of the cultivation. I think after ten years we made no - we didn't follow the question up after a certain time.
- I. Yes. Was it your practice when you were in the Settlement Department to retain some of it for the village and force the planter to pay for the rest of it to Government?
- S. I think the first question we always determined was whether the land was Crown or private.
- I. Yes, agreed. Once it was found that it was Crown land, what did you do?
- S. Crown land, it was declared Crown under the Waste Lands Ordinance.
- I. Yes, but ...
- S. There was a certain procedure for doing that.
- I. Yes, but didn't you reserve land for - some of this Crown land for the village if it was necessary?
- S. Oh, now we are going on to mapping-out I think?¹

1. Mapping-out was a term which, I believe, was introduced into the discussion of land policy in the late 1920's and was eventually a process applied in conjunction with the Land Development Ordinance of 1935, one of whose architects was C.V. Brayne. It was thereafter, then, that mapping-out was introduced on a comprehensive scale. But measures similar in form to mapping-out had been operated for decades by officers of the Land Settlement Department in the course of 'settlement' work. These men had wide discretionary powers in determining what they could do with land held on dubious title and deemed Crown, even if there were occupiers with no prescriptive rights, i.e. with less than thirty years occupancy in theory, usually twenty-five in practice. It was this aspect I was more interested in. I wished to ascertain what principles these officers followed. As evidenced in the preceding lines as well as his answers to a fresh attempt to resolve this problem a few pages further on, Mr. Sandys' memory was obviously rather hazy and his 1929-31 settlement experiences had been telescoped into those pertaining to the operation of the 1935 Ordinance - producing a very fuddled picture.

I. Yes, that's right.

S. Yes, yes, I did hours of work mapping-out. That was a valuable procedure. We couldn't do without it. But we had to get the land declared Crown first.

I. Yes. And what did mapping-out involve?

S. Well, what it was wanted for. That was a procedure in itself. We went through the village. We made an enquiry, I think, as to whether the land was wanted for cattle pasture or for forest or for any purpose like that. For scenery, all sorts of odd subjects, irrigation purposes or anything like that.

I. Did you ever consider the needs for population growth and ...?

S. Oh, yes, you're talking about ... One of the obvious things was village expansion or settlement. Expansional settlement was the word. You've heard that before?

I. Yes.

S. Yes. And that was - the land was - if there was an urgent need in the village for that, it was put-up by ourselves, by the Settlement Officer or left to the G.A. to do afterwards. I've done both, both as G.A. and as Settlement Officer.

I. Yes. One criticism that has been made is - wouldn't it have been useful for you to have gone out with a surveyor rather than send your plans to the Survey Department? You know what I mean? - worked in the field itself with the surveyor?

S. Yes. Oh, we worked in terms of so much land, an acre or two acres or three acres or whatever it may have been. Or even half an acre sometimes.

I. But didn't you find that as a - sometimes as an A.G.A. you found that a certain village was being settled but it took years before the village was released? You see what I mean? [released] from the settlement, before they cleared it up?

S. Oh, yes, yes. That was a serious grievance. That was hopeless. I know I found that in several cases. In fact I followed it up both in Mannar and Matale and one or two other places. As G.A. or A.G.A. you had powers to act as a Settlement Officer. And being familiar with it I went out and did pieces here and there. And it produced great relief because it meant that you got rid of a certain amount of land and marked the rest Crown. And then you could start giving it out for various purposes.

I. But if it had not been released, it was a great nuisance?

S. Yes. Oh, it became a nightmare sometimes. Many of our troubles were due to non-settlement. I know a settlement was unpopular

in certain quarters but it was an extraordinarily useful thing.

- I. Yes. How did they ... Concentrating on the Land Settlement Department, how did they decide which areas should be taken up and which areas should not be taken up - immediately, you know? Questions of ...?
- S. Oh, that was a question - big question which I didn't have much to do with personally. It was done in the office. The Settlement Officer, I think, probably met the Land Commissioner and various G.A.'s and decided which should be taken up and did that first. Of course ...
- I. What was the basis on which they chose areas?
- S. I couldn't say. They left out certain areas near the coast which were heavily claimed I know. I always lamented that. Especially round Galle. Couldn't get - the things were doubtful and difficult for that reason.
- I. Yes, I see.
- S. Where they thought there was an appreciable amount of Crown land.
- I. Oh, I see.
- S. I think that was probably the answer. Then they decided on getting that surveyed and settled. I'm not sure about whether the surveyor could help at an earlier stage. I never discussed it or thought about it. It didn't come up.
- I. On the field a simple sort of - I don't know the technical term - a triangular, sort of boundary survey, I think its called.
- S. Yes, yes. Oh, we gave them a good deal of latitude I think, as far as I remember. We only put - we had a - we took a pencil and just drew the ...
- I. Rough sketch?
- S. The henas. You know they all had curious names.
- I. Chenas?
- S. Yes.
- I. You know, when you were working in 1929 and 1930 as a Land Settlement Officer ...
- S. I was actually doing it as Land Settlement Officer then.
- I. Yes.
- S. Assistant [Land Settlement Officer].
- I. You were working under the system which had been changed by this Land Commission, wasn't that so? Somewhere in the mid 1920's they recommended - they made certain recommendations which changed the earlier system?
- S. I think so, yes. But I wasn't doing it under the early system.
-

I don't know what that was.¹

- I. Yes, how did you learn your job?
- S. I went out with Mr. Stace. And Mr. Egan I think was Assistant Settlement Officer. I went out with him and stayed in his camp for about a week or a month or so.
- I. So it was - in a sense you were following precedence here?
- S. Oh, yes. I followed - I didn't strike out any new lines as far as that was concerned.
- I. Would it - would you say that - would it be fair to say that one of your - well, part of your policy was to protect the village and the villager from the speculator?
- S. Oh, yes, it would amount to that. Certainly, yes.
- I. You were conscious of the activities of speculators and genuine planters, who encroached on village land?
- S. Well, they could get unsettled land certainly. It was the unsettlement of the land that produced all that trouble.
- I. Oh, I see.
- S. Just a confusion.
- I. And, you see, in the 1920's and for a few decades before that, many politicians were criticising the British Waste Lands policy and criticising the Land Settlement Department.
- S. Yes.
- I. But there is some evidence to show that some of these politicians, though not all of them, were themselves speculators and land-buyers who were being baulked by the L.S.D's.²
- S. Yes.
- I. Would you say that's correct?
- S. Oh, yes, I think so, yes. Yes, there were grounds for - what's the word? - for criticism. Certainly.
- I. There is - was there in Ceylon a class of people whom one calls land-brokers, who specialised in buying dubious claims and then selling them to planters?
- S. I should think very likely. I don't know them under that term.

1. Since he was an Assistant Settlement Officer[A.S.O.] from January 1929 to October 1931 and the Final Report of the Land Commission appeared in 1929 this is probably correct; the Settlement Officer was a member of the Commission and would have introduced the recommendations by then. I raised the issue, however, because I could recall a point made in Dr. Lal Jayawardena's thesis: namely, that several officials criticised the proposals which the Land Commission were advocating on the ground that these suggestions would aid speculators and land-grabbers. Sandys was one of these; indeed there were some quotations from his letters in the thesis. It is unlikely that his criticisms were made as late as 1929 when he was an A.S.O. so it is probable that he raised this point when A.G.A., Matara.

2. I meant, by the Land Settlement Officers.

But there were people, I remember, in Ratnapura District who were known experts in that sort of thing. I know there were several people well-known for that.

- I. Were there any chaps who took to politics afterwards? Or were politicians themselves?
- S. Oh, I expect so. They're just the sort of people who would take to that.
- I. Did you feel that - were some of them lawyers and proctors?
- S. Yes, yes, exactly. That's the crowd. Yes, yes.
- I. And would you say that they were generally unscrupulous in the way they got the land from the villager?
- S. Oh, I couldn't have enough experience to say that, hardly. I should think they probably were, yes.
- I. What about the villagers themselves: what did you feel their attitude was to you as a Land Settlement Officer?
- S. Well, I remember the bit I did at Matale. I took-up a village that had been surveyed and left sitting there for years. And it was growing up again so that one could hardly recognise what the cultivation was. And I said to them all - there was only enough for what you call village settlement. And gave the whole lot out and they were delighted. The whole village came to thank me for it. And said they were more than delighted.
- I. This was when you were A.G.A., Matale?
- S. Yes, A.G.A., Matale.
- I. 1935?
- S. 1935, that's right.
- I. '36, yes.
- S. After that ghastly malaria epidemic.
- I. Yes, I see. And ...
- S. But its difficult to - its rather a big question, isn't it, whether they were satisfied?
- I. Was there a certain amount of grumbling?
- S. Oh, yes, there was grumbling because they didn't realise what the position was. They thought there was more land there than there was there, very often.
- I. I was asking this question because I was wondering - I was trying to establish whether the politicians were representing the grievance of the villagers? Or were, for political and other purposes, raising this question off their own bat? You see what I mean?
- S. Oh, yes, yes.
-

- I. Did you feel that this political criticism was in response to a grievance on the part of the villagers?
- S. I don't know. I don't think so. No. I think there was certainly a point where they realised that the old system wouldn't do. In fact ...
- I. Who?
- S. The villagers. They agreed with Brayne's theory that just selling the land wasn't good enough. Because the rich man had the advantage that he could buy all the land.
- I. Yes. And was this - is it a fair criticism of the Land Settlement Department to say that they did settle land and they did map out, but after they left an area was there much to prevent the villagers alienating their own land? After they had settled an area?
- S. Oh, yes, there was. There was this legislation, the terms of the - the terms on which they were given the land.
- I. Oh, this is Brayne's land?
- S. Yes.
- I. No, I was not only thinking of that. I was thinking of the Land Settlement Department's work. They mapped a certain village out.
- S. Yes.
- I. And they reserved ...
- S. Oh, you mean settled some of it on the villagers?
- I. Yes.
- S. That's a different form. Oh, that was the best title in the world. Everybody recognised that.
- I. The Land Settlement ...?
- S. Oh, yes, that was definitely - there was nobody to interfere with that. But of course we got - I forget the exact date or time - but we got instructions not to follow that out. Not to settle on these lines because ...
- I. That was after Brayne's scheme?
- S. Yes, yes, yes.
- I. No, I was thinking of - before Brayne's idea was brought into being.
- S. Good title?
- I. Yes.
- S. Yes.
- I. But, now, since your aim was to protect the village ...
- S. Yes.
-

- I. And you gave them good title, and sometimes you mapped a village out and left room for expansion. Was there, after you had left, anything to prevent these villagers acting foolishly and sometimes giving out this communal land to planters?
- S. Oh, yes, because it was a criminal offence. That was the whole thing. That's where you were ...
- I. But they could sell the title of the land which they'd got a title to?
- S. Oh, yes, rather, yes. Yes. Oh, yes, that's why Brayne went on, you see, to prevent this alienation, as far as he could.
- I. I - a criticism has been made of Brayne's idea that it was good in theory but very difficult to work administratively. Did you find that so?
- S. Let me see now. Can I think of any examples. There were a lot of - a lot of - a good many of these pieces of land were not taken up I remember. I mean they weren't occupied.
- I. So you got ...?
- S. And then we got petitions. 'Could I have a piece of abandoned land?' That was quite common.
- I. Apart from that Brayne's idea was to prevent fragmentation?
- S. Yes, prevent fragmentation.
- I. But what was ...
- S. I think it did - it did that on the whole.
- I. You think so? What is there to prevent a chap, while not selling it, giving out the land on a share-cropping basis? On a fragmented basis to share-croppers - ande tenure?
- S. Yes.
- I. I mean, when you sold about a thousand plots in one district it was difficult to keep an eye on the whole lot.
- S. Well, the penalty was cancellation of the lot, I suppose, if he did anything contrary to the permit, you see. The terms of the permit.
- I. Oh, I see. The terms were pretty strict, were they?
- S. Yes. Yes, they were. Oh, yes. Oh, yes, as far as I remember, we could control that.
- I. What did the headmen say about this system?
- S. Oh, they took it quite calmly. I don't think they minded.
- I. Because, ultimately, keeping an eye on things depended on them, didn't it?
- S. Yes. Well, it was taken in hand by the headmen - I mean a good headman, and most of them were on the whole. They were carefully
-

chosen for being good men. And they were quite pleased, I think, because the villagers were pleased. They [the headmen] were villagers themselves. But of course that - if I may say something about the mapping-out, it fulfilled their requirements admirably. Because they were always having trouble over the cattle pastures and things like that. In unsettled villages.

I. Whereas in settled ...

S. Cattle all over the place where they shouldn't have been.

I. Oh, yes. And what did you find in settled villages? Was it different?

S. Oh, it was quite different, yes. When we could get a proper thing going for them. And the same with these village forests. That was another thing Brayne did. A villager must have forest for all sorts of things. To build his houses with. And it was misery if there wasn't one anywhere near. This happened near the coast.

I. When you were mapping-out what did you do if you found that one or a few villagers didn't have any land at all?

S. Oh, well, you could only colonise them somewhere else. That's where the whole policy of colonisation came in. 'I've got land, twenty-five, twenty miles away, will you go there?'

I. Did they?

S. They said, 'Yes'. I've got a picture here that will show you.

I. Yes, I saw that one.

S. You've seen that one?

I. Yes.

S. [This picture]; up in Hinidum pattu. Miles away from where they'd lived originally. I mean that was - Gal Oya scheme was after my time rather but I believe that ...

I. Yes, but what if there was no colonisation within the area?

S. You couldn't do anything for them. Quite impossible. If they wanted bits of land, you couldn't take other people's land.

I. And what happened if you found that a planter had bought up quite a lot of village land which was needed when you were mapping it out? And it was not planted land, it hadn't been used yet?

S. Oh, yes.

I. And you found that this land was on rather dubious title. It was in fact Crown land. What did you do in such circumstances? Did you sell the land to the planter or ...?

S. Well, if it was suspected that it was Crown land you could put it under the terms of the Land Settlement Order and settle it.

That would be the end of that. Then I mean - then you could do what you liked with it.

I. You could do what you liked with it?

S. But if the planter had had the best of the case and could prove it was private then ...

I. It was given to him?

S. Personally I shouldn't have taken any action. That brings a whole question to view: to what extent you should ...

I. Interfere?

S. You should interfere with plantations or not. Of course, there was a case for and a case against. It did provide employment for the villages, the surrounding villagers. There's no doubt about that.

I. Yes.

S. Having the estate there.

I. And you felt that having estates in the vicinity was good for the villagers?

S. Oh, yes, yes. It enabled the population to increase. That's a very important point.

I. Would you be able to agree that policy was to have - where there were other capitalists of this sort - policy was to have them 'near enough to the villager to influence him and not so near as to dispossess him?' If you see what I mean? [Not near enough] to take away all his land but near enough for him to work?

S. Yes.

I. I don't suppose you thought on those lines?

S. I think that's rather a difficult question to answer.

I. But wasn't there a tendency to give first consideration to village claimants rather than to outside claimants?

S. Oh, yes, it was certainly. That was one of the principles. Because it was clear that the land in the island was becoming scarce. And so after settling a village and finding what was available then you could first of all take your 'public purposes', as we called it. I've forgotten what; probably post offices and things like that.

I. Oh, I see.

S. You see? And I'm just beginning to remember it. And your forests, your village forests and your cattle pastures and so on afterwards. You could go on to the villagers, the villager was next. And the - then I'd come to another one, the middle-

class man. We had him - he was next, I think, and then after that, the capitalist was last.

I. Oh, I see.

S. So it was a question of order, you see, precedence. Which one you should choose. But I felt it was unwise to worry the estates if you had any land that nobody wanted and keep it.

I. I quite see that. Its a question of these lands which both groups wanted, if you see what I mean?

S. Yes, yes, yes. Quite.

I. And did you have wide discretion in naming the price of the land? If it was Crown land?

S. Let me see now. Of course the villagers' land was a fixed price, a rupee an acre or whatever it was. Nothing above that.

I. Yes.

S. The - for outsiders they had special terms. The middle-class man had a special term under a special contract. And the - now I don't know whether you sold it outright to the planter. I can't remember now. I think they put - by the time I left it was only leasehold, probably a long lease.

I. Yes, I see.

S. You see?

I. One thing that intrigues me about your day-to-day work as a L.S.O. you went with - did you go with an interpreter?

S. Interpreter, yes. That's right, yes.

I. What were the specific areas in which you worked as a Land Settlement Officer?

S. Mostly in two parts of the Island. One was in the Kurunegala District near Dodangamuwa ... I think it was.

I. Dandegamuwa?

S. Dandegamuwa. And the other was in the Ratnapura District. Particularly near the Adams Peak, base of the Adams Peak there. I settled quite a number of villages there.

I. How good was your Sinhalese if I may ask?

S. Well, it was never as strong as I should have liked it to be. But I could understand the villager.

I. Oh, you could? Could you manage without an interpreter?

S. Oh, I've sometimes been out all day with a headman who couldn't speak a word of English. And would get along with him pretty well.

I. Oh, well, that ...

S. Just small things that you were likely to want.

- I. These villages at the foot of Adams Peak: were there any plantations in their vicinity?
- S. Plantations? Oh, yes, fairly near.
- I. Fairly near?
- S. Yes.
- I. It would have been more sort of vertically near rather than horizontally near? You would have been ascending to the plantations, would you?
- S. No, I don't - oh, I see what you mean. I was on that route which went up from Carney(?) Estate on that ...
- I. Was there any sort of clash for land there? Or were the villagers - shall I put it in another way - were the villagers short of land?
- S. Oh, yes, they were always short of land.
- I. No, I'm not thinking of their claims, but what you felt was necessary. They always claimed more than they wanted.
- S. I don't - I came up against very little conflict between the estate people and the villagers.
- I. Oh, that's a very useful fact.
- S. Very little.
- I. And another thing that has always intrigued me is this question of - it was thirty years occupation, you see. It was Crown land if they hadn't occupied it for thirty years. But how do you define thirty years occupation when it came to chena land?
- S. Yes. Thirty years occupation. I forget now. That was the - it would be put up of course, and claims would be called for in the first instance. And then they'd either claim or not claim. If they claimed then we should go into it.
- I. But, I mean, chenas were cultivated once in five to fifteen years and how were they going to prove thirty years ownership of a chena?
- S. Yes.
- I. I know this is rather a detailed question but I wanted ...
- S. Yes, rather difficult to settle that. But one would go into the facts connected with it I suppose. Can't remember now.
- I. Alright. It doesn't matter. But did you know Mr. ... Yes?
- S. Yes. I remember there was some difference between Kurunegala and other parts of the Island. As regards claiming chena. Yes, that's what it was. If the villager claimed the whole chena it would be given out to the villager. That was in Kurunegala, their villages.¹ Not in other parts of the Island.

1. In the North-Western Province the villages were entitled to chena land on the basis of their paddy land: three acres of chena to one of paddy.

It was a separate scheme.

I. Why?

S. Give them more favourable terms.

I. In Kurunegala?

S. Yes, in Kurunegala. I don't know. The Settlement Department didn't much like it. They thought it wasn't fair.

I. Did you know Mr. Freeman?

S. Yes, I knew him quite well, yes. Yes, I went out in the villages right with him.

I. Oh, were you in - you were not in Anuradhapura? Oh, yes, D.J.

S. Yes, I was P.M. and D.J. in Anuradhapura. I was sent there on purpose to deal with Freeman and his questions.

I. Oh, what was he saying?

S. Well, he was defending the villager, you know.

I. In everything?

S. Yes.

I. What were his main ...?

S. This was - they couldn't - that was illicit chena cultivation that went on there.

I. Yes.

S. And - gracious me, I wrote a long memo about it.

I. Yes.

S. There wasn't enough imagination over it. They didn't realise what was going on.

I. Who didn't realise?

S. The authorities.

I. Oh, you believed that Freeman was correct?

S. A great part of what he said was correct, yes.

I. Oh, that's very interesting.

S. But I stopped it more or less because - I was there for about a year.

I. Stopped what?

S. Stopped all these prosecutions. They were due to not - improper action by the headmen in getting in the claims and the conditions that were ...

I. Yes, who had - but surely the headmen were acting under orders?

S. Yes, they were acting under orders from the kachcheri. And the kachcheri had no imagination whatever.

I. That would have been Wedderburn, wasn't it?

S. There were three G.A's there. The first was - went to Kegalla?

I. Tyrrell?

- S. No. The second was Bartlett and the third was - was Wedderburn. Wedderburn was third, Bartlett was second. The first one was - who was it now, who was A.G.A., Kegalla when I first went there? He became Governor of some island in the West Indies.
- I. Blood?
- S. No. You're quite right. It was not Blood though.
- I. Murphy?
- S. No, not Murphy.
- I. It could be Slater.¹ Or ..., no. Well, it doesn't matter.
- S. No, he was - there were three G.A.'s when I was there. And it was the earlier period that I was criticising. Wedderburn entirely agreed with me.
- I. Oh, I see. Oh, I thought Wedderburn and Freeman rather disagreed?
- S. I shouldn't think so. Not very much, no. Wedderburn was a very good man indeed.
- I. He was a former L.S.O.?
- S. Yes, yes. He was very good indeed. I put up everything that he - he ...
- I. You felt that the former policy was too strict?
- S. It had just grown up in the kachcheri. They hadn't realised what was going on. They [the peasants] were frightfully short and they couldn't live without either chenas or tanks, you see.
- I. Yes. And they had no tanks so - and ...
- S. Well, they had tanks but they weren't efficient. They were these old things which breached in every direction, and wanted properly mending.
- I. So you felt that they were too strict and too niggardly ...?
- S. Yes. I didn't meet with - I don't disagree with the kachcheri. They agreed with me in time but they had - I pointed out these things that were going on and they were gradually remedied. But I had to keep law and order too, you see.
- I. Yes, you couldn't ...
- S. That was where - that was a very interesting question. Because that was where Freeman disagreed with the G.A. He wanted no law and order, no ...
- I. No restrictions at all?
- S. But the G.A. had to look after the chenas somehow. It was Crown property. And he had to do something. But you could have avoided it by giving out chenas in advance where they

1. It was almost certainly A.W. Seymour; basing myself on the authors of the Administrative Reports in the 1920's.

were really necessary. And by improving the irrigation conditions and so on.

I. Did the villagers have to pay for these permits?

S. Yes, I think so.

I. But how did they manage to pay in advance? Its, I mean, ...?

S. Oh, I don't know.

I. But that was why I was wondering whether it wouldn't have been better to have got a payment after the crop was reaped or something like that?

S. Yes, they could. That was one of the things that was done to help them, I think.

I. Oh, I see.

S. I think that was one of the things.

I. But I know the - Leonard Woolf has made a similar point with regard to Hambantota. And its a very similar area if I - roughly, you know the type of ...

S. Yes, I know. I've been A.G.A., Hambantota too.

I. And this sort of jungle was useless from the commercial point of view, wasn't it? The scrub land which they were chenaing?

S. Well, not entirely useless. You could - you could cultivate it.

I. Yes, I mean - but from the point of view of trees or any other commercial timber?

A. Oh, yes, you mean, actually, what it was growing at the time?

I. Yes.

S. Yes, yes.

I. So why then if it was a sea of old chena, why should you restrict them chenaing this land?

S. Well, because it was Crown land and they had to protect it.

I. Yes, but it was useless Crown land.

S. Well, I don't know whether - ultimately, not useless. Useless for the time being. You mean it wasn't growing any useful crops?

I. Yes.

S. Yes, but if a private individual took it and sat there and gradually acquired some sort of right to it then you'd deprive ... be(?) swept(?) under another word(?) more or less, wouldn't it?

I. No, but they wouldn't really squat there because they could only chena it. And chena is a sort of ...

S. Oh, yes, yes, I see. It wouldn't give any title.

I. It wouldn't give them any title.

S. Yes, yes. Well, I know that was the policy: to prevent it anyhow. Chena cultivation, yes.

- I. Well, its a very interesting question that. What sort of man was Mr. Freeman?
- S. Oh, delightful I thought. He'd go along cracking jokes to the villagers in their own language, which impressed me enormously. Yes - went about with a pocket of change handing every - giving this, that and the other and he couldn't afford it. (?) (?) oneself and couldn't help it.
- I. My criticism of policy at the centre is that - I notice a tendency among those at the centre to regard Freeman with rather amused tolerance and to consider his ideas impractical. Whereas they were not as - always as impractical as they sounded.
- S. Yes.
- I. And on the whole it doesn't speak very well of - for the centre - for the Secretariat.
- S. Yes. Yes, there may have been people who didn't go out among the villagers enough. That was what we were talking about to start with, this office routine. There was too much in the office, and not enough out in the country. I always made it a principle - even at the latest, right at the end - to go at least two days a week out among the villagers and see what they were doing. I think that was very important.
- I. When you were A.G.A., Matale, did you find that many of the villagers were landless? That is, had absolutely no access to land in any form?
- S. Well, Matale I was only Acting G.A. for two - three months there.
- I. Oh, I see.
- A. And I was very ill with malaria. After settling this village I was very ill with malaria for some time. So I haven't really much experience of it. But what was the question again?
- I. Or take it with regard to Kalutara. Did you feel that - or in Sabaragamuwa - that many of the villagers - the peasantry, the true peasantry - had absolutely no access to land? Either as a relative's land or ande tenants?
- S. Oh, yes, I did certainly. You mention Sabaragamuwa. There was a most enormous question there. Connected with the - what's that river called? The ...?
- I. Kelani?
- S. No, the big river that goes out of Colombo. Not the Kaluganga?
- I. Kelani ganga?
-

- I. Was that carried out?
- S. And it was carried out. Now there was - the most awful trouble began appearing a year or two afterwards because the villagers hadn't paid - hadn't paid back what they'd borrowed, you see. It was on a borrowing idea.
- I. Oh, it was supposed to be borrowed money, yes.
- S. And they hadn't paid it back. And everybody concerned got into the most awful trouble. We answered queries, we ordered(?) queries and goodness knows what else. And some of it was eventually lost, probably. But that was a case in which the villager had no capacity for repaying a loan. It showed they were either in debt or just not one way or the other, just scrabbling along making enough to live on. Subsistence. 'Subsistence cultivation' is what it was called.
- I. Yes. What about the depression? Did that affect the peasantry? The great depression of 1929, '30, '31?
- S. '29, '30, '31. Let me think now. Oh, that was when I was with the Settlement Department. Yes - oh, no, I was only in the Settlement Department then. I had no land.
- I. Did you find that foreclosures were increasing?
- S. Well, I was doing Land Settlement all the time.
- I. Yes, I see.
- S. I didn't have a district.
- I. Did the peasantry understand all these regulations when it came to - you know, this land - the system of leasing, giving licences and then Brayne's idea? Did they comprehend these regulations?
- S. Well, I took a great deal of my time trying to explain it to them. They were very, very slow to understand it. They could not understand what we were doing. And I took every opportunity of explaining. Even right up to the end they couldn't quite see what it was all about. That's true. They were very slow in seeing. And they couldn't see that by taking land away, one was making land available to give them in the future or near future, if they wanted it.
- I. In other countries they've had a system of free land grants. Do you think that sort of thing would have been useful in Ceylon? On a discriminating basis?
- S. Well - free land grants, yes. Well, we just stopped at this, you see, We had these land grants. We gave them [land] practically free.
-

- S. Kelani ganga. There was a huge reservation there. They couldn't get land anywhere near it because it was all reserved for purposes of ...
- I. Climatic purposes?
- S. Climatic purposes.
- I. Did you feel that was legitimate?
- S. That was a very - one of the most interesting times I ever had when I got in touch with a villager, not knowing what I was. He thought I was a planter. I asked him what his grievances were and he told me all about this. And I discovered that was what was - that was the trouble. That he couldn't get any land at all. I don't - it was nobody's fault of course.
- I. But what happened ...?
- S. They couldn't expand, you see.
- I. In that case did you feel that in Sabaragamuwa there was a lot of landlessness?
- S. Oh, yes, there was landlessness all over the place.
- I. You wouldn't like to say roughly how much? A percentage?
- S. No, I couldn't say that. Difference in different parts of the ...
- I. Did it ever reach as high a figure as 50% of a village?
- S. I should think it might, yes. Yes. There was quite a lot of colonisation going on.
- I. In Sabaragamuwa?
- S. Yes. Under this ...
- I. Brayne scheme?
- S. Brayne scheme, yes.
- I. What about the extent of their indebtedness? Did you feel that the peasants were generally indebted? In Sabaragamuwa?
- S. I don't know. It didn't come up very much. No, I didn't have much experience of that.
- I. But, of course, they did tend to borrow on rather ruinous terms, didn't they? Seed paddy and the like?
- S. Oh, yes. Now - of course, I had the most tremendous experience of that in Mannar District, when we had the cyclone of 1931. And thousands of buffaloes were drowned. And there were certainly thousands of buffaloes drowned, and they couldn't work their fields. And one of the proposals was that they should be given 32,000 rupees divided out between the two divisions affected - two out of three were affected - to buy buffaloes.
-

I. Why?

S. Nearly free. Well, it was only a rupee an acre or something. It was worth much more than that. So we were near that. But ...

I. And what about the availability of capital? I mean, land alone is not sufficient. What about the capital to work the land?

S. Oh, yes, yes, that's another interesting question. [Long pause.] Yes.

I. How successful was the cooperative credit movement?

S. Ah, yes, you'd have to ask one of those - those people who did that. I'm afraid I had - I never had any ...

I. I know you didn't work it. But as an A.G.A. didn't you come across its influence?

S. It had some success I know. Yes. Yes, it had some success.

I. What do you mean by success?

S. Well, they used it and made things - seed paddy and all the rest of it. We did give that out from time to time I know. And towards the end - that was rather the end of my time was when this - these chemicals came out. What do you call them?

I. Oh, manures?

S. Yes. When those came out. They were very accepted - very much accepted. But I really couldn't - I haven't gone into the details of how ...

I. How did the peasants respond to the cooperative credit idea? Were they slow in this sphere too?

S. I think they responded fairly well in the district I remember.

I. What was that?

S. I forget which it was. I think it was Batticaloa.

I. And also didn't you feel that Government could have done a bit more to improve marketing facilities? Village roads, and, well, any - some sort of system. Cooperative marketing?

S. Cooperative marketing. Yes. Well, yes, that was the same thing, wasn't it; as in the cooperative department; it comes within that. I'm really not an expert on the subject. Although I knew one or two of the - Lucette and ...

I. What sort of man was Mr. Brayne?

S. Well, I thought he was very imaginative and very useful - the work he did. Very, very useful.

I. Did you feel that the Civil Service didn't have enough of that sort of man?

S. Oh, it could have done with more of them - certainly - yes. Oh, yes, I think so. Of course, his brother was very famous

in Northern India too. He tackled the fragmentation of holdings. He practically invented it. He brought them all together so that a man got five or six times as big a holding as he had before.

- I. This was the sort of question I was harping on earlier. I was wondering whether the Secretariat tended to dampen imaginative ideas coming from such men as Brayne, you see. Whether they tended to be rather ...
- S. Oh, I see what you mean, yes. No, I don't think - they never attempted to damp me at all.
- I. Oh, they didn't?
- S. I used to take a lot of damping anyhow.
- I. And, yes, it was Mr. Campbell who was in charge of [Cooperation].
- S. Campbell, yes. W.K.H. Campbell. Yes, that was right. He was the first one. And there was Lucette and there was the one from India who came down - Calvert.
- I. What sort of man was Campbell?
- S. An Indian civilian - I.C.S. What sort of man was ...?
- I. Campbell. W.K.H. Campbell. He - was he ...?
- S. Campbell.
- I. Yes, was he ...?
- S. Oh, oh, he was very sound - very sound, yes. Afterwards went out to China to try and do something there. Yes, he was very sound. He was my A.G.A., Puttalam, my first district. I took over from him for a short time - acting. And Archibald was there too.
- I. Yes, Archibald was also an L.S.O.
- S. He was an L.S.O., yes, yes. Yes, very delightful person. Very sound too.
- I. Turning to rather a different sphere though allied to it - looking at the British legal system, the one established in Ceylon - its Roman-Dutch law and all that - did you feel that you brought too much law? You brought law rather than justice? If you see what I mean?
- S. Oh, yes, yes. [Long pause.]
- I. And, I mean, looking at the procedure did you feel that it was rather too formalised, when it came to dealing with the peasants?
- S. Yes. Oh, yes, you mean a sort of cramped attitude was produced when cases were heard in court?
- I. Yes, that's right.
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- S. Yes, yes. One did certainly feel that and other officers have told me that the best justice was done under a coconut tree. That was true. There were too many - there was too much red-tape. I mean there was too much ...
- I. Yes.
- S. Yes, yes. That is true.
- I. I know that the people - well, the villagers - don't you feel that this system, which had grown up with the times, ...
- S. Yes, yes.
- I. ... tended to increase the ...?
- S. Yes, yes, it did. There was too much lawyer business over it. There was certainly.
- I. How useful were these gansabhawa courts, which were on a different basis?
- S. Oh, they were - yes, they were alright in their way, I think. Don't think there was much to criticise about them.
- I. I mean did they help to diminish the amount of litigation? The amount of court ...?
- S. Yes, I think they did, certainly. Yes, I think, they were good in their way.
- I. But somehow I get a feeling that the peasantry, though these [the gansabhwawas] were meant to help them, still preferred the courts?
- S. Yes, I don't know. No, I think they would give evidence with less reserve if it was held out in the open. Without too many proctors around them. And somebody from Malaya told me the same thing.
- I. What about the gansabhwawas as administrative bodies? Did you find them useful?
- S. Yes. I don't know whether I should criticise the gansabhwawas as [much as] the villagers that didn't understand them - didn't use them enough. One continually got complaints after they'd been established that - that the gansabha wouldn't do this or that. Wouldn't attend to this or that road. And I said, over and over again, 'Why not go to your (?) and tell him?' 'Oh, we never thought of that'.
- I. Oh, this is very interesting, yes. There was some sort of apathy and lethargy?
- S. Yes, it was that. That was the trouble about them. That's why the old-fashioned idea was to have the R.M.¹ or the - in charge of the whole thing. And he just made an order on it and didn't

1. Ratemahatmaya, or chief headman.

bother consulting the villager much. In the name of the gansabhawa, you see.

I. Yes, I see. But ...

S. It was autocratic.

I. But in your time it was - the R. Mad didn't have this power?

S. Well, it was gradually changing over. Yes. Whether it got better later on I couldn't say.

I. Did you feel that some of these gansabhawas were an unmanageable size? A bit too large? I mean covering too large an area?

S. No, I didn't find that. No. I don't remember any examples.

I. What about their scope? Did you feel that it was too limited? That they should have had wider powers and more tasks?

S. No, well then you get onto the police court, I think. In which you'd have to have lawyers - there were no lawyers there? - you'd have to have lawyers in that case.

I. And who repaired the tanks? Was it the gansabhawa or the vel vidane independant of the gansabha?

S. Oh, yes, now this is a question I really don't know a lot ... That was done by so much an acre. You were supposed to pay so much. Or do the work, you see. This is where tremendous questions went on in Mullaittivu - the first district I had. The villager was supposed to do so much earthwork, which was commutable in money. And if he didn't do it - there was a - brought a case against him which was tried by the A.G.A. It was one of the most fruitful things one had to do. By 'fruitful', I mean, it demanded more of one's time than anything else trying these cases, and you were supposed to recover the amount at once, whether arrears, if he was late, or if not, fine him so much. Two rupees or whatever it was. And then spend the money with coolies - other people you see - spend the money in doing the work the villagers should have done originally by hand. And that caused the most terrible difficulties in the district. By the time I got there, there were 19,000 rupees in arrears in these irrigation fines. But - nothing had happened you see. They weren't expected to pay them. You said, 'I fine you two rupees. Go away'. And he went off and didn't pay it. Nothing happened and that went on and on and on. 19,000 rupees. And ...

I. When was this?

S. This was in '23 and '24. And there were beginning to be complaints about it. And I discovered that this couldn't go

on any longer. And we should have to get the fines paid at once. That meant going into it - who was responsible for paying them. You found women and children - it was almost incredible - you found old women and children were expected to do this work or pay the fine. And they couldn't do either - absolutely penniless creatures. Hopelessly penniless.

I. Why had they been ...?

S. And so I got permission to remit - get the thing wiped off back to the arrears and everything. And we remitted an enormous number like that. And the others - if a man was a most able-bodied man and could work I insisted with him paying the fine at once and being sent to jail if he didn't - didn't pay it or something like that, you see. And that began to work after a time. Making the ones that were fit do something and the ones that were not fit were left out of account altogether.

I. What - apart from that who supervised the actual work of maintenance and ...?

S. It was a chap called the I.S.I. - the Irrigation Sub-Inspector, of which I had three in Mullaittivu I think. Only three I think. It should have been - [more] were necessary. And they were the people supposed to look after it. They drew up lists and so on.

I. But weren't there a class of people known as - well, equivalent to the vel vidanes in the village themselves? Some villager?

S. Oh, yes, they acted with the vel vidanes of course. They were elected.

I. How good were these vel vidanes in their tasks?

S. Oh, alright I think. They were just villagers, they didn't pretend to be anything else. They weren't engineers(?) in any way.

I. Oh, I see.

S. They were just villagers' representatives. And they just told the I.S.I., who was in charge of ...

I. But would you - would it be correct to say that many of these vel vidanes or overseers were not really qualified or able to do much in maintaining the ...?

S. Yes, that was another thing I discovered. The - there was a very good superintendant when I was there. And he told me - he said, 'Your I.S.I's are not trained in engineering'.

I. Who was it?

- S. 'They're not engineers at all'. This was Emerson. Not trained as engineers at all. 'Let them do the surveys and give me the thing and I'll make the design and I'll construct the tank'.
- I. Superintendant of what?
- S. The Superintendant of Surveys.
- I. Oh, I ...
- S. In the province, you see.
- I. So he was a better irrigationman than the irrigation men themselves?
- S. No, he was the - he was the trained - [he was] in charge of the province, you see.
- I. Oh, I see.
- S. He was an engineer - trained engineer. But these I.S.I's couldn't do that sort of work. If they put up the tank it fell down again in a short time. You had to survey it so that if the bund was a certain height it would keep in a certain amount of flood which had to be calculated all round. I don't know how they did it.
- I. These I.S.I's were Ceylonese?
- S. Yes, always.
- I. Well, it seems rather pointless appointing chaps as irrigation men if they can't build a tank.
- S. Well, they could just do the ...
- I. Basis?
- S. ... scientific basis of it.
- I. But they couldn't do the surveys?
- S. No, I don't know - they did the surveys but under supervision of the - their own officers. But that was a very important point.
- I. What about in areas like Sabaragamuwa and Matale, maintaining these channels and things? Were they an important part of the ...?
- S. Yes, well, Sabaragamuwa was Wet Zone. 170 inches a year. And Matale was rather Dry Zone if I remember right - most of it.
- I. Yes.
- S. What was the question?
- I. Did you have any irrigation work in these - in Matale?
- S. Oh, yes, in Matale - there was irrigation work all over the Island practically. Practically every district I was in. And curiously enough it was in the wet districts very often. To keep the water from oozing about here and there and causing damage. That was almost more difficult than the ...
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- I. Dry Zone?
- S. ... Dry Zone in some ways.
- I. And how good were these local village vel vidanes in doing their duties? Or how bad were they?
- S. Oh, they could do the simple things they were expected to do. Just collect lists of shareholders and that sort of thing.
- I. Oh, they did - did they have to do anything in the way of cutting bunds or, you know, maintaining a channel? Preventing it from ...?
- S. Oh, yes, they just have overseers' work in doing that I expect, yes. Yes, I'm right.
- I. I mean, I was wondering whether you had to push them to do these things or whether they did it ...?
- S. Oh, no, they did it alright, I think, as far as I remember. Yes.
- I. And the headmen, of course - the headman system. What did you think of the headman system?
- S. I think it was good on the whole. I thought the - you did get some badhats occasionally. Do you remember - who was it? - I think it was Wedderburn again I'm talking about. He had a very interesting - brought out a very interesting white paper in 1934. And he - that was on the chief headman system, you know. He found that - he and one other found that the system was good on the whole. You occasionally had black sheep, very occasionally. Once in a large number. And I think he was right. But all these other people were politicians and they didn't care two pins what happened. They found [i.e. concluded that] they were all scoundrels and abolished the whole system.
- I. You think that was wrong?
- S. I think it was quite wrong. I think it was much better to have the old people who would have been there for years and years and knew all about it.
- I. And what were the - have you any inkling what the political motives were for scrapping this system?
- S. I don't know exactly.
- I. Because, I mean, in effect they were going against Wedderburn's report?
- S. Yes, they were. Yes, that's on paper somewhere. You could prove that. No doubt about it.
- I. Did you - did you trust these headmen when it came to land matters?
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- S. Oh, not entirely. I'd go into their - what they'd done. After an enquiry, decide. No, you wouldn't always - they wanted enquiry.
- I. No, I was wondering whether the headmen tended to look after their own interests?
- S. Oh, I see. He was a badhat that's all and you'd get rid of him - you'd sack him. I had one bad case. I won't say where or who he was. He used to drink probably. One or two of them like that. They were no good, you see. Pitched them out. But it was very, very much the exception. It wasn't the rule.
- I. Would you call them benevolent despots?
- S. Yes; benevolent despots, yes. Something like that, yes. More or less.
- I. And was there a distinction between the Kandyan chaps and the low-countrymen?
- S. No, I don't think so. Both in their way, you see. I had one excellent - the R.M. at Vavuniya, when I first went there, was an excellent man. Very good scholar too. He could speak Tamil as well as he could speak Sinhalese. Unusual.
- I. I know you were not much at the centre but I'd like to turn a bit to the constitutional sphere. And - how did you find Sir Herbert Stanley as a Governor? Or what did the Civil Service think of him?
- S. He came to see me several times and he was at Balliol too.¹ Herbert Stanley? I should have thought he was very conciliatory on the whole. Don't know. He came to see me when I was at Matara. Went all round and took him out in the villages and he seemed very pleased.
- I. And what was your reaction when the Donoughmore Constitution was created? When their recommendations were made known?
- S. Was that the '31?
- I. Yes, the '31.
- S. '31, yes.
- I. What did you think of universal franchise?
- S. Well, my views are general on this - not particular.
- I. Yes. What are the general views?
- S. You either had to go forward or go back.
- I. Yes.
- S. You see? I don't know. I don't think, on the whole, when you've got an uneducated electorate - vastly uneducated - I've always been of that opinion that when you've got 80-85%

1. Mr. Sandys got his B.A. at Balliol.

inhabitants almost totally uneducated a democratic system won't work. I think it was one of the Governors - I forget - one of the earlier Governors - who said that whatever you did it must be more or less in racial - I think it was Manning, or one of the earlier ones who said that. And it always seemed to me that if you had some sort of a council representing all races, presided over by an impartial governor with experience, it would probably be the best form of constitution. That, of course, is going against all this theory about counting heads and so on. But there it was.

I. What did you think of this rather - the rather odd system of Committees?

S. Yes, I suppose it was alright in its way.

I. Did you feel that it was cumbersome? A bit slow?

S. Oh, yes, it would be that, definitely, yes. Yes.

I. Were the officials rather appalled at the recommendations?

I know one governor - I think it was Stubbs - implied that it was a madness, but I was wondering how general the view was?

S. Stubbs? - yes. You mean the Committee system or the general Constitution?

I. No, the whole thing.

S. The whole thing. [Long pause.] Well, I don't think on the whole it worked very well. That was my opinion. But, as I say, I wasn't - I didn't bother about ...

I. Bother about how(?) it(?) worked(?). Yes. Oh, of course, there were some - I mean, it called for a lot of adaptation from the leading men because I mean a Colonial Secretary now found that he had much less power. And he was in a difficult position.

S. Yes, yes, that's right.

I. And I know that there was, at the outset especially, some degree of friction between the three Officers-of-State and the Ministers.

S. Yes. Yes.

I. But, of course, their personalities counted for a lot and ... I don't know whether Sir Graeme Tyrrell was a man who couldn't get on with the politicians or not? And I think it was Bourdillon who followed him - yes, that's right.

S. Oh, yes, yes. No, I don't think it was anything to do - I don't think it was Tyrrell's fault.

I. You think the politicians ...?

- S. I don't think anyone could have got on with them.
- I. It was very difficult to get on with them?
- S. I think so, yes, from what I've heard.
- I. What exactly did you hear?
- S. Well, there's a book on the subject. Do you know that Wall's book?
- I. Wall?
- S. Wall. I think its by Wall. 'Britain's ...' - what did he call? - 'Britain's Folly' or something. That's all about the ...
- I. Oh, I see.
- S. ... Donoughmore Commission. He criticises them very severely. They were always finding fault with everything that happened. There was too much fault-finding. That was the criticism that I've heard of that Government.
- I. Too much fault-finding?
- S. Too much fault-finding.
- I. By the Ministers?
- S. Yes, by the Ministers.
- I. Yes, did you come - did you come in personal contact with any of the politicians? In Badulla or Matale or someplace?
- S. Not until rather a late stage when I was at Galle towards the end. Who was our friend there?
- I. Dahanayake?
- S. Dahanayake, yes, ha-ha-ha. Extraordinary - I almost - I had hardly any enemies. I always got on with [people] but it was most difficult to get on with him. Because he'd come - when we were holding a meeting - he'd come beforehand and stir up the people against what you were going to propose and then sit there and spoil the whole meeting. It was simply wasting one's time. It wasn't the way to treat things at all.
- I. He was interfering was he?
- S. Yes, he was interfering, badly. Yes. Do you remember they always interfered with people's salaries and things, and wouldn't vote them or pass them. They even refused the Governor's salary or something?
- I. Was that taken seriously ...?
- S. That was very childish, don't you think so?
- I. Was that taken seriously by the Civil Service?
- S. Oh, not by the Civil Service but by anyone like Wall who was writing a book on the subject - took it very seriously.
- I. Oh, I see.
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- S. That was very silly. It didn't get one anywhere.
- I. And what about the elections themselves. How did the - was there a lot of impersonation and malpractice?
- S. Well, the only thing - my experience was in '50... - just before I left - I think it was '52.
- I. Oh, nothing earlier? In Badulla?
- S. In Galle I was at the time. There were two - it was a two member thing. And we found an enormous number of spoilt papers. That was the great thing that stood out. I think it was something like 4,000 spoilt papers.
- I. No, I was thinking of the earlier period in the 1930's - the first few elections. This was the first experience of adult franchise. And did the bus companies, for instance, have a great influence. This is 1930's ...
- S. Bus company?
- I. In Kalutara, for instance, in 1931.
- S. Oh, yes. I can't remember.
- I. Well, it is a detailed question going quite a way back. I was just having a shot. And did you find - I mean in the 1930's and the 1920's when you were A.G.A. - did you find any politicians interfering and - or going above your head or making personal attacks in the newspapers or in the Council? Criticising you personally?
- S. No, I can remember - I remember the opposite. I think Senanayake was most - was very kind always.
- I. Oh, was he?
- S. I remember - very kind, yes.
- I. What did you think of Senanayake?
- S. I think he was one of the most - one of the most reasonable - he had many - he was full of ideas. I liked his ideas about cultivation and so on. I thought they were very fine. Restoration of tanks and so on.
- I. Wasn't he perhaps a bit sanguine? Expecting too much?
- S. You mean expecting too much of the - his own regime?
- I. No, in his agricultural point of view he was aiming too high?
- S. Oh, I see. No, I didn't feel that he was aiming too high. He was trying new schemes. I think they did good - I don't know. Of course I didn't - the Gal Oya scheme wasn't finished by the time I left. It was coming along then. That was the biggest scheme, wasn't it?
- I. Yes. That was - I'm not sure when it was started. It was set
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going just before the second world war I think.

S. I was hoping they could go further. You know there were three or four other big schemes as big as that one in (?) . It was not ...

I. Walawe?

S. ... alone.

I. Yes.

S. I was always saying I thought Ceylon could make itself self-supporting in rice.

I. You felt that they could?

S. Oh, yes, if those magnificent schemes had been put up(?) (?). That was one thing I felt about this modern democratic business, the amount of money it spent. The old system, if you went back, had something like a council - it wouldn't spend the money. And this money could go into the big irrigation schemes until the standard of living went up. Until the standard of living went up you couldn't have much in the way of education. Because you can't have education if you're living in a mud hut, with no furniture and no books and papers and ink and anything like that. That's the whole trouble I felt.

I. That it was - would it be fair to say that you feel that they were putting the cart before the horse?

S. Yes, yes, yes. Very much so.

I. That's very interesting. That's where - I think that's where - a point that needs considerable discussion.

S. Yes.

I. Turning to another sphere can you remember this famous Bracegirdle affair? You'd have been in Badulla then.

S. Oh, Bracegirdle.

I. The chap who was deported.

S. Yes, yes, yes, ...

END OF INTERVIEW