

FOREWORD

Not very much has been written about the Makum Namdang Tea Company and it is good that Larry Brown has at least put pen to paper and given a comprehensive record of his time with the Namdang Tea Company and importantly, he has listed the people who were with the respective Makum and Namdang Tea Companies, right from the new Assistants to the most senior Managers.

The first land clearance started at Margherita Tea Estate in 1890 and in September 1891 78 acres had been planted. By June 1894 a thousand acres were under tea.

Lord Curzon visited in 1900 and said about the Makum Company Teas “Will they not be drunk and appreciated all over the world? Teas once tasted, never abandoned”

Plantings were started at Namdang 1909 and under William Warren’s charge increased rapidly to cover nearly 500 acres.

The Jack family, like William Warren, were of Scottish descent and recognizing this it was decided to incorporate the Saxon 4th figure in the trademark. This unique symbol appears in the Armorial bearing of the Merchant Guild of Stirling, which was the fourth of the four original burghs (*Berwick, Roxburgh, Edinburgh and Stirling*)

The Companies had close ties with the Assam Company and the shared Directors and Chairmen, included John Berry White, Sir Annesley de Renzy, A.W.Madden and others.

I am happy to have been of assistance to Larry when he was compiling this record and it was interesting to delve into my memory bank to recall times and places-and people that were all intertwined. Like Larry, I have thoroughly enjoyed my time in Assam and I hope this record jogs the memories of others who were there.

James Beven

Norfolk July 2008.

My daughters have often asked me to write a few lines about my time in India and I have only now got around to doing this.

My pathway to tea and for other prospective young tea planters, was the Interview-Mincing Lane or Aberdeen-The Circassia/Cilicia or the Caledonia or on a P & O boat – the Bay of Biscay- Gibraltar-Port Said- Karachi – Bombay.

Some complained of the hardships of heat and dust encountered during the journey but I think most of us revelled in just about every aspect of going to India and the time that was spent there.

My journey, and my time in India, although relatively short in my overall span of three score and ten years, perhaps make up the most memorable chapters in my life. I hope that this record will be of some interest to those who were there and to those who are in the Makum Namdang Company today. In about 50 years from now, the sixties will have receded over 100 years into the past and the names that are recorded here, will, I hope, not be forgotten. At that time there will be no expatriate or Indian tea planters left who experienced those times. In a hundred years no doubt changes will have happened. Radical upheavals are occurring in Assam today and the halcyon days in tea that I so fondly remember will never be repeated.

It is a credit to the Planting Communities of the 2000's, that in spite of adversities they can still have a good Club life, and have Meets, Flower shows and so on and in 'The Camellia' tea magazine the photos show groups of happy planters and their wives but I still think that the Golden Years were from the early 50's to the early 70's and these were relatively carefree and non political. One worked hard and played hard and appreciated that they were guests of a lovely people in their lovely Province.

I feel very privileged to have been in tea, and in Assam, and with the Namdang Tea Company and to have met and known so many wonderful people

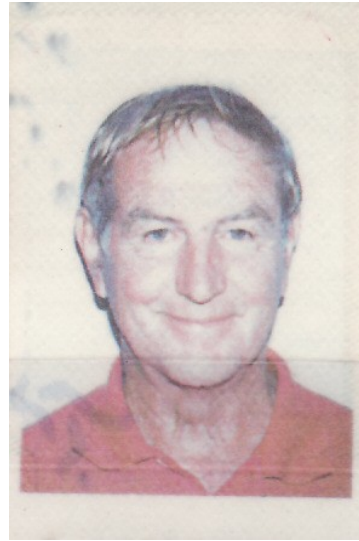
I would hope that others, particularly the diminishing band who attend the different Reunions, will get around to recording the memories that they had when they joined tea as young men so that their times, their experiences, and their friends will not be forgotten.

My account is fairly localized as the company gardens were in the Margherita/Digboi area, and as such it may have only a limited interest to the wider tea community. Nevertheless, many names are mentioned and these may be familiar to a wider group. Some are still with us and others, sadly, but not forgotten, have gone to the Tea Planters abode in the sky.

Forgive me for jumping from the past to the present and back in this narrative and perhaps getting some names, dates and places wrong.



1960



2008

Passport photos of Then and Now

A Young Irishman joins Tea.

CHAPTER ONE:

ARRIVAL.

CHAPTER TWO:

PEOPLE IN THE COMPANY.

CHAPTER THREE:	SOME STORIES OF THE MORE COLOURFUL CHARACTERS IN THE COMPANY AND IN THE DISTRICT.
CHAPTER FOUR:	LOCAL LEAVE
CHAPTER FIVE:	SOME FRIENDS AND MORE PEOPLE AND PLACES
CHAPTER SIX	NAMDANG FACTORY BUNGALOW GHOST.
CHAPTER SEVEN	RIVERS
CHAPTER EIGHT.	OBSERVATIONS ON TEA
CHAPTER NINE	SOME MORE EXPERIENCES and more amusing stories from Tony Pickford about people in the Company.
CHAPTER 10	PLANTER'S DOGS.
CHAPTER 11:	HOME LEAVE.
CHAPTER 12:	AFTER HOME LEAVE.
CHAPTER 13:	WEDDINGS.
CHAPTER 14:	PHOTO GALLERIES.
Conclusion:	People who were there at the time.

(This account of my time is supplemented by some stories of events, people and situations within the Makum /Namdang Tea Company and surrounds, by Tony Pickford, Ali Zaman and Phil Bayley and I thank them for these. I have had photos from Jimmy Beven, Peter Bartlett, Alan Lane, Bill Addison, Vic Pearson, Paul Sherman-James and others and I thank them and all the people who kindly sent their wedding photos. Jimmy Beven and Bob Jones have been great in helping me to compile some background on the people and events in the Makum Namdang Company.)

CHAPTER ONE.

Arrival.

The DC 3 touched down at Mohanbari and I was met by **Simon Penney** and **Austin Rufus**. I was one of the last to leave the plane and I believe that Simon had asked **Ooona Gates**, also from Margherita, if she had seen the new bloke on board. Quite frankly, she couldn't have missed him! The 'new bloke' was in great distress. His dark blue woollen serge suit would have been okay in the UK but in Assam, in June, it was grossly out of place. Add to this the bacillary dysentery he was suffering- then add the ear pain, through not adequately compensating for pressure changes, he was indeed very distressed!

The road trip to Margherita was, however, fascinating and took my mind from my physical discomforts. There were so many new sights-the variety of exotic birds-the paddy fields and banana groves, an elephant even put in a roadside appearance. Simon's driving would have made any Defensive Driving Academy's instructor very proud as he negotiated the many hazards of cows and bullock carts and overladen trucks that came arrow straight down the centre of the road!

I was taken to the Factory Bungalow at Namdang where I met **Polly Rajpal**. Polly was a Rajput and a product of the Doon School at Dehra Dun, possibly the best and most exclusive Public School in India. He had the build of a sportsman and dashing good looks. He was extremely well read and was popular in the District. Polly lived in the Factory Bungalow and the four of us had tea there prior to going to the office to meet **Chris Gathorne**, who was the Acting Manager. Like the others, Chris made me feel very welcome and he explained that I would be living in the Managers bungalow for 6 months as a Chowkidhar, until the Manager, **John Phillips**, and his wife **Marion**, returned from their leave in the UK.

Chris took me along a shady driveway which ended in a short steep climb to the Bara Bungalow-it was awesome-I had never seen anything so palatial. I had seen country homes in Ireland that were magnificent but this was different-I was actually going to be living there for some time. I was introduced to all the servants and was given a room to one side of the bungalow. Chris left with the promise to send me some Thalazole tablets to fix up the stomach problem, which he did within the hour, along with the garden hospital Doctor, who explained dosages and so on. He was Assamese, and like the others he gave me a warm welcome.

I could hardly wait to explore the bungalow and its massive superbly manicured surrounds. There were Tennis Courts, flower beds with show standard Dahlias and wide expanses of closely cut lawns. It was fantastic. There was a gazebo and a large statue of Buddha overlooked the approach to the bungalow.

That evening I was invited to have dinner at **Krishna Kumar's** bungalow. Krishna was an assistant on Namdang who had obtained his degree from Queens University in Belfast. He could mimic my accent to a 'T'! All the Namdang crowd were there: **Kishan Dhar**, who was the Welfare and Legal Adviser, **N.N.Gupta (Narendra Narayan)**-known as 'Toonoo' a Senior Assistant who hailed from Lucknow and cousin of Peter Lal, a former Namdang employee. Chris Gathorne and his wife **Pam**, Polly, Simon and a few others. I enjoyed the evening but would have had a better time if my

stomach hadn't been so queasy, the legacy of drinking water on the train from Bombay to Calcutta but thankfully the Thalazole's were beginning to effect a cure.

When I returned to the bara bungalow after the dinner at Krishnas I sat on a chair on the massive terrazzo floored verandah which looked out over the plantation to the hills beyond. The stars were so close you could touch them and in the shrubs surrounding the bungalow a million fireflies pulsed their light. I could hear the sound of beating drums wafting from the labour lines. **I was a long way from Belfast.**

The next morning I was up bright and early-the tea had been prepared and toast and marmalade was the fare on a small table on the verandah. I got smiles and greetings once again and was treated to the magnificent view of the flat, green tea fields stretching as far as the eye could see. The sounds were now not of drums but of bird calls and the Hoo-Hoo of the Gibbons in the nearby Patkoi hills.



Hoolock Gibbons

Polly ran me through what I would be required to do-the instructions from the Acting Manager-shepherding the labour for plucking into the tea- and the other many jobs, some quite small, that were included in the day to day running of the plantation, for example, a visit to the small anti-malaria squad that worked in the labour lines and plantation making sure there was no standing water so that mosquitoes could not breed-DDT was widely used. A day's supervision of the work was very full and the transport work steed in 1960 was a sturdy bicycle! As the garden had a number of hills this ensured that one was fit. Polly and I prided ourselves that we never dismounted no matter how steep the hill! (No 23 was the worst)

At the close of the day it was weigh-in and this was conducted either in the field or at the factory if this was deemed to be closer.

Simon and the Namdang crowd were very social and it didn't take long for me to meet others within

as well as outside of the company. Margherita Club was where all of the Makum/Namdang people met on Picture night. The Club had a full size Billiard table, 3 tennis courts, a good library, a dance floor and stage, and a Club Store, where there was a large variety of provisions that could be purchased. Last but not least-a well stocked bar.

Simon Penney was a very affable person and he knew a lot about the finer things in life. He appreciated and knew a lot about the Arts and was a lover of Classical music. He was well read and was a good conversationalist and good company. He had very dry wit!

When we were invited to dinner parties Simon would bring a smile at the start of proceedings by pretending to read the bottom of the dinner plate while the host and hostess were otherwise engaged or in the kitchen. Although the crockery may have been the finest Alfred Meakin or Wedgewood or from another renowned Stoke on Trent pottery, Simon would exclaim: "Just as I thought-Bengal Potteries!"



Self

Simon Penney

Peter Pett

'Polly' Rajpal.

CHAPTER TWO

(PEOPLE IN THE COMPANY)

Simon Penney and **Austin Rufus** were the first two that I met when they came to meet me on my arrival at Mohanbari. Simon was the Senior Assistant on Namdang and Austin was the Senior Assistant on Margherita.

Polly Rajpal had joined Namdang only a few months before me. **Chris Gathorne** was the Acting Manager at Namdang. The other assistants were **Toonoo Gupta** and **Krishna Kumar**. On the company's sister garden, Bogapani, **Arthur Nuttall** had just left and the manager was **Peter Furst**. The assistants, who were about to leave, were **Snuff Maltby** and **Ian Saltmarsh**. They would be replaced by **Jimmy Beven** and **Raj Bhasin**.

I also met other managers and assistants: **John Moran** and his wife '**Bubbles**' (I don't think anyone knew her real name!) John was a senior manager and was getting ready to call it a day. He was acting Superintendent of the company, while **Jim Maltby** was on leave. John came from a long line of tea people and others with Indian connections. A relative of his, Terrence Moran, planted out most of Bogapani from 19 21 onwards.

John was an excellent polo player and when he left India he took up a position at Cowdray Park, at Midhurst, as a Polo Instructor. Another of his kin, also ex Assam, Philippa Moran, bred and trained Polo ponies at her stables in Midhurst.

Derek Wood, a senior manager from the Doom Dooma Tea Company joined the Makum Company in 1961 and was manager of Dirok TE. Derek died in Calcutta some years later.

Sandy Lakin and his wife **Jean**. They were Scottish and Sandy was the manager of Dirok. They were lovely people and they had assisted the refugees from Burma who were on the long trek in 1942. Jean was the Matron of a hospital at Dimapur and she was awarded an OBE in recognition of the wonderful humanitarian work that she did there. She worked with **Alexander Beattie**, a tea planter of Woka TE, a caring man, who sacrificed his life to help others. Sandy and Jean had one daughter, **Moirra**, who later married an assistant from the Makum Company, **Douglas Russell**, whose father was the manager of the Chartered Bank in Calcutta.

In later years, when Sandy became Superintendent, he hosted what was to be the best party ever in the annals of Makum/Namdang.

It was customary for the Superintendent to host a party near to Christmas ostensibly to meet the Visiting Director. The parties were lavish, Scotch whisky, Cigars, food treats from Calcutta. The planters daughters, from many of the districts, out from the UK for the Cold Weather holidays, were there in force.

The 'oldies' retired early and left the 'young'uns' to it.

Dessert had been served and all the guests had had their fill. I think a girl visitor from the UK was the catalyst for what followed; she flicked a spoonful of jelly at a young planter sitting opposite. Well, within seconds it was full on and, like a Buster Keaton silent movie, the trifle, jelly and cream pies went flying! When it was all over and we had spruced up we all went to the Club for more fun. As we left we looked in at the dining room-the servants had worked wonders and there was not a trace of the mayhem that had occurred only a short time before.

An interesting tradition was in place at Margherita and that was attending the Church service when **Padre Innes** was in station. Padre's lovely old church was one minute's walk from the Club. On a Sunday morning there was always a good attendance and when the service was over, the congregation retired en masse to the Club.

Of course there was great camaraderie there and the beer and spirits flowed. **Lt Col Logan(Pearly) Gates** from the AR & T Company got on the piano and there was a good old singalong, soft shoe shuffles, all in all-a real good time.

Another interesting part of the Margherita Club entertainment calendar was 'The Bachelor's Ball' This was an evening of wining, dining and dancing. It was a Black Tie affair and it was to honour all of the married couples in the district and surrounds who had included the Margherita bachelors on their dinner guest lists throughout the year. Everything was organized and paid for by the bachelors who agreed that best behaviour, politeness, attentiveness and courtesy to the ladies were the standards to be set. There were some ladies that all the bachelors would love to dance with but there were a few others, I must admit, very few, where selection was done by cutting the cards as there were no volunteers. Nevertheless, the evening was usually a raging success and was talked about for weeks afterwards.

I met **Arthur Donkin**, a quiet spoken man, a good Engineer, and Manager of Dehing. In later years tragedy was to befall Arthur as it indeed was to be for some others who are mentioned in this little story.

Chris Gathorne, shortly after my arrival, accompanied me to where that day's plucking was to be. As we rode our cycles to Namdang No1 Section, Chris told me about chivvying the latecomers. I asked if I could do this and could he tell me what to say. He said: What you've got to say is, "If you come as late as this tomorrow, you won't get work" so tell them: "Kal itne deri annesay, kam nahin milege" I asked him to repeat it a few times and as we rode our cycles I repeated "Kal itne deri annesay, kam nahin milege" over and over and over.

When we arrived at the section most had already entered the tea rows-but there were a few stragglers. I started to shout "Kal" -but I had forgotten the rest!. Chris laughed and told me "It'll come, it'll come"

Chris, when time permitted, used to wander with his faithful Cocker Spaniel, into the Patkoi hills that surrounded Namdang. This was part of NEFA (North East Frontier Agency) and entry to this area was strictly prohibited. The allure of the forbidden, the thickly forested hills, the authentic rope bridges, whitewater rivers, the birds, the butterflies-and the people, meant that prohibitory orders were sometimes ignored! Chris would at times disappear for days and when asked where he had been he mentioned village names (where he stayed) that no one had heard of but they were on the Indo/Burma border or even inside Burma.

Chris told me a story of when he was living in the 'Mati Bungalow' on Namdang when he was recovering from Typhoid. He was very weak and moved about very slowly with the aid of walking sticks. One morning he decided to have an early morning round of the garden compound and as he was about to go down the steps of the bungalow, he looked up and there, level with his eyes, was a snake dangling from the rafters of the carport!!! Chris was transfixed for a few agonising moments before he fell on his backside!! He gave up the idea of a morning walk.

A little recollection from Phil Bayley. "One of my best memories of Chris & Pam was the story of their local leave at the Chilka Lakes, which goes something like this" :-

Chris & Pam went on local leave to Puri staying at the Railway Hotel . Whilst there they took a trip out to the lakes for a bird-watching exercise where they met a very articulate Indian gentleman who invited them back for drinks and a great friendship grew. Chris was always called Mr GASTHORN by this gentleman who turned out to be the Maharaj of Rewa or some name like that . As is the wont of planters , on his departure from Puri , Chris invited him to visit

his tea estate at any time . Eventually that cold weather he was surprised to find the Margherita Station Master outside his office in a complete panic as he had received a telegram from Delhi to make arrangements for the imminent arrival of the Central Government Minister of Railways who was travelling on inspection, in his own train and wished to meet his old friend Mr GASTHORN !!!!! Can you imagine the chaos in Margherita!!

(The Chilka Lake is spread over 1,100 sq kms and is Asia's largest Salt Water Lagoon.

It is home to the largest breeding colonies of Flamingos.)

(The AR & T Company in 1884 was instrumental in setting up the Makum Namdang Tea Company and because of this shared history and the common Club, there was a special bond between the Tea, Timber, and Coal People. The first Director was John Berry-White of the Jokai Company.) Mr Sydney S.Hawkins was with the Colliery Dept of the AR & T and Engineering, in charge of Locomotives. He later was General Manager of the Company. Arthur Bertram Hawkins(probably a relative) was the Accountant with the Colliery Dept and later became the General Manager of the Assam Oil Company. He was the Hon'y Secretary of the Margherita Club which was established in 1891 in Dibrugarh. He was a member of the Assam Legislative Council 1912-1920. He resided 30 years in the district but died at sea on the 12th December 1920 after a brave struggle against ill health, aged 47yrs 10 mths, a man greatly beloved.

The Managing Committee Members of the 1891 established Margherita Club in Dibrugarh were:-

<i>G.TURNER</i>	<i>General Manager A R & T Co</i>
<i>G.E.HARRIS</i>	<i>Colliery Manager</i>
<i>C.H.HOLDER</i>	<i>Superintendent Makum Company,</i>
<i>Dr A. HARRIS</i>	<i>Principal Medical Officer AR & T.</i>
<i>H.McKENZIE</i>	<i>-----</i>
<i>A.B.HAWKINS</i>	<i>Colliery Dept Accountant. (and Hony Secty of the Club)</i>

There was yet another Hawkins in the district who may have been related to the other two. He lived in a fine bungalow on the outskirts of Digboi on the way to Margherita. He and his wife were popular and he was a contractor of note performing many works projects in Digboi and for the Oil Company. His wife was an Anglo Indian lady called Enid, and in the 1990's , I saw her as a resident in one of the homes for old folks, in the Catholic Mission at Upper Nongthymai in Shillong, mentally alert and acutely aware of her humble surroundings.

The first Superintendent of the Makum Company was C.H.Holder He died on the 13th May 1906 aged 39 yrs

The general manager of the AR & T , **Graham Eyre-Higgins**, was about to retire. His replacement, **Harvey Whitefield**, was already taking up the reins. Harvey stayed only for two years or so. His successor was **Harry Beattie** – the last expatriate General Manager.

(it is interesting to note that Alan Lane of Great Yarmouth, obtained a hard bound copy of 'The History of the Assam Railways and Trading Company' at a book sale. When he enquired where it came from he was told from a deceased estate 'Higgins' and this would have been Graham Eyre-Higgins. Links with the past keep cropping up!

Dr Andy Iyer and **Subba Rao** from the Veneer Mill (the planters usually called it the 'Venereal Mill' , a young Anglo-Indian, **John Godsell**, was the Mill Manager. **Arthur Littlewood**, a great friend of Peewee's, from the Colliery and the **Saxenas**. **Doc Jim Baird** from Margherita Central

Hospital. **Harry and Marjorie Ward**-Marjorie was in charge of the Library.

Tess and Shirley Dixon, Arthur (Bob) Peal, Charles and Tamey Rigo, Bertie and Phyllis

Johannes, Jean Etto were all with the AR & T Company. **Lionel Rushton** was the Accountant.

Hugh McBlain Douglas(also known as 'Black Douglas') was the Chief Accountant who was about to retire. **Robbie Sharp**, of the Engineering Dept., was also retiring and he and his wife **Nancy** would go to Scotland.

All of those mentioned, and others from the AR&T Co regularly frequented Margherita Club.

The Factory Assistant (Mistry Sahib) at Margherita was **Colin Bryan**. He was from Salford , near Manchester, and was an easygoing, laid back person who talked about many who had been and gone in the Makum Company. A great friend of his was **Mick Pilling** who had been on Dirok Tea Estate and Colin missed him. Colin knew all the gossip within the Company and of course he was interesting to talk to! Among his many stories there was one about-e pronounced the name as two separate entities-DON MOTI (Dhanmoti)-and she was singularly attractive. Colin described in detail the array of bikinis she had when bathing-and she didn't mind a bit if Colin saw her! When Colin's friends left he also made preparations to leave and return to Salford-but he ended up in Canada!

I met **Paul Sherman-James**, who was the Garden Assistant on Dirok.



Colin Bryan. Tom Porter

Ruth Pariat. Paul Sherman-James.

Bill Hendren. Larry Brown

(Outside Margherita Club 1961)

Paul's father had been manager of Keyhung TE in the Tingri district in the late 1930's and retired in 1955. Paul was carrying on the tradition. On Kamjari, he carried a little swagger stick and was always smartly dressed in neat work clothes. His speech was very pukka , he was meticulous in his work and was highly thought of by his Managers. I think that Paul was wise beyond his years and although he got up to as much mischief as the rest of us, he was more discreet about his

escapades. Paul was good company and his good friends were Colin Bryan, Tony Pickford and Eric Singh. They all joined the Makum Company about 1957/58.

The Makum Company had three gardens: **Margherita, Dirok and Dehing**. The former two were in the Margherita area and Dehing was between Margherita and Digboi.

Namdang Tea Company had two gardens: **Namdang and Bogapani**.

Namdang TE, together with an outgarden, Namtok, was in Margherita. Bogapani, with its outgarden Nazirating was on the other side of Digboi. In the early days the AR & T Company had extensive land holdings and the tea properties were selected as being the most suitable areas to grow tea. Other areas had been identified for Oil and Coal production. All of the land on which the town of Digboi is situated, and the oilfields, was owned at one time by the Assam Railways and Trading Company. The land was sold to the Burmah Oil Company in 1922.

Namdang is a very picturesque tea garden bounded on three sides by hills. Both Namdang and the outgarden, Namtok, border on the North East Frontier Agency (NEFA) which is now known as Arunachal Pradesh. From Namdang the snow covered peak of '**Daphabum**' (15,020 ft) is clearly seen from the Namdang Chungs. The surrounding Patkoi Hills are at times a riot of colour with the Nahor and Golmohur contrasting with the lush green foliage of other trees. Back in the hills there is profuse coverage of Rhododendrons.

Namdang plantings started in 1909 and in 1960 it had 1232 acres under tea and a tea seed bari of some 13 acres. The garden has always had a 'mark' and is recognized as one of the topmost quality gardens in Upper Assam.

The staffing in 1960 was: Manager: **John Marshall Phillips**. Assistants: **Christopher Bainbridge Gathorne, James Beven, Brijendra Rajpal, and me, Larry Brown**.

John Phillips retired about 1963 and **Chris Gathorne** became manager.

The sister garden, Bogapani, was situated on the outskirts of the oil town, Digboi. It had an outgarden, Nazirating. The area was 1394 acres and it was perhaps the highest yielding garden in the valley.

Arthur Mansfield Nuttall was the manager of Bogapani, he retired in 1959 and **P.J.F. Furst (Prof) (Peter J Frederick Furst)** took over. The assistants were:- (**P.V. Maltby (Snuff)** -**I. Saltmarsh, (Ian)** both left in early 1960) **S.F. Penney (Simon), N.N. Gupta (Toonoo), and K. Kumar. (Krishna)**

The gardens of the Makum Company were: Margherita, Dirok, Dehing. The former two were situated at Margherita while Dehing was situated mid way between Margherita and Powai, which was a Finlays garden.

Margherita: manager: **John Moran**. Assistants: **Colin Bryan, Ronoo Barua, Tony Pickford**.

Dirok: manager: **H.A. (Sandy) Lakin**, Assts: (**Naloo**) **B. Dutt, Arthur Donkin, Austin Rufus, (R.W. Keith. Bill Duke, both left in 1960)**

Dehing: manager: **P.J. (Peewee) Bursnall**. Assts: **Nagendra (Eric) Singh, Paul Sherman-James**.

When I first arrived, some people who had recently left were still fondly talked about: **David Catmur, Peter Lal, Malcolm Wyle, Mick Pilling** and others. David Catmur went to Canada and became head of CUSO which is the organization that is in charge of sending Canadian volunteers abroad to developing countries. Peter Lal, cousin of Toonoo Gupta, went to Sydney. Malcolm Wyle went to Uganda and married a Bugandan Princess but he had a tragic end.

The Makum/Namdang Tea Company had a wealth of good people and although there were small differences from time to time everyone was very supportive. The mix of Tea people with the AR & T colliery and timber people was great.

By 1964 some had left and there were other new arrivals. From the Makum Company Messrs **Duke , Keith and Bryan** had left and there were new arrivals: **Bob Powell-Jones, Douglas Russell, Shaun Northcote and Billy Hendren.**(even later came **Ashoke Broome, Gordon Marr, John Grey , Martin Merry, and Colin Westcombe,** as others left.)

Bob Jones, myself and Peter Pett and Tom Porter did almost everything together and we had some rare old times. When Bob arrived in tea he was brought from Margherita on a visit to Namdang where he met Peter and I. Bob had an acoustic guitar slung over his shoulder and I was most impressed when he told me he could play three chords. This was to influence a decision I made when I went on my first home leave.

At Namdang, the new arrivals were **Raj Bhasin, Peter Pett and Roy Tharian.**
Balmer, Lawrie were the Forwarding Agents for the Company.

CHAPTER THREE

Colourful characters.

The three most colourful characters within the Company would arguably be **Peewee Burnsnall, Eric Singh and Arthur Nuttall** Outside the Company the title would go to **Mike Griffith** from Rupai TE.

I met **Peter Burnsnall**, manager of Margherita and because of my origins, he immediately christened me "Seamus"! He made one feel at ease, and although he was senior he talked to lowly assistants as equals. A wonderful man.

Peter was more widely known as 'Peewee'. He was part of the Eighth Army that fought in North Africa. He was one of the most popular and well liked people in the district. In wartime he played football and he occasionally substituted for Frank Swift when the Army Team was in tournaments (Frank Swift was England's goalkeeper who later, as a Sports Writer, died in the 1953 Munich Plane Crash which decimated the Manchester United Football Team.

In his Army days Peewee must have been a fine athlete.

When Peewee came to India he was also a cricketer of note-the stories of him are boundless and they invariably bring a smile to the listener.

Every year Peewee would send a Christmas card to the Makum,Namdang Board on the front of which was a photograph of the Margherita No 1 Chung. This was decrepit and falling apart. Long streamers of torn hessian flapped in the wind and many steps on the stairways had rotted, roofing iron had blown away. It was the venue of numerous romantic trysts by the Margherita labour.

Peewee, when sending the card, asked the Board, in place of the chung, to sanction the construction of a swimming pool at the Margherita Bara Bungalow- The proposal was submitted every year and it was knocked back every year!

At the Club, if there was a ring of his friends busily talking, in earnest conversation and when he was unable to break into the group he would exclaim "What am I, a fookin German" and they would smile and make way for him. If he was making some point in a conversation he would emphasise the veracity of what he was about to say with "This is not the nine'o'clock news" - a legacy of wartime BBC news.

On one home leave Peewee was to have some tea friends round for lunch. He told his mother that his friends often called him by a pet name 'Laura' and that if she did the same they would

appreciate it. The company dissolved when Peewees Mum asked "Pass the gravy to your friends, Laura"!!

Peewee taught many of us the old Army songs: 'Sussex by the Sea' 'Down in Kent, where the Royal Marines had their Barracks....Ups an' whops a lousy tanner in 'er hand..... and much, much more.

When he told the story of the troops billeted in England, going off to the local church for the service. We all could picture the scene as Peewee told it

"the squaddies all went with their left right, left right into the church and filed into the pews. One of them forgot to take his cap off and the Sergeant Major barked in the soldiers ear. " 'ats orf in the 'ouse o Gawd" "@#%"!*

I remember hearing of a trip Peewee made to Dibrugarh and it was a rainy day. Joe Lys was a friend of his and as Peewee passed the plantation he saw the pluckers were working on the roadside sections. He stopped his jeep and called out to the Sirdars and workers: "Lys Sahib bola hai, abhi chuti karo, bessi barish ayega" (take leave, heavy rain is coming)so they all took leave and made to the weigh in points, much to the surprise of Joe Lys!

When he got a bit sentimental he would recite, with a great depth of feeling-'**The Deck of Cards**' sometimes also known as '**The Soldiers Prayer**'. As I now see the words to this, they are so evocative and it's as if Peewee is standing there in Margherita Club once again, surrounded by rapt listeners and speaking the words, word perfect without a stumble, of the Soldiers Prayer. The listeners would stand still and quiet until the last utterance.. Peewee was a one off and he will always be treasured in hearts and minds of those who knew him.

THE SOLDIER'S PRAYER

During the North African campaign, a bunch of soldier boys had been on a long hike and they arrived in a little town called Casino. The next morning being Sunday, several of the boys went to Church. A sergeant commanded the boys in Church and after the Chaplain had read the prayer, the text was taken up next. Those of the boys who had a prayer book took them out, but this one boy had only a deck of cards, and so he spread them out. The Sergeant saw the cards and said, "Soldier, put away those cards." After the service was over, the soldier was taken prisoner and brought before the Provost Marshall.

The Marshall said, "Sergeant, why have you brought this man here?" "For playing cards in church, Sir." "And what have you to say for yourself, son?" "Much, Sir," replied the soldier. The Marshall said, "I hope so, for if not I shall punish you more than any man was ever punished." The soldier said, "Sir, I have been on the march for about six days. I have neither a Bible nor a prayer book, but I hope to satisfy you, Sir, with the purity of my intentions." And with that, the boy started his story:

"You see Sir, when I look at the Ace, it reminds me that there is but one God. And the Deuce reminds me that the Bible is divided into two parts, the Old and the New Testaments. When I see the Trey, I think of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. And when I see the Four, I think of the four Evangelists who preached the Gospel; there was Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. And when I see the Five, it reminds me of the five wise virgins who trimmed their lamps; there were ten of them: five were wise and were saved, five were foolish and were shut out. When I see the Six, it reminds me that in six days, God made this great heaven and

earth. When I see the Seven, it reminds me that on the seventh day, God rested from His great work. And when I see the Eight, I think of the eight righteous persons God saved when He destroyed this earth; there was Noah, his wife, their sons and their wives. And when I see the Nine, I think of the lepers our Savior cleansed, and nine out of the ten didn't even thank Him. When I see the Ten, I think of the Ten Commandments God handed down to Moses on a tablet of stone. When I see the King, it reminds me that there is but one King of Heaven, God Almighty. And when I see the Queen, I think of the Blessed Virgin Mary, who is Queen of Heaven. And the Jack or Knave is the Devil. When I count the number of spots on a deck of cards, I find 365, the number of days in a year. There are 52 cards, the number of weeks in a year. There are 4 suits, the number of weeks in a month. There are 12 picture cards, the number of months in a year. There are 13 tricks, the number of weeks in a quarter. So you see, Sir, my pack of cards serves me as a Bible, an Almanac and a Prayer Book."

"And friends, the story is true. I know, I was that soldier."

(When Jimmy Beven, Simon, Paul, Colin, Bob Jones, Peter Pett, Polly Rajpal, Austin Rufus- the last survivors of that era of the Makum/Namdang Tea Company, read this, they will remember Peewee fondly.)

PETER 'PEEWEE' BURSNALL *by Tony Pickford*

I believe that those of us who came all the way from the U.K. to work in tea, in Assam, in the fifties and before had to be of a different mental make-up than our counterparts we left behind in England. Was it that we had 'funny' families that we were escaping from, was it the thought of the drudgery of a 9 to 5 job in the British climate, was it that we needed

something more adventurous to satisfy our necessity to earn a 'crust' with the added romantic notion that India offered something just that little different to other places which was very often coupled with the fact that most British families had someone who had 'been in India' and their reminiscences sparked the imagination. Mine was being the third son of a country landowner therefore 'no room on the farm' big as it was, so it was the Army, Civil Service or the Church, as the saying went, I chose the former and had served for three years in Her Majesty's Forces [Army] before coming to tea, having had a very adventurous life in uniform, running a Tea Garden was so much like commanding troops in the Army.

Peter 'Peewee' Bursnall of the Makum Company was from the same Army background, he had served during the 2nd World War in North Africa

with the renowned 8th Army under Monty, he held the rank of Sergeant, he was a footballer and had kept goal in the 8th Army Football team when not fighting off 'friend' Rommel, he was actually a stand-in for Frank Swift the England National keeper, so obviously a good player, Peewee had a quirky sense of humour which I think all of us who came under him or knew him well, found out to our cost.

When he was Manager of Margherita T.E. I can remember that he was phoned by Joyce Maltby, the Superintendent's wife, who complained that as she regularly passed the Garden Hospital from her house, all those standing outside on the road had never acknowledged her passing by saying

' Good Morning " or even " Salaam ". After apologising, Peewee took this in hand... he paid a visit to the Hospital and berated the Garden Doctor and instructed him and the Staff and any others who happened to be there, when she passed in the chauffeur driven Studebaker, to greet her with enthusiasm... a few days later Peewee got a very irate call from Joyce expressing her horror and disgust at the reception she got when passing the Hospital... evidently a crowd had lined the road and when the car went past, they had all happily raised their right arms at 45 degrees and given the car a tremendous ' V ' sign accompanied by a cry of " Good Morning Mrs Maltby " ... such was Peewee's wicked sense of humour.

If you were privileged enough to be invited to his Bungalow which was always immaculate unlike other bachelor establishments, one could find various touches of his sense of the ridiculous... there was a chamber-pot [piss pot to the un-enlightened] in which there was a single stem very thorny cactus growing about three feet in height.. painted on the pot was the title " JEAN LAKIN SAT HERE " Jean was Sandy Lakin's wife [Dirok Manager] who was awarded an O.B.E. for her renowned work as Hospital Matron with the Burmese refugees during WW II at Dimapur, she was actually a lovely person, Peewee only took it out on people he was fond of. On his Bar was a large pottery figure of Venus with a push down button coming from the head which if depressed dispensed a measure of Gin from the left breast... in his toilet above the loo was a picture of a Dowager type lady complete with a tiara and other jewelled accessories sitting with her ball gown pulled up and her knickers round her ankles, on a ' royal ' toilet.. the caption read ' THE RELIEF OF LADY SMITH ' [after the African Campaign in the Boer War]

TONY PICKFORD

#(Peewee's father was the recipient of a double Military Medal in the Great War.) LB.

* * * * *

Eric Singh(Nagendra), called at Namdang to say hello and he was a person with whom one immediately felt at ease. He was a tearaway, and almost as good at sports as Polly.

Eric, as I was later told, was one of "the Patiala Boys" that is, his father was the Maharaja of Patiala, who was one of India's richest men and who had a number of concubines.

Eric was always on the go and if there was any decent function or party in the offing, he would be there. I think Eric, in people's memories, is on a par with Peewee, and together their escapades and stories could fill several books.

One very touching reminder to me of Eric is when I picked him up from the **AOC Bungalow No 1**, he shyly showed me a lipstick mark on his clean white handkerchief, and told me that was his first kiss with **Prabha**, who was later to be his wife. I was moved. Eric is one who unfortunately did not make it to the avowed ambition of "being shot in bed by a jealous husband at the age of 100" But Eric lives on in all our minds and it's hoped that recording little bits of his life is appreciated. Eric's daughter, Nibha, lives in Karratha in Western Australia. His son Jessie (Jaiswal) lives at Gurgaon in Delhi. (The children are thrilled to know more about their father through some stories by Tony Pickford, that appeared on koi-hai)



Imagine Chairs and Tables placed here-and a Belly Dancer on the stage!

Eric was always the life and soul of the party. When a few of us, Self, Simon, Eric, Polly, **Jimmy Ross** and others were in Calcutta, we decided that we would have a few drinks at the Great Eastern. Some time later in the evening there was a belly dancing performance. Eric had had a few too many and could no longer resist the gyrating lady's voluptuous charms. He made his way to the stage and accompanied the lady in her routine. The 'Pahlwans' were alerted by the cheering and marched Eric out the front door. They came back and asked us to move on too.

Despite vehement denials that we did not know Eric-they still insisted that we move on. So we all went to the Grand and carried on there!

* * * * *

November 17 2006

THE SEALING OF ERIC'S FUTURE

by **TONY PICKFORD**

I had been seriously "chasing" a young Indian girl, working with the Chief Geologist of the Assam Oil Company in Digboi, she shared a Company bungalow, with four other ladies likewise employed with the Oil people, there were two Anglo-Indian girls and one Anglo-Burmese girl all from Calcutta, my "girl" and one other, Prabha, were from the Isabella Thorburn College for Young Ladies in Lucknow in U.P., in those days a highly prestigious ladies academic establishment. Eric had spotted the other 'college girl' and it was soon obvious that he had taken a real fancy to her, as we were sharing a bungalow together and I was regularly running off to Digboi on a courting run, that he asked gingerly if I would put a word in on his behalf. I did what I could and Grace, the girl I was seeing said she would organise something where they could meet. Some little time later we and a number of other 'bachelors' were invited to a Lunch party thrown by the girls, being young and silly, we guys thought the party should be enlivened somewhat as we found things a little stilted and this atmosphere was made worse by the Anglo-Burmese lady, who was much older, being rather like a Mother Superior and keeping a very severe chaperone-like eye on all of us. The girls were generous enough to include alcohol as part of their welcome which, after some while, took its normal effect. A couple of us 'visited' the designated 'boys room' which was one of the girls bathroom's, we stripped off the bedclothes and mattress, and threaded the spring frame complete head and foot rails onto the overhead fan blades, put the fan on to 'speedone' and left the whole lot circulating gently round and round, having passed the message on to the rest of our crew of our dirty deed, other events unfolded, the objectionable Anglo-Burmese lady then became a focus of our mischievous attention,

someone [no names] found a pair of high heeled shoes of hers in her bedroom and proceeded to break an egg into each shoe so that she would get a rude shock the next time she used them... she was an odd lady anyway, her bathroom was below her bedroom on the ground floor where she kept two hens and a cockerel, the cockerel was sitting on the bathrack on the bath when the egg deed was performed. Whilst all this was going on the conversation drifted from one subject to another when one of the girls said the quality of a gentleman, in her eyes, was measured in the size and effectiveness of the flowers he brought, as none of us had brought any bouquets, this had to be rectified. At the bottom of the 52 steps up to the bungalow, was a small Papaya tree about ten feet tall complete with small fruits on it, two of us went and uprooted it, they have very shallow roots, and brought it up and put it on the verandah, to prove our worth, somehow, it didn't seem to be appreciated at all... during all of this " tamasha " Eric had been seriously plying his attentions on Prabha, the lady of his choice, and we, who knew Eric well, knew that when he turned on his charm he could stop an elephant in its tracks.... it didn't take many weeks before Prabha had agreed that she would marry him... the rest, as they say, is history, Grace also said " Yes " to me. None of the girls were ever told who the various miscreants were, suffice it to say, Eric wasn't far away !!!.... Bless him. All good semi-harmless fun [at the time]

* * * * *

THE HEROES OF THE N.E.FRONTIER RAILWAY

by Tony Pickford

It all started as one of our normal weekly after-hours drinks parties at the Factory Chung Bungalow, Dehing on a warm Monsoon evening. There were about six of us from the Company gathered together, Eric Singh and self were hosts as we shared the Bungalow as bachelors all those years ago in the late fifties. There was one among us who was known to have a zero tolerance to alcohol and got quite tipsy within about half an hour, but he also had to the most amazing powers of recovery. This gentleman also had a passion for the big American cars that were still about in those days though fast disappearing through the lack of spares, in his case he had the most immaculate Straight 8 Ivory coloured Dodge which he lovingly cared for and which purred back in response to his never-ending administrations.

As predicted the gentleman reached his limit within the prescribed time, he made his mumbled farewells and disappeared downstairs when we soon heard the sound of his lovely car going out of the gate, from the Bungalow one had to pass over the railway line by a level crossing out to the road and it was right to Margherita and left to Powai and Digboi, after about ten to fifteen minutes the gentleman arrived back to announce to the assembled company that he had left the Bungalow, turned right to Margherita when he heard a regular thumping coming from underneath the car, assuming he had got a puncture he stopped, got down to find he was on the railway line which accounted for the regular bumping caused by running over the sleepers.

He said that he then reversed the car [there being no fancy reversing lights as on modern cars] he said he felt a very hard bump at the back followed

by a crash which rocked the car which then refused to move... Getting down once more he found that he had run into a signal post complete with its large arm and oil lamp at the top and necessary connecting wires.

Eric immediately took charge of the situation " Right, chaps, lets go and see what he has done " we all trooped down to the site of the mishap to find the car pinned under the signal post which had fallen right across the boot.... after a lot of very strenuous lifting and shoving we managed to get the post and its equipment to the side of the track... with a lot of drunken shouting and directions from all of us we managed to get the car back to the level crossing where the gentleman was told to go home and lie extremely low.

" O.K., chaps, on to our next move " sez Eric... " back to the Bungalow, that was thirsty work " after a couple more Eric says " i have an idea but will need a couple more chaps " he grabbed a bunch of keys and we, the " volunteers " trooped to the Factory unlocked the Company Jeep which the Manager [Sandy Lakin] used daily... off we went down the Garden to the Bamboo Bari where the Elephants used to come... sure enough our " friends " had recently been there and had left their " deposits " all around... by hand, we gathered a large load into the back of the Jeep... we returned to the " crash site " and walked the load from the level crossing to the " site " and distributed it about making it look like a visit from our large friends.. " Quick back in the Jeep " sez Eric " I have a call to make " .. we took the Jeep to the Bungalow and got the Pani-Wallah and the Chowkidar to wash it out as best we could we then all went to the Factory where Eric phoned the Stationmaster of Margherita and told him..... " Mr Stationmaster, we had been sitting on our verandah, when one of us noticed the signal pole and its light was not visible, we sent our Watchman to see and he has reported back that what looked like a big herd of Elephants had come through and they had knocked down the signal pole right across the line, we, Sir, had gone down and removed the pole etc., from the line as we knew the night coal train was due."

" Ah, sar " he said " we were finding the Number 7 signal post not working and the lever here is jamming, you are finding problem, the coal train is standing here in my Station, driver saying he not moving as rules say signal not saying go then he not going, I am sending Engineer urgently to see damage, I am thanking you for your timely actions "

The better part of valour suggested we stayed in the Bungalow... the following morning we went to the Office as usual, there was a strange Jeep standing outside, we were called in by Sandy to find a gentleman in full uniform from the railways sitting there... we thought the game was up.... not a bit of it.... " This is the Stationmaster from Margherita " says Sandy " he wanted to meet you both " The Stationmaster beaming from ear to ear stood and shook both our hands profusely. " By your timely actions " he said " you are most certainly saving the North East Frontier Railways the horrors of big accident, many Elephant are coming onto my track and making nuisance everywhere and knocking over the No: 7 signal post, they are shitting everywhere, it is an honour to shake the hands of such civil minded persons... you are indeed heroes and I am writing to Divisional Engineer to tell him of your good works... I shall be recommending you for award " What could we say.... after he had gone with the usual prescribed packet of Tea, Sandy hauled us back into the Office abd said " I don't know what the hell you two damned rascals got up to with your friends, doubtless you will tell me in time, but for the moment,

if any award comes its Company property and will stay in this Office... I am not going to punish you as you have put Dehing in a very favorable light with the Railway people and we should get preferential treatment when we want the fuel oil tanker and our tea trucks shunted in here "

" By the way, my Jeep smells like a bloody farmyard, I want the two of you to go and wash it out now, personally !! "

* * * * *

October 23 2006

Hair Washing

" After a period of getting to know each other and our petty foibles, Eric having come to the Superintendent's bungalow to collect me after my arrival in Margherita, we got to know our family backgrounds, interests and likes and dislikes, Eric showed me the way round, how to organise the servants, which one did what, ordering and buying in the supplies, all the things in the running of the household of two bachelors.... after a period of about 3 months, his bearer came to me and asked if I could help him with the washing of Eric's hair, Eric being a pukka Sikh had never cut his hair from the day he was born and it had grown to touch the calves of his legs... having seen what sort of facilities he had, I could see that it needed a complete new perspective on the process.

We rigged up a table to the same height as the bath, luckily there was enough room at the end of the bath to put the table, we got Eric to lie on his back on the table with his head and " mane " going down into the bath almost to the plughole, we washed his hair like this about 4/5 times a week accompanied by the appropriate libation, it could get into quite a drunken old session, I tell you ! It took two full size bath towels to dry him off.

One day it all stopped, I questioned the bearer but he wouldn't say a thing but managed to convey the fact that " Sahib had made other arrangements ! " immediately all of us, his cronies, thought " Oh yes, we know what you've got !!" an O.W.[old woman] none the less, it was a practice for some bachelors to install a " girl " who would look after one's needs if you get the gist... so nothing more was said and the hair subject never came up again.

It must have been 4/5 months later that I happened to be going to the Factory in the car and I knocked on Eric's bedroom door to see if he wanted a lift, he hadn't secured the door and it swung open to reveal Eric sitting at his dressing table with a crew-cut , with long hair appropriately at the nape of his neck and standing on his dressing table were about 6 wig stands with ready made turbans in different colours, he used a tobacco tin at the front of his head to make it look like the knot of hair... We all felt a little disappointed to see that Eric had indeed not got an O.W. It was soon after this that he came out in public with no turban which was a pity , as a full Sikh the girls thought he was smashing and very good looking...

I got this report back from the Digboi girls.

* * * * *

October 19 2006

Dibrugarh/ Tinsukia road near Panitola,

" You will remember that in the late 50's and early 60's the British Overseas Airways Corporation used to host parties at various Clubs throughout the Valley to drum up business... the food was all good imported fare and the booze was free... mind boggling in those days... they held their " do " in the Margherita Club ,followed by the Digboi Club,they then went on to the Tingri Club. Eric and I and many others became Camp followers and turned up at all the venues, at Tingrai the hosts were beginning to become very suspicious of some of us as they seemed

to believe they were seeing the same faces too often, so Eric & I decided to call it a day by making the most of the free booze.

We set off from the Tingri Club in Eric's old Fiat [the one with the spotlight in the Grille....1955 model, I think.] very much the worse for wear, we somehow got onto the Dibrugarh - Tinsukia road, Eric was driving, it was hellishly hot , no means of cooling the car, Eric suddenly declared " to hell with this, I'm going to cool down outside " I thought we were going to stop, no such thing... " Hang on to the wheel a moment, will you, sez he " Eric wound the drivers window down to the bottom, got out of the seat through the window and ended up on the roof-rack outside, with me hanging on to the steering wheel from the passenger side, luckily the car was slowing down with no one at the pedals...being a bench seat I could slide across and we continued on our way with this daft Sikh sitting on the top of the car.. some time later we approached a Studebaker Imperial with white curtains across the rear window...

Eric's face appeared upside down through the drivers window with the instruction to pass the " b.....d " which after a lot of drunken horn application and flashing lights we managed to do.... through the passenger window I saw Eric's hand with two fat fingers giving the ' V ' sign in the lights of the Studebaker.... with lots of hilarious laughter... when we finally reached Dehing, Eric descended from his perch saying, that taught old Saligram Chunilal a lesson with his flash Studebaker bought from gross profit making from our Company, amongst others.

At about 11 a.m. the following day, Peter Bursnall who was our Manager summoned us to the Office to tell us we were wanted at the Superintendent's Office immediately... off we went. .we were called in and told to stand to attention by the office wall and keep our mouths shut.. Jim Maltby the Super then of Makum/Namdang Co, dialled a number and when it was answered, we were told, in turn, to apologise very sincerely to the person on the other end for our rude and unforgiveable behaviour on the Dibrugarh road the previous night ... before taking the phone we both said that we wouldn't bow to Mr Chunilal. " Just answer the phone, will you " the voice on the other end had the very clear cut accent of obviously an Englishman who gave us both such an earful... it transpired the Studebaker was the Company car of none other than a certain Mr Christie#.. Superintendent from Doom Dooma..he and his wife had been coming from a function at Panitola... the net result of this escapade was the confiscation of our car keys and being grounded in our Bungalow for 3 weeks plus a letter from both of us to Mr & Mrs Christie with the most abject apology

Moral of the story ...

Never presume you know who is in the car in front and don't have a rude, drunken, cackling Sikh on the roof-rack !!!!!

#NB The Mr & Mrs Christie mentioned above were the parents of Julie Christie..Frank St John Christie was with the Jokai Company as Manager of Jamirah(LB)

* * * * *

Tony Pickford was a great friend of Eric's. The first thing that struck me about Tony was his driving. He was a fantastic driver and although he had a normal Ambassador car-he seemed to be able to get an extra 20 miles an hour from it! Coming back from Digboi Club to Margherita Tony was able to pass everyone. We always reckoned he was adding something to the fuel! Tony was courting **Grace Peters** and at the same time Eric Singh was courting **Prabha Chotilal**. The girls shared accomodation in the AOC Bungalow No 1. Grace and Prabha would later become the respective wives of Tony and Eric. Nevertheless, to gain entry to the Bungalow they had to charm old Doris, the Anglo Burmese senior resident, who was in charge and very protective of 'her girls' but Tony and Eric charmed with aplomb!

* * * * *

The Shikaris friends of the forest



**“Katompani” Sharma & Arthur Nuttall.
Both were great ‘Shikaris’**

Arthur Mansfield Nuttall: He was manager of Bogapani TE from 1951 to 1959. He left in 1959 at the age of 53 to return to England. There are many amusing incidents and stories like: when some dinner guests were leaving his house and one remarked “Thank you, Mr Nuttall, for your hostility” Nuttall remarked, “Stupid bugger, all the time he meant “HOSPIT-I-LITY” Arthur often got things wrong, and despite his previous experiences at Moran, he continued to get things wrong by 'warring' with authority. He and Jack Kilburn, The Superintendent of the Makum/Namdang Tea Company, had a few words in 1959 and when Arthur thumped the table and said if he didn't get certain things from the company, he would resign, Jack gave paper and pen to him.

I was told by Barry Pigott, Doom Dooma, that a vendetta between Arthur and his assistant Ian Saltmarsh culminated in Ian, who knew Arthur's every move, waiting until Arthur entered his bathroom and as he sat down on the commode, Ian let fly with two barrels of LG directed towards the bathroom window. The shot would have passed a couple of feet above Arthur's head!! All hell broke loose-Ian scarpered-police were called but the culprit was never apprehended.

Nevertheless, Arthur had a gentler side and often when he visited Digboi Club for the movie he gave each of the little children in the front row of seats, bunches of Violets that he had brought from his garden. He also paid for the education for some children of mixed parentage whose parents had either died, been killed in the war or had fallen on hard times.

A very interesting and complex man.

Bill Addison said that Arthur was greatly admired by the younger planters of his day, and Neil O'Connor from Samdang, which bordered Bogapani, wanted to learn as much from Arthur as he could. Long sessions, into the wee hours with him in Digboi Club, saw avid listeners in Neil and Denis O'Connor, Dinger Bell, Bill Addison and others.

His troubled background is succinctly recorded in Ali Zaman's 'The Elephant Boy' and it may explain why he had a few problems. Ali's story is now reproduced.

THE ELEPHANT BOY OF TEA *BY ALI ZAMAN.*

Many will remember Sabu, the first Indian actor who made it to Hollywood and became the legendary Elephant Boy. This is the story of The Elephant Boy of Tea, son of an ex-patriate planter.

Arthur Mansfield Nuttall was born in 1906, at Digulturrung TE, which was planted out by his father.

His great grandfather was Maj General Sir Arthur Nuttall of the Gurkha Brigade. Arthur's parents became estranged when he was very young and his mother returned to England leaving the toddler behind. His father died soon afterwards. The Miri bungalow servants adopted the abandoned child and raised the white baba in their village.

Soon the young lad, brought up in the Miri traditions, became an expert at kheda operations, training of elephants and a talented shikari. Assam in those days was prone to malaria and kala-ajar, which periodically surfaced in epidemic form. The youngster fell violently ill and was brought to Digulturrung in a critical condition. The Bara Sahib seeing a white boy and learning of his antecedent had the patient admitted in the estate hospital.

Planters on hearing of the English boy, gone native, decided to get him back to their civilization. Colleagues of the boy's father helped to send Arthur to St. Paul's School, in Darjeeling. However, the lad so much at home with the local tribesman and the wild animals of Assam, especially the elephants, was a total misfit among "his own". The English language and the western culture he was being educated in was totally alien to him. Not being able to express his inner feelings he developed a violent temper and was quick with his fists, traits that made teachers and students leave Arthur alone. The loner not academically inclined, but excelling in sports and games, left school before completing his final studies.

He returned back to Assam.

With the tea industry expanding rapidly contractors were engaged to clear the jungle for plantations. A renowned contractor was **Walter Smiles**, later knighted to become Sir Walter. This gentleman, who engaged elephants for jungle clearance, employed young Nuttall and put him in charge of the herd, a job he loved. But the fiery temper, which develops when one is brought up in a disturbed environment, surfaced and Nuttall fell out with his employer. It was with a heavy heart that he said goodbye to his beloved elephants.

He joined the Railways as a temporary ticket collector at Makum Junction. Those days the Railways had a three-tier salary system, for Europeans, Anglo Indians and Indians. Arthur was paid the middle wages. Finding out that he was entitled to the European scale Nuttall applied but got no justice. The refusal of the higher scale was on the grounds that although he was a white man he lived like a native. In frustration he resigned.

A planter seeing Arthur in Makum offered him an apprentices post in Moran T.E. By dint of hard work Arthur Nuttall was promoted to the covenanted ranks and proved to be a diligent planter. He was very energetic and able to realize good work from the labourers without friction. He was adept at all garden work. Could do a full nirrick in pruning and pluck as well as the best plucker. His weakness was friction with fellow planters, especially seniors, poor administration and hostility to paper work. He was nicknamed 'Nutty Nuttall' by his colleagues for his eccentricities.

He went to England on leave, his first trip overseas. While in UK he met and married an English lady. It was only after marriage that he was taught to live like a foreigner. The English mem that turned Nuttall into a "British sahib" was, however, unable to curb the fiery temper, even when he

became the Acting Superintendent of Moran Tea Company.

In the 40's Assam came into the orbit of World War II. The Japanese Air Force bombed many areas and their land forces moved rapidly through Manipur into the Naga Hills, then a district of Assam Province. Planters evacuated their families out of the war zone. The tide turned only after the Battle of Kohima when the Japanese were defeated and started retreating.

When the Superintendent of Moran Tea Company went to leave his family in Darjeeling, Nuttall, the Acting Superintendent spread the rumour that his senior had run away. The rumour cost Nuttall his job.

With a family to support, the couple had two kids; Arthur Nuttall accepted work as a temporary garden assistant with the Makum (Assam) Tea Co in '44. In 1947 he was promoted as Senior Assistant and put in charge of Top Side division of Margherita TE. In 1951 he was transferred to Namdang Tea Co where he received his billet in Bogapani.

Bogapani, in the 50's, was in the midst of a thick jungle infested with wild animals. News of a rogue tusker, creating havoc at the Bogapani railway station, was reported with Government orders to destroy the pachyderm. Nuttall went to inspect it. He looked at the rogue and declared that it was not wild. He slowly approached the animal, talking in mahout's language. Soon he had the animal following him and led the tusker away from the railway tracks, where a train was held up. When forest personnel queried as to how the sahib knew that the elephant was not wild he pointed to the faint chain marks on the animal's feet.

Nuttall was Manager of Bogapani from 1951 to 1959. During his term he cleared the estate of encroachers and started the out garden Nazirating, then infested with tigers. For killing a man-eater he was given a small plot of land by the forest authorities for a shikar camp. The story goes that every time Nuttall went for a shoot he moved the Nazirating boundary pillars thus acquiring 100 hectares of prime forestland for the company. To clear the jungle two retired sirdars were given the timber as bakshis. Once the trees were removed he distributed the land to the workers and allowed them to cultivate ahu paddy for two years. With the land levelled Nuttall started planting. Today, even after half a century, Nazirating has some of the finest teas.

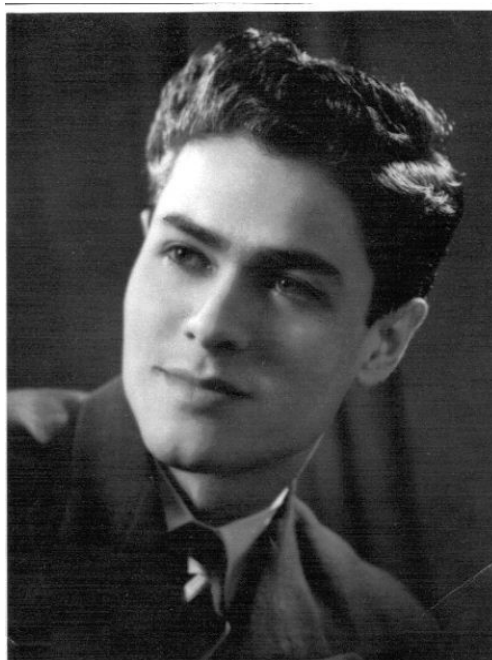
The fiery temper never abated and led to Nuttall's final downfall. He quarrelled with the Superintendent and was dismissed. In 1959, aged 53, he left India for England with his family for good. Arthur Mansfield Nuttall passed away in the 80's. The story does not end here.

During his bachelor days Nuttall frequented Shillong where a Khasi lady befriended him. Out of that friendship a male child was born. When the boy was of school going age Nuttall had him admitted to Dr. Graham's Home, Kalimpong, with the instructions that the boy must never be told of his father.

The youngster grew up and went off to England where he married and settled down. Just a few years back he, with his wife, came looking for his roots. In Shillong he met Mr Peter Furst, an expatriate and the last European Superintendent of the erstwhile Makum Namdang Company. Peter, who had worked under A.M.Nuttall as an assistant, and on retirement settled in Shillong, where he still resides.

The visitor, John, from England asked Peter to narrate about his father. It was with rapt attention that the couple listened to what Peter had to say. When he finished the lady quietly remarked that her husband was just like Arthur Mansfield Nuttall, a father the son never knew.

ALI N ZAMAN (Ex Manager Bogapani 1988-1997.)



John Graham Nuttall

(the son the father never knew)



Digulturrung bungalow. This is where Arthur was born and would have been left alone when his father died of 'Kala Azar' –(Blackwater Fever) All bungalows in Tea have stories.

When Arthur's father went to Digulturrung from Panitola there was only 100 acres under tea. The incumbent, a P.Barry, was probably related to Dr J.B.Barry, an Irish surgeon who founded Barry and Co which on being taken over by Inchcape, was amalgamated later with MacNeills. The bulk of the planting of Digulturrung would have been done by Arthur's father.

Nuttall H.M. Probably the father of Arthur In 1895 he was with The Jokai Assam Company as an assistant on Panitola. It's presumed he later left them and joined a MacNeils garden, Digulturrung, as Manager. It's also possible that the middle name is the family name-Mansfield. It is also assumed that he would have been buried on the garden like many others were on their respective gardens but sadly all markers have disappeared in the mists of time.

THE CENTENARY OF THE ASSAM COMPANY (SABU, SMILES and ELEPHANTS)

(excerpt from H.A.Antrobus's great work 'History of the Assam Company')

The 10th January 1939 was exactly one hundred years since the first consignment of tea from Assam was sold by auction on the London market. Details of the eight chests, the produce of the Government's (the East India Company) experimental baris, and their sale to Captain Pidding, at the remarkable prices of from 16s. to 34s. a lb., are given in Chapter XXIII (p.265).

To commemorate this occasion, a Committee called the Empire Tea Centenary Committee, representative of Tea Associations connected with the production of tea from the chief countries within the Empire, was formed. **Lieutenant-Colonel Sir Walter Smiles**, C.I.E., D.S.O., M.P.

(originally an Assistant in the Assam Company) was Chairman of the committee.

The celebrations opened with the unloading from lighters at St. Katherine's Dock of six chests of tea. These were then loaded onto three elephants, and accompanied by **Sabu, the Elephant Boy** of the films, they proceeded as far as Tower Hill. There the chests were transferred to horse vans,

which was to symbolise the change over from the East to the West, and they were taken in procession to Plantation House. At the Tea Auction Rooms at Plantation House, the Chairman of the Tea Brokers' Association,

Mr. R. R. Plowman, in welcoming the Lord Mayor of London, Sir Frank Bowater, said

This is a great day for the Tea Industry, because 100 years ago, the first packages of tea from Assam were sold at public Auction in the City of London. It is the desire of all that this landmark in the history of the tea trade should be fittingly commemorated, and that honour should be done to our ancestors, who with determination and foresight laid the foundations of this great industry, which has proved not only an inestimable boon, but has become a necessity to countless millions of people.

Sir Robert Graham, as Chairman then of the International Tea Committee, after giving a brief outline of the history of the Tea Trade,

announced that they had been exceedingly honoured on this occasion by His Majesty King George VI having graciously consented to accept a casket of the choicest Empire tea as a token of the loyalty and devotion of the Tea Industry during the last hundred years.

That casket was placed on view in the Auction Room before being sent that day to Buckingham Palace.

The next proceeding in this memorable ceremony was for the Lord Mayor to seal with the official seal of the City of London a similar casket to that given to his Majesty, which casket was not to be opened, however, till the occasion of the next Centenary in 2039. This casket,

containing 2lb. of tea, was then auctioned by the Lord Mayor, and after brisk bidding the £1,000 mark was soon passed and it was knocked down finally for £1,156, the highest price ever paid for tea.

The safe custody of this casket is the responsibility of the Tea Brokers' Association of London. It is normally deposited with their Bankers, but so that it shall not be lost sight of, nor forgotten, it is placed on view at every Annual General Meeting of that Association.

There remained thirty-six similar caskets of tea in chromium to be auctioned, the auctioneer being chosen by ballot. By a happy chance, Mr. W.J. Thompson, direct descendant of the first auctioneer of Assam Tea one hundred years before, won the ballot, and had the honour of conducting the sale, which realised a total of £1,072. This, together with that paid for the silver casket, thanks to the generosity of the bidders, resulted in the Benevolent Societies of the Tea Industry benefiting to the extent of £2,228.

Later that day a reception was held at Grosvenor House, which was well attended by representatives of every section of the Tea Trade, and at which Sir John Anderson (now Lord Waverley), having just served as Governor of Bengal, was the principal guest.

The foregoing was the official commemoration of the founding of the Tea Industry in Assam, with its emphasis, however, on Empire tea.

That year was equally a memorable one for the Assam Company, which was formed in February 1839 and was the first commercial enterprise to produce tea in Assam. On the occasion of the Annual General Meeting on 17th July 1939, the Chairman, then Arthur R. Graham, gave a brief account of the history of the Company since its inception, and although that year (they were dealing with the results of 1938) the profit made was less than for the previous year, the Board decided that, to celebrate the occasion by some tangible act, they give their staff in Assam and in London a small bonus, amounting in all to only £1,219, and to the 'Stockholders they give a bonus of 1 percent. in addition to their total dividend of six percent. that year.

In retrospect, one might criticize this as an insignificant commemoration of such a memorable occasion, but it has to be remembered that though at this Meeting there was only a vague reference to the uncertainty and apprehension current

then regarding the political situation, any undue generosity was not justified in the shadow of war, which broke out little over a month later.. It does not seem necessary to enlarge further on the Assam Company's contribution to this Centenary of the Tea Industry. It was really only a landmark in the Company's long existence which this History records.

Except for the briefest reference in the official account of the origin of Assam tea, and in the Assam Company's Review, to Lord William Bentinck and to a "Mr. Bruce," it seems a pity that mention of personalities in giving credit for the start of such an enterprise are not mentioned.

Robert and C.A. Bruce, together with A. Charlton and Captain Francis Jenkins for the Government tea bars, and for the Assam Company, J.W. Masters, Henry de Mornay, Stephen Mornay, Henry Burkinyoung, George Williamson Junior, and William Roberts, all deserve and should have received due recognition.

In 1939 Arthur Nuttall was Manager of Sepon TE. It's a pity that he was not selected for the Centenary Celebrations as he was the true 'Elephant Boy of Tea'

(Sir Walter Smiles perished when the "Princess Victoria" ferry went down in 1953)

A Memorable character outside the Makum Namdang Company *(the Godfather to my 2nd daughter, Natasha)*

Michael Starbuck Tweedie Griffith from Rupai TE was a frequent visitor to Margherita and Namdang. He was great company and had an endless stream of stories about the many situations he had been in.

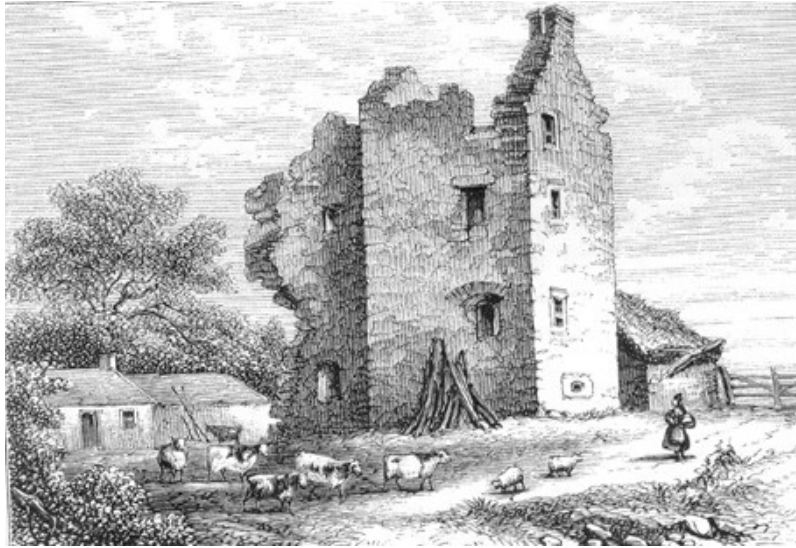
He had an embossed gold signet ring, which, he said, bore the family crest, and when sending a letter of invitation he would seal the envelope with proper sealing wax and then press the hot wax with the the gold ring. He likened himself to the old style 'remittance man' ! He never stayed in one area (or job) for long as he liked to see new horizons. He would describe his moves as the urge to "follow the Spring herds, which were moving East" He admired the planters of the past and described them as "Iron Men in Wooden Ships" - not like today's "Wooden men in Iron Ships!" Although we tended to take many of Mike's stories with a pinch of salt his tea lineage was impeccable: (although he never grandstanded about it) His early ancestors made their fortune in Indigo but Mike's interesting Tea connections are, **Francis James Tweedie**, Manager of Dilli-Assam Tea Syndicate 1917. **Charles Tweedie**, Indigo and Tea Planter-Director of Jaipur Tea Co. **James Walter Tweedie** Indigo and Manager of Jaipur Tea Co. **Charles Maxwell Tweedie** Manager of Assam Company in 1940, born Dibrugarh 1900.

(The Starbuck connection is through the marriage of **Ada Mabel Tweedie** and **William Starbuck Griffith**, of Milford Haven, in 1902)

Even after India, Mike's exploits continued. He changed jobs five times in one year in Papua New Guinea. (In India 3 jobs in three years)

While on a Coffee Estate in Banz, in the Western Highlands of New Guinea, he broke his leg when, ironically, while dancing he slipped off a coffee table during a wild evening party!

He travelled to Paris to try to join the French Foreign Legion and had run-ins, when he went to the U.S. with tobacco chewing Sheriff's in America's deep South. His air travel experiences are hilarious.



Drummelzier Castle c 1860
(was built in the 1700's)

Today, he has gone to ground and is either in Carlisle or Peebles! (Or in a cottage in the shadow of the ruins of the Ancestral home!)



The Tweedie Stone-St Andrews Churchyard-Peebles

CHAPTER FOUR

LOCAL LEAVE.

Local leaves were given every year by the Company-my first was spent in Shillong.

Simon Penney, Polly Rajpal, and **Peter Pett** , piled into Simon's car and set off for Shillong. Margherita to Digboi, Makum, Tinsukia, Dibrugarh, Moran-Sibsagar and so on until we arrived at Jorabat, which was the bottom 'gate' This controlled the traffic which in those days was single lane. A second gate was at Nongpoh before the final ascent to Shillong. The record for the quickest time, from the bottom gate at Jorabat to Shillong Bara Bazar, was made by Vic Pearson in his Jeep in 1961.

The record for Margherita to Gauhati is held by Tony Pickford. When a load of tea was picked up from Dehing it was noticed (a day later) that one tea chest had been left behind. It is believed that the Manager, Pee-wee Bursnall, asked Tony(the best and fastest driver in the district) if he could get the chest of tea to meet the train in Gauhati. The reply was affirmative and Tony set off in his Ambassador with the errant tea chest in the boot despite the train having had a headstart of nearly 15 hours. He made it!!!

(We like short, shorts!--Vic Pearson and party en route to Shillong)



Tony and Grace Pickford Geraldine McCarthy* Vic Pearson Eric Singh

*Geraldine, daughter of a Calcutta based Riverboat Skipper, was visiting Grace in Digboi)

(The Traub family lived in Shillong and Calcutta. **George** was a Dentist and had a practice at Chowringhee. He also visited the gardens and later his services were exclusively used by WM's. **Zhava** and **Vic Pearson** got married and after India moved, with Mrs Traub, to Perth in Western Australia.

Vic meets regularly with **Tim Graves, Alan Morris and Robin Gregory**, all of whom have strong Shillong connections.)



KHASI CEREMONIAL DRESS.
(Lalenya Brown)

We stayed at the '**Pinewood Hotel**' and during the day we took in all the sights, Shillong Peak, Lady Hydari Park, Cherrapunji, boating on Ward Lake and towards the close of the holiday, to Captain Hunt's at Mawphlang, to stock up on Cherry Brandy to take back to the garden. Every night there was a party! I had such a terrific time in Shillong I mentally noted that I would have to visit

again-I did-many times. All the Khasi's were musical. The first we met was the '**Bigalsan Trio**' made up of **Bivan**, **Gallant**, and **Sanbah**. Their harmony was superb and they sang all the old songs. **Sanbah** would later join tea. We were all,however, unaware of the tragedies that lay ahead for him.

We met **Jimmy and Ruth Pariat**, **Shehnaz Kidwai**, **Dorothy Lyngdoh** – all of the '**Vanguards**' and '**Fentones**' band members and many, many others. At most of the parties there were so many people that the guests spilled out onto the verandahs and the lawns. This led to Peter Pett's classic definition of Khasis: *"lovely, hospitable people who give large parties in small houses"*!

Mani Shergill from Bagracote often visited Shillong where his wife **Puna's** father was a leading building contractor.



Umiam Lake – (Barapani) 16 kms from Shillong.

Billy Stewart was a very good friend of mine in Belfast. He, like me, was a Sirocco man. When he arrived in India-a year after me, it was decided that we should take our local leave the next year, in Darjeeling. I had completed the necessary time in order to qualify for a company car loan so I had a spanking new Ambassador and we would drive this to Darjeeling.

Billy, was a red haired Irishman who was very talented and could do anything. He lived in Bangor (same town as Sam Davidson, founder of Sirocco) He worked at Sirocco and I knew him well. He had two sisters and they adored him. He could dance to competition standards-dive from the highest point in Pickie Pool in Bangor-not content with a swallow dive he would somersault, back, pike, whatever. He could swim like an Olympian-play the piano like Winifred Atwell or Russ Conway -and, thanks to his sisters-he had other accomplishments.

I picked Billy up from Duamara TE and we set off for Darjeeling. The drive was long but enjoyable and it was interesting to travel by ferry across the Brahmaputra. The river swirled with massive eddies and whirlpools and carried huge floating masses of vegetation. The freshwater dolphins were seen often.

We drove almost non stop, our sustenance being Dr Writers Baked Beans eaten straight from the tin! We did have a couple of 'Dabba' meals, and they were substantial.

We stayed at the Darjeeling Club.

After exploring Darjeeling for some time we came across a Tennis Court where two young boys, **Minoo** and **Erick**, were hammering the ball to each other. Billy and I had racquets in the car and we asked the youngsters if they would mind if we joined them. We were welcomed. We played all afternoon and laughed a lot as the tennis was for fun and not serious. We all had a great time. It wasn't until late that we noticed a lady had been watching us. She came down to the court and made introductions- her name was **Hilla Avari** - she asked us to meet her husband, **Erich Avari**, a Parsee, who, we found out, was one of the luminaries in Darjeeling, he owned a number of business's and the two local cinemas. At one time he was also the Chief Conservator of Forests for West Bengal. The meeting culminated with Billy and I being invited to spend the night with Erich and his family at a Dak Bungalow which was situated on 'Tiger Hill' Erich had pulled a few strings!



KANCHENJUNGA PICTURE (courtesy of MARCOS GARCIA.)

The Sunrise on Kanchenjunga is difficult to describe but I'll do my best. Just before dawn, we walked a short distance from the dak bungalow-there were about five or so people there, mainly Americans, and we looked at the cold, grey imposing mass of Kanchenjunga. Dawn approached and the whirrings of the Americans cameras began. As the sun rose the Kanchenjunga mass of snow and ice was transformed into an awesome sight. The snow became a fantastic flamingo pink-indescribable. A sight never to be forgotten!

Erich arranged for us to visit the Himalayan Mountaineering Institute where we met the Director, **Brigadier Gyan Singh**-the Brigadier and Erich had a special treat in store for us. They had arranged for us to meet **Tenzing Norgay** and **Nawang Gombu**.

Tenzing was, of course, the man who conquered Mount Everest with Sir Edmund Hillary, for the first time. Nawang Gombu, born in Tibet in 1936, was Tenzings nephew and he led the first successful American team to the summit in 1963 and was also the first man to climb Everest twice.



**Tenzing Norgay-Larry Brown-Billy Stewart
and Nawang Gombu
at Himalayan Mountaineering Institute
Darjeeling - 1961**

Correction - Darjeeling 1963

The next day Billy and I had decided to go on a pony trek but before this we took a walk up Chowrasta just to see the sights. At the top of Chowrasta, there were a number Nepali women selling woollen sweaters and they were industriously engaged in knitting. Billy and I chatted to the women and suddenly Billy sat down beside one woman and took the knitting from her. He proceeded to knit, possibly twice as fast as all who were there, and the ladies smiled, laughed- and applauded ! (Billy's sisters had taught him well!)

The pony trek was memorable. The Syce brought two ponies to the Darjeeling Club. I mounted my steed and it promptly took off up the Chowrasta. I pretended I was in control-but I wasn't. The horse took to me to the stables at the top of the Chowrasta and I had to duck my head as we cantered inside. I sat there amongst a dozen or so horses wondering if this was normal. After I had been rescued the trek went ahead and showed all the splendour of Darjeeling and surrounds.

I have visited Darjeeling a number of times over the years but that first visit will never be forgotten. (The Avari family made our trip so memorable and they have a fascinating background. The young Avaris with whom Billy and I played tennis, were the great grandsons of Sir J.J.Madan.

The Madans, J.F. And J.J. were pioneers of the Indian cinema and film industry and at one time owned nearly half of all the cinemas in India.

Young Erick appeared in the movie 'Kanchenzunga' at the tender age of 8 years. He now is in Hollywood and has appeared in Star Trek, Enterprise, Jag, The Mummy, West Wing and many, many others.)

Some local leaves were spent in Calcutta and although the object was to have as much fun as possible there were, nevertheless, so many interesting places to see there. I generally preferred to walk, and from the Lytton or Fairlawn, I didn't mind walking to the Racecourse or the Victoria Memorial or the Planetarium. I walked to Howrah Railway Station and marvelled at the teeming life under the huge glass roofed station. People were born in that station, lived their lives there, got married and started the whole cycle again. To the Botanic Gardens and to see the magnificent riverside mansions of the erstwhile Jute Nabobs now being taken over by the Bara Sahibs of the Agency Houses. The New Market was a short stroll from Mr Poonwani's Lytton Hotel or Vi Smith's Fairlawn, down Madge Lane.



HOGGS MARKET (Newmarket) from Lindsay Street

A complete contrast to the teeming frenetic life in Calcutta was the ambience of the Tollygunge Club and the Swimming Club. The latter was for expatriates only right up till the mid sixties but a local politician changed this when he collected a crowd from Bowbazar Street (where else) and marched into the Swimming Club. The pool was soon filled to capacity with brown bodies and thereafter the Club changed the rules and it was no longer the exclusive precinct of the white expatriate residents!



The Light Horse Bar at the Saturday Club. The Club, at No 7 Wood Street, used to be the Headquarters of The Calcutta Light Horse

When visiting Calcutta it was pleasant to have a leisurely stroll in the cool of the evening along

Sudder Street to Chowringhee then into Park Street. Past Trinca's where many a visit was made. On past the pavement booksellers outside the Oxford Book Depot-Magnolia's Ice Cream Parlour-Studio Orient, Moulin Rouge, Mocambo, Blue Fox-all the top night spots were in Park Street. On the other side Flury's, where one stocked up with delicious cakes to take back to the garden. Down Freeschool Street where many an approach had been made to young planters. Simon Penney tells of the time when a group of planters were walking down Freeschool Street and they were solicited by a pimp offering to provide a young English schoolteacher, just out from England. One of the group called into the stationary taxi "And which part of England do you come from, my dear?" The reply from the dark interior "Kya bola?"

Mr Flury, a Swiss gentleman, started his tea rooms in 1924. Not long after his wife ran off with a Mr Trinca, who also had tea rooms on the other side of Park Street!

CHAPTER FIVE.

Some friends, and more people, stories and places

The six months of being 'chowkhdar' at Namdang Bara Bungalow quickly passed and I then shared the Factory Bungalow with Polly Rajpal.

As I have mentioned, he was a great sportsman and was accomplished in Cricket, Squash and Tennis in fact the only sport he did not play was golf and if he had, he would have been very good at it.

He taught me the rudiments of tennis and after some time, under his tuition, I became quite passable and looked forward to 'tennis days' at the club. I even won a little copper dish with the silver Indian Rupee in the middle, at the Margherita Club Meet.

Another classic remark coined by Peter Pett was '*a Margherita Volley*' This was a winning shot made by attempting an overhead smash but instead of the racquet head making contact-it was the handle-the ball usually went off at an oblique angle and trickled over the net for a winner. There were many 'Margherita Volleys' on tennis courts all over the district!



Peter Pett and Self (as an advert for 'Simla' cigarettes!)

On the way to Digboi the rail line was crossed at a Finlays garden, Powai Tea Estate. The manager was **H.E.(Sam) Weller** and the assistants were **Rubi Deogun, Tom Porter and John Braithwaite.**

(Rubi's son Nikhil is currently the Editor of The Wall Street Journal)

Tom was a particularly good friend- had his own horse and was a keen rider. He also had an old Humber with leather interior and this was definitely a cut above the Fiats, Ambassadors and Herald's, which were the norm. Tom was good at his job and he was later promoted to V.A.- in charge of V.P. Work (Vegetative Propagation) for Finlays and based at Lattookajan TE. He is now growing grapes and Olives in New Zealand-and making wine.



Tom Porter and self at Namdang Mati Bungalow

Once a fortnight there was a morning Group Tea Tasting session at a factory within the company. This was rostered so that each factory was the host to a session. It was attended by all the managers who were accompanied on many occasions by their respective factory assistants.. The host factory received all the samples to be tasted a day in advance and the rows of cups would be neatly lined on the tasting bench.

When I was in the factory it always amused me to see the Head Tea House Babu preparing our own samples. After selecting some sorted samples he would make his way to the tasting room and as he walked he would be letting the tea fall from his cupped hand into the sample tin-all the while gently

blowing-to remove a little more fibre! I usually called out “**Chiring Babu-not TOO** clean” and we would both smile!

I remember looking through some leather bound books that were kept at Namdang. These were records from the early 1900's – bookeeping was easy in those days-a monthly entry that I remember, recorded in copperplate ink script, was:-

<i>FEEDING OF ELEPHANTS</i>	<i>RUPEES---XXXX</i>
<i>TO COOLIE'S WAGES</i>	<i>RUPEES---XXXX</i>
<i>OTHER</i>	<i>RUPEES---XXXX</i>
<i>TOTAL</i>	<i>XXXXX</i>

The Cold Weather saw visits by the London Directors. Everyone was on their best behaviour and a cavalcade of cars made the rounds of the plantation. The lead car would have the Superintendent and the Director, the next one would have the manager of the plantation and the third carried the Superintendents Personal Assistant.

It's said that on one particular visit that **Sir Owain Jenkins** (from Balmer Lawrie) made. The cavalcade stopped at a section to say hello to a young garden assistant who was standing in the roadside bushes of a section that was being middle pruned.. After niceties were exchanged Sir Owain remarked that some of the bushes were a bit ragged. The manager cringed when the young assistant replied “If you think it's bad here Sir, you should go further in, it's even worse!”
(*Sir Owain was a VA to the Balmer Lawrie managed gardens. He was on a courtesy visit-Namdang was not under a VA system as it had it's own Superintendent*)

Jack Kilburn was the Director who made visits in the 60's.

When I was joining Namdang I was given a list of things I would need. There was also a little note, in verse, from **Natalie Kilburn**, Jack's wife. It went like this.:

*Luscious Fruits and Salads Green,
Harbour deadly Germs Unseen,
The Traveller in the East must not,
Eat anything, unless it's hot.*

Although I observed the above rules while travelling when I arrived at Mohanbari I was in a bad condition-I had drunk the chilled water on the train journey from Bombay to Calcutta!

In our immediate area of Margherita we had two Clubs-Margherita and Ledo. Only 6 miles down the road was Digboi Club which was well attended by planters from the surrounding districts and by all of the Assam Oil Company people some of whom were French and worked for

Schlumberger, an oil exploration company.(One little child whose parents were French is accredited with using three languages, English, Hindi and French in one sentence “Daddy, Daddy, dekho cette vache” (Daddy, Daddy look at that cow)



The cast of a play “HASSAN” at Digboi Club.

The AR&T/Makum Namdang members:-
Simon Penney Colin Westcombe

Tess Dixon Phyllis Johannes
Martin Merry

There were two film nights a week at Digboi and there were regular shows and plays staged. The facilities were excellent and the club boasted a large swimming pool, squash courts and numerous lawn tennis courts. The club shop was big and well stocked.

There were two other clubs in Digboi-The Digboi Indian Club which was mainly patronised by the Indian Staff members of AOC. And the Hilltop Club-where the Anglo Indians/Anglo Burmese-and planters-got together for great music and good times in great company.

In Digboi there was a lovely shop called the “Kashmir Emporium” it was owned by a Kashmiri gentleman who was universally known as, and did not in the slightest bit mind, of his being called '**pock face**'. The owner, as a child, had unfortunately been afflicted with smallpox, had survived but the legacy still showed and he had the pitted skin features of smallpox. One could buy items and know that they would be delivered safely anywhere in the world.

All employees, fresh out from the UK, were encouraged to learn the language. The Book that I recollect was given to most was “Saighal's Hindustani Grammar” and most of us had a copy. I was told that one of the English/Hindustani listings under 'Useful Phrases' was “The Postillion has been struck by lightning”!

A new employee of the AOC was given “a language allowance” which meant extra rupees on top of his pay if he had satisfactorily gained a working knowledge of the language. The competency was gauged by a simple oral test.

It's said that one young man was asked by the examiner to tell the man next to him “to go and stand by that tree” The young man pondered, verb, to go/tree etc? He then strode quickly to the tree

and called out to the other fellow “AO!”(Come) He passed!.

My first visit to Doom Dooma club was an eye opener. At the very long bar there was total division. At one end stood the Superintendents and Senior Managers. Next to them, the not so senior

managers/acting managers-the senior assistants-and last of all, the assistants! It was totally different from all the other clubs in the area which were informal, friendly and relaxed

Over the next few months I was to meet many from Doom Dooma. I met **Phil and Jennifer Bayley** a delightful couple who were good company and full of fun. **Peter Baxter, HIP Verma, Dick Graves, Peter Wilson, Colin Bell, Jimmy Ross** were some of the many others.

Peter Baxter was a very talented person, he could master anything if he put his mind to it. He formed a Doom Dooma band and called it PB4. The four were: Peter on saxophone, **Terry Morris** from Pengaree Tea Estate on drums, **Jimmy Pariat** from Bordubi-a guitar maestro from Shillong, and **Eric Singh** from Margherita, on tea chest bass.



Terry Morris

Peter Baxter Eric Singh

Jimmy Pariat

Another 'quartet' was to follow the PB4 consisting of myself, **Bob Jones, Ron Aston** and **Douglas Russell**. Peter Baxter was to give Bob and I invaluable 'music savvy' when we stayed with him for a couple of days at Sangsua when travelling to Shillong. We also stayed a night with Jimmy Pariat, at Behora, on the way back and he gave us quite a few tips on guitar playing. While PB4 restricted themselves to playing only at Doom Dooma, the 'Mudguards' (more on this later) travelled all over the valley and played at Margherita, Digboi, Panitola, Dibrugarh, Doom Dooma and Mariani.

CHAPTER SIX

THE NAMDANG FACTORY BUNGALOW GHOST



Namdang Factory Bungalow

When I moved from the Bara Bungalow at Namdang and was sharing with Polly in the Factory Bungalow both Polly and I would often be asked by the senior planters of the district 'Have you seen the Ghost?' Polly and I laughed about this and paid no attention. However.... one night....I had just got into bed, ready to go to sleep, when **Jimmy Beven** drove past en route to the Teela Bungalow where he lived. As was usual for Jim, he sat on the horn as he drove past our bungalow in his big white monster of a Buick or Dodge! At that time he was courting Jean Filshill, whom he later married. Jean was Matron of Digboi Hospital and was a lovely, lovely person. Anyway, I ruffled up my pillow, looked at my watch, saw it was 1 am and thought Jim has had a long courting session, plonked my head on the pillow-and froze!!!

Starting from my ankles I could feel every hair standing on end. I tried to raise myself but couldn't move. Out of the corner of my eye I saw a luminous figure gliding into the room. I shut my eyes -tried to move but I couldn't. The apparition glided across the floor and while I was praying to Jesus and was absolutely terrified, 'it' leaned on the bedstead end and peered at my face. By this time I was talking and asking him to please go away. He looked at me again and then I felt his presence receding- passing through the closed door. I lay there calling myself a wimp etc and on the count of three I jumped out of bed and switched on the light. There was nothing but I left the light on all night.

In the morning, when Polly and I were having breakfast I asked him if he had noticed anything strange about last night – he said yes, “something threw me out of bed, and it took me some time to get to sleep again.”

As I later learnt, 'he' the ghost, had been a young man who had caught Blackwater Fever, at Namtok and was brought to Namdang, and put in the same room and lain in the same bed that Polly was sleeping on, and died.

The story didn't end there because a couple of years later, when I was the sole occupant of the Factory Bungalow, he kept visiting me, sometimes three times a week. I think there was a special affinity between us as I had been told that 'he' had died when he was 23 - I was at that time, 23. He came in March and thereafter paid me regular visits. On these visits my dog would get it's hackles up and slink away. I had an icy feeling on my cheek as I was reading a book, or listening to music,

while enjoying a roaring fire as was normal in the cold weather but he kept on visiting me. Eventually I spoke to him and told him that he was a young planter who had been at Namtok and had died from Blackwater fever in the very bed in the next room and I walked into the room and showed him the bed. I asked if I could help in any way I would do so, but told him that he was scaring me out of my skin and that he should leave me alone if he was satisfied with my explanation. He never returned. I later learned from the servants of many 'happenings' at the bungalow but I was happy that the tormented soul was at last at rest. *(Jimmy Beven visited Namdang in November 2006. I phoned him from Australia to ask how things were going -when he told me that he had visited Namdang I naturally enquired about many things-including the ghost. He's still there!!!! I obviously didn't exorcise him completely and he still continues to send shivers down the spines of young assistants!!)*

Namdang Factory Bungalow was a popular meeting place for young planters from outside the district and also within the company. Like many bungalows in tea the hot water was always in short supply. If we had ten visitors wanting to get ready for the club-including Polly and I-a total of 12- there was barely enough hot water to draw both baths. If six people had to share the same bathwater the last cab off the rank would be settling into fairly murky water! The cards were cut by two lots of six. As hosts we could have claimed priority status but in fairness we took part in drawing the cards. It was stipulated that nobody was allowed to shampoo their hair as this gave a thick scum line. On the rare times when I was last in line, the water black, lethal looking and rapidly getting cold, I would clear the film from the top of the water and empty a few mugs of water over myself, that sufficed as a bath!



Namdang Factory from Factory Bungalow steps

RIVERS

Bill Addison once told me that if it wasn't for the rivers and the “Cold Weather” he would not have stayed in Assam. The Rivers were everything from turbulent to placid, from dangerous to serene.



Bhalakpong

Sonitpur District.



THE SIANG



Sunset on the Brahmaputra



Manas



Self and Simon Penney at the Tirap.

The rivers, however, in flood could sometimes be wild and instead of bringing joy there could be sadness. Our nearest river was the TIRAP. From Margherita it didn't take long to get to Ledo, Jaraimpur and

then on to the Tirap, a magnificent river coming from NEFA (Arunachal) with an abundance of fishing-the Mahseer were plentiful. Going upstream one encountered Elephants crossing the river, monkeys swimming, packs of wild dogs and much, much more. A place on the river called 'The Gorge' was still and majestic, with deep water and reached only if ones selves and the boatmen had carried the dugout up at least five rapids. At that point it was far into forbidden territory. The Tirap was usually quiet in the cold weather but during the rains it could be deadly.

The Tirap was looked upon by those in the Makum Namdang Companies as “our River” but it also had quite a few visitors from the Doom Dooma, Tingri areas. It was only a few miles distant from Margherita along the Ledo Road. At the junction, known as “**Tokyo Y**” one fork went to the Tirap while the other led to the Namchik river and Miao in NEFA.

We were able to drive right to the river's edge at Mile 9 and by traveling 5 hours upstream reached “the Gorge”

The Tirap rose in NEFA near a place called Laju, some 60 miles from Margherita. It discharged into the Dehing, some 10 miles from Margherita.

The 'Dehing' was a mighty river nearly 150 miles in length. It rose in NEFA and discharged into the Brahmaputra after passing directly through Margherita and near to Jaipur, Nahorkatiya, and Khowang, and on to the Dihingmukh. We often travelled many miles upstream, calling in at some of the many villages which dotted it's banks. The further north we travelled revealed more Burman type people with Pongis (Buddhist Priests) and village Buddhist shrines. There were some quicksands on the Dehing and numerous sandbanks. Like many before us, we looked for gold but didn't find any but there were lots of coal seams and oil seepage.

As mentioned, the rivers could be hostile and many headstones in cemeteries all throughout the tea areas attest to this- 'drowned while bathing' 'drowned while fishing' was a frequent annotation on many headstones throughout the cemeteries in the North East. (**Peter Bartlett** of *Tingrai* learnt of his great grandfathers demise who was drowned at *Dhunserimukh* on the 2nd October 1885. when details of the *Numaligarh Cemetery* were posted on the *koihai* site)

Most tragic to me was the loss of two very good friends, '**Sonny**' **Sen Gupta**, from Daisajan Tea Estate, and his wife. They, together with their two young sons aged about 6 and 4, were picnicking at the Tirap. The river was in flood and Sonny's wife lost balance on a slippery rock and was swept away-Sonny immediately dived in and tried to rescue her but they both lost their lives. With great

sadness one can picture the two forlorn little boys standing at the rivers edge-I still think about this even though it happened over 40 years ago.

* * * * *

There were many frequent trips to the Tirap during the Cold Weather and there was usually boating, Fishing or swimming. The river, when low, sometimes carried organisms that could cause infection. On one such occasion I got an ear infection and the pain was so intense that I kept my head cocked to one side. When I went to the hospital Doc Chatterjee very gently looked in my ear and then promptly filled up a hypodermic, which looked the size of a bicycle pump, with penicillin, and shot this into my buttock. I was given six tiny pills and was told to go straight to bed and if the pain became too intense, to take a pill. I vaguely remember taking a pill while getting into bed and the throbbing pain diminished very quickly. I then think my reasoning was that if one pill can have such a good effect, I'll have another-and I did! In my stupor my reasoning must have continued on this track and I finished all six pills. The next morning I could not be roused and Chris Gathorne took me to the hospital, where, I was told, my speech was slurred and I threw up on Dr Chatterjee!! I slept solidly for two days and when I recovered I was told of my missing days. I vowed that I would never take sleeping pills again!



Tirap River Picnic

Peter Baxter HIP Verma

Dick Graves & (?)

Eric Singh

Bill Addison told me of the time he and a few friends went duck shooting and had travelled up the Lohit and crossed the Inner Line well into NEFA. One of the party had recently returned from leave and had brought a number of decoy ducks and these were being tried out. Shortly after they had been set there was an almighty bang and when they investigated they found an elderly Abor with an equally old 'Blunderbuss'! He was accompanied by his nephew and was now trying to claim the duck he had shot. When this was retrieved he was shown the shredded rubber decoy-the nephew could not contain himself and fell to the ground in uncontrollable laughter-he pointed to the decoy and then to his uncle, who looked more sheepish by the minute. The story spread like wildfire and soon reached the ears of the DC. He was amused but he sternly admonished the errant duck hunters for straying into the forbidden zone!

CHAPTER 8

OBSERVATIONS ON TEA

Orthodox manufacture was being rapidly replaced by CTC. Crush, Tear, Curl which was sometimes referred to, incorrectly, as Cut, Tear Curl. The orthodox tea rollers were in many instances replaced by a continuous 'rolling machine', the 'McTear Rotorvane.' The Rotorvane, being continuous, meant that it could be linked up to a bank of CTC's thus giving more automation to manufacture. At the time, the CTC most widely used was a 48" machine manufactured by Marshalls. It was fed by brass tilting trays which were laboriously cleaned every day after manufacture. The early factories drove the machines by way of overhead lineshafts that stretched the length of the factory. A later improvement was made by using DC motors and then some years later to the ultimate AC powered factory.

Withering chungs were replaced by Troughs or Withering tunnels. A continuous Drum Withering system was introduced by Davidsons but this did not find a great deal of favour with the planters.

Although in many instances Tea rollers were replaced by the Rotorvane, some factories retained a number of rollers to enable them to carry out 'Dual' manufacture, that is, either Orthodox or CTC manufacture could be done. There was no such thing as a 'Standard' Tea roller-they came in all shapes and sizes, single action, double-'Keegel Cone' -Pyramid cone-Pressure gear-scimitar/talwar, boomerang battens and so on. Everyone had an opinion on the best way to make orthodox!!

The 48 ins CTC's were made smaller to 30" or 24" so that they could be more easily accommodated in a continuous line. The machines were linked by food grade rubber, or plastic coated belting.

Improvements were made to the Fermentation segment of manufacture and

trough or Gumla Fermentation as it was sometimes called was developed by W.M.'s and adopted by many.

Some tried the new continuous Fermenter developed by Davidsons yet others stuck with either floor or 'gumla' fermentation-and then along came fermenting continuously on a series of tiered rubber belts.

Sorting also underwent many changes and although the trusted Andrews breaker was not thrown out it had a radical helper in the form of the 'Miracle Mill' This was simply a hammer mill which created vast amounts of fine dust and it's even finer cousin's which fell all over the sorting room. This was later curtailed by adding a Dust Collection unit. The fine red, powdery dust was then 'reprocessed' that is, it was mixed with water to allow a certain consistency, and was then dried.

The finished product was 'very brown', and was basically graded into a couple of sizes of 'bally' teas. On brewing the made tea collapsed into the fine milled particles but threw a very strong liquor-zero on quality but high on strength. At the time when 'reprocessing' was introduced, such teas prices were only slightly below the normal grades produced but 'reprocessed teas' later fell from favour.

Myddletons, Trinnicks, McIntoshes, Chalmers, Chota Moores-and later the 'Kason', became a matter of which one the manager liked, it was the same with the Java or Waterfall type winnowers. The tiny one was the 'Benton'

In the Dooars many still retained Legg Cutters-these were tobacco cutting machines that had been adapted to cut fresh compressed green leaf. The teas were bright but thin in liquor. Another way of processing tea and which dispensed the use of the other forms of leaf rolling/maceration was the Lawrie Tea Processor (LTP) this was basically a very large hammer mill in a stainless steel casing.

As with just about all machines sold by manufacturers to the tea industry, it was then up to the user to modify, improve and fine tune the piece of equipment! With the LTP the multiple flailing blades became blunt and rounded very quickly. In New Guinea we modified the blades to have a ground recess into which carbon tool tungsten tips were fitted and glued into place using a 'space age' glue! -better cutting-no more sharpening!

One of my very few claims to fame was that I 'invented' the fibre extractor which is in use in probably every factory in every tea growing country in the world today. I remember, while sitting on a tea chest in the sorting room at Namdang at about 2am. and looking at the AFCO-a large machine through which tea from a hopper was passed close to sets of large plastic rollers by a series of slips and slides. I thought, as there are now so many conveyors in the firing and sorting rooms, there could be an application to put a number of small plastic rollers above and at the spill of each conveyor using an alkathene pipe over a wooden cored roller. I drew up a plan showing the construction of these wooden cored rollers exactly where I would place them in the firing and sorting rooms. The rollers would have a static field introduced by rubbing the surface with a piece of Nylon/Terylene fabric and this static field would attract the relatively drier fibre particles. It could also work with machines such as a Myddleton which shuffled stalk and fibre to the top surface. Next day I had a visitor, **Rajan Tewari** from Ledo. Me, being me, excitedly showed Rajan my idea, then got caught up with more immediate concerns, shelving my plans to install the extractors. Rajan came back after a couple of days and said "your" Fibre Extractor works like a dream! I quickly got on to this and realized I may perhaps make some money-off to Calcutta-approached Remfry & Sons, Patent Attorneys-went through a great rigmarole on patenting but after I had spent R's4000/- I gave up, I didn't have any money left! 4,000 rupees to an assistant was an awful lot of money.

Within months it was all over the world. It was too simple!!

So it was a lost cause and my dreams of owning a Rolls-or preferably a Ferrari, rapidly dissipated. Ah Well...

I had a few other ideas....-converting old "Empire" 3 stage driers into two stage Driers. Stopping 'blanketing' on the top run of drier trays by using piano wire mounted on a full width timber batten and positioned just before the 1st tray tilt on the top run-a simple curved stainless steel baffle to give a self cleaning CTC. - and a little pivoting arm rubber bladed scraper, which followed the contours of any irregularities on rubber or plastic coated feed belts, to effectively take all the tea from them and deposit it on the CTC slow roller.

In Australia, many years later, I installed a continuous trough withering unit using link chains with flat bar stiffeners holding plastic mesh. The drive was by an electric motor through a small zero/max gear box that gave variable speeds. Staggered rotating brush segments helped to give a perfect consistent even feed to a rotorvane. This even feed ensured maximum output and absolutely no jamming through overfeed. Three such units arranged piggy back and enclosed would be continuous and efficient. A simple garden mulcher was rigged up above the Rotorvane, to further increase output, and it worked well. This has been in operation for the last 12 years-in India it would have been adopted about 6 years ago. In some aspects India lags behind other producer countries and in many ways it is its own worst enemy. Who, for example, would pack tea in new Hessian sacks-we all know that new hessian has a strong smell and we all know that tea will readily pick up a taint-and it certainly did when it was packed in new hessian bags. This in turn was imparted to the taste of the brewed tea through the inner plastic liner-plastic is an ineffective barrier, (the only sure protection is provided by aluminium) -an error like the one mentioned means lost customers-I believe that India may have at last caught up with the other producer countries and foil lined paper sacks are now used as well as vacuum packaging) but I hope it's not too late. Traditional markets to Russia and the CIS countries – and the UK have been eroded by Ceylon, Kenya, and Indonesia.

I think the economic policies and ties with the USSR started the decline. Huge Steel and other manufacturing plants were set up by Russia against Rupee payment. It was the same for purchase of

the vast quantities of Arms and Aircraft. With billions of Rupees the Auctions were dominated by the Russians and the traditional buyers looked elsewhere. The teas purchased were promptly shipped by the Russians to London and Europe thus converting the rupee sales to hard currency! A MIG fighter equates to an awful lot of tea!!

I remember an amusing incident at Bogapani in the DC days. The electric wires running to the various pieces of machinery first ran along a small ledge high up on the whitewashed brick walls of the factory.

The old wiring insulation over the years had perished and one evening there was a significant blue arc where the wires were shorting. The Electrician was sent for and he came with his jugallie who carried a long bamboo. This was used to flick at the wires until they separated and the arc disappeared! Fixed!!

On the old DC main switchboard at Bogapani, stout short lengths of bamboo were bent and positioned to stop the switches tripping and on heavy overload conditions the whole board glowed red! In very humid occasions a weight was hung on the safety valve arm of the Babcock and Wilcox boiler to allow heat from the steam radiators to be maintained at satisfactory levels for longer periods!!

The only Duncan's garden in the area was Ledo TE. As it's name implies this was situated at Ledo, more noted for the coal mines of AR & T and the 'over the hump' exploits of WW 2 Dakota pilots and the Stilwell Road.

The manager at Ledo was **Prem Kapur** and his assistants were **Rajen Tiwari** and **Bharat Saronwalla**, who later became manager when Prem went to Head Office in Calcutta.

Jimmy Beven had also been with Duncans, on Ledo, but he left there and joined the Namdang Tea Company, who were keen to have his services.

I was very impressed by Prem's efforts to effect economies! He had grills and mesh traps installed in every drain in the 'Rolling Room'. When the CTC's were washed down all of the cut particles which had clung to the machines were collected in the traps-the collected leaf was 'sort of' fermented, then dried!

(there was a nice entry in the Rolling Book at Namdang, in the sixties "No 2 CTC stopped due to Rolling Babu's shoe!!!) It appears 'Charavarty Babu' was on top of the machine clearing some leaves from the electric motor, when his shoe slipped off and jammed the CTC!

In the sixties the buzz word was Clones-Vegetative Propagation. 20-23-1, 19--- etc TV1, TV9 and more. Although Tocklai tried, tested and released a number of clones, there were many who thought that they could get a world beater through selecting from their own gardens. I personally feel that because single leaf cuttings have a very short tap root, they do not handle drought conditions all that well, we may all be in for an unpleasant surprise. Many plantations in Ceylon have had their clonal plantings adversely affected by drought but nevertheless replanting was with more clones. Malawi clones were devastated by drought and some plantations suffered a 50% deaths of mature bushes. I feel that bi-clonal seeds are a better bet.

Seed plantings in the Highlands of New Guinea had the highest yields in the world bar none. Why? It rained every day at about 4.30pm-a gentle soaking rain that continued for a few hours.

Tea has been 'on the edge' for many years. When it gets too hot (about 35 C) photosynthesis stops-no growth-therefore no yield. At 40C, permanent leaf cell damage is done and recovery takes a long time. There were many days when these conditions were prevalent and they will continue to increase. It will be interesting to see what effect global warming will have on the traditional tea areas'

However, enough on tea. Debates and controversies will continue forever!

* * * * *

Margherita, although at the end of the line, was not too far from the other Clubs so if there was a particularly good film it was no trouble to travel there. Digboi was 6 miles Tingri was about 20 miles, Doom Dooma, the same.

Panitola 30 miles or so Duliajan 25 miles and Dibrugarh about 45 miles. Tingri had a fun crowd and our great friend there was Vic Pearson. Sometimes when we went to the movie Vic would tell us to bring our DJ's as there would be a party following the movie. The parties were good and when Kay Hannay was visiting Tingri, there were many at the Bara Bungalow. I remember Polly Rajpal and I leaving things a bit late and having to front up for the daily Kamjari details in front of John Phillips, while still dressed in Dinner Jackets. John barely looked up but simply said in a rich Scottish burr "I think you two fellows should go and get properly dressed" Jimmy Beven and Chris Gathorne were barely able to contain their mirth!

I quite liked my manager, John Phillips but all who worked with him acknowledged that his Hindi was atrocious. Not just those who worked with him but those who worked *for* him, that is, the garden labour. The labour often referred to him as "Ham Hukm"

At one of the early 'bechars' at Namdang when the labour were airing their problems and concerns, one man, it appears, got a little bit out of line and John berated him with 'HAM HUKM TUM KAM' He wanted to say Ham hukm dega tum kam karega (I'll give the orders-you will do the work) Thereafter, poor John was known as Ham Hukm.

On another occasion when new plantings were being carried out, John, as Manager, decided to inspect. The new plants were carried from the nursery to the field on a flat tray, and as was the normal Indian way, the women carried this tray gracefully on their head. On top of the tray a sheet of hessian was placed to protect the plants from the sun. As one woman put her tray down near where she was to plant, John wanted to have a look at the plants so he said.....

'Tumhare kapra khulo ham dekne mangta' which loosely translated means 'Open your clothing I want to have a look!!'

CHAPTER NINE

SOME MORE EXPERIENCES.

(and more Tony Pickfords amusing stories of Margherita)

While staying in the Bara Bungalow I saw my first snake! It was gliding over the lawn and I ran to get a closer look. It was a Cobra and as I approached it stopped, turned, and then came towards me! I didn't know a great deal about Cobras, i.e. whether they were fast or attacked if unprovoked or what but I still wanted to have a close look but without danger, so I ran into the bungalow and got the shotgun-as a safety precaution-I approached the Cobra with the gun levelled and aimed. I got closer as it alternatively retreated and occasionally came towards me. It reared up and as it twisted and turned it's hood markings were clearly visible. I cautiously went closer with the gun pointed at him. I got to about 10 feet and was marvelling at the grace of the movement and taking in all the detail when suddenly there was a splash on the gunsight of the shotgun. This brought an involuntary reaction of the trigger finger and the poor snake was cut in two and from it's innards spilled a large partly digested frog. I had encountered a spitting Cobra and it must have mistaken the gun's twin barrels for eyes. From then on I looked at Cobras only from a safe distance.

The old Belgian 12 bore that was given to me by my elder brother when I left Belfast did come in useful on a few occasions. When he handed me the gun he said "here, take this, you never know what you might run into out there-if it's big, use solid ball or LG and if it's small use a No 7" He was a good shooter and fisherman and he asked for the feathers of a Jungle Murgha, should I ever encounter one, because it's bright plumage would be very useful when tying salmon flies.

As it so happened I did come across some Jungle Murghis-quite a flock of them, all congregated at a small pool just below the Bara Bungalow. One morning I decided to shoot some. I whistled at them-shouted at them and finally when I threw a stone they rose as one-bang- bang and I got five. I took them to Chris Gathorne with the request that he could have the birds but could I keep the feathers. Chris was very pleased as it was apparent that they were good eating. Chris casually asked where I had shot them and when I told him, he visibly wilted, he said "Good God, Marion has been hand feeding those birds for the past 10 years!" Nevertheless, we ate them and the secret has been kept until now!

I had been living in the Bara Bungalow for a few months and one night, I was lying in bed reading, when huge bangs and explosions came from the direction of the verandah. Although termed 'cracker' in India, they are more like small powerful bombs! I ventured out and was engulfed in flashes and bangs-my ears were ringing and senses were reeling and I thought-I'm under attack "they" want to steal the managers things and I am the chowkidhar! Back to my room, loaded the shotgun, stood on the verandah surrounded by the bangs/flashes and I shot over the tall dahlia flower beds! A somewhat shaken **Vic Pearson** from Tingrai and a few others emerged calling out "Don't shoot, don't shoot-it's only us!" We had a few drinks and when they had sufficiently regained composure we were off to Digboi Club!

One not so amusing incident at Bogapani was when Tom Porter and I went to Bogapani after having been at Digboi Club. The main garden road had two tarmacadamed strips and while proceeding en route to the Factory Bungalow we noticed a number of people on the road near the Bara Bungalow. As we neared them and slowed down Tom and I noticed a pool of blood on one of the tracks but we passed through this before braking to a stop. By torchlight the pool of blood revealed broken spectacles and broken dentures. In a nearby deep nullah there was a slumped body. I jumped into the drain to see if I could help but when I reached out and touched a shoulder I knew that the person was dead. There was a massive head wound. I jumped out of the drain (and my skin) quick smart. Enquiries from the couple of bystanders revealed that it was the Bara Bungalow bearer, who had been murdered. Peter Furst was the manager and he was still at Digboi Club where I phoned to let him know of the situation. It appeared that the bearer had been 'playing up' with some young girls in the labour line and had ignored a number of warnings to desist from being a nuisance and as he didn't comply it had disastrous consequences.

Assam, during the rains was an exceptionally hot and sticky place and sleep was sometimes difficult despite the ceiling fan going at full speed. Some slept on verandahs under mosquito netting and others kept cool by having frequent showers and then lying under the fan.

I had generally good health while in Assam but during the hot, humid days of the rains I scratched at heat lumps on my hands and feet, they became septic and I was incapacitated for some time. The Doctor said it was due to getting soaked on the plantation and instead of returning to the bungalow for a change of clothes, they were allowed to partially dry. This caused the heat lumps and gave fertile conditions for all sorts of skin microbes to multiply! For those who have experienced 'Dhobi's itch' they will know what I mean-walking with legs far apart, like a cowboy, in order to avoid tender parts coming in painful contact!! The prickly heat powder I remember was 'Nycil' and this was used in copious amounts by many to try to offset the potential problems. The only other feeling under the weather problems were invariably self inflicted!! Cigarettes were very cheap so one smoked too much. If in the factory the smokers intake trebled in order to try to keep awake during the mid rains 'ek hazaar bimar' days (1000 maunds of green leaf a day sickness). One could say that there was an exponential rate of smoking to quantity of green leaf harvested!!

The factory never stopped and it was lucky to be able to make time available to even wash the machines. In addition to the cigarettes Messrs Black Knight, Beehive, Giraffe and others did their bit to sometimes cause morning after headaches!

An amusing story was told to me by Bill Addison, where he and Jock McKean were to be Godfathers at the christening of Rod and Joan Meadows son Jamie at the little church close to the Dibrugarh Club. John Powrie was to be Godfather to another child. Padre Innes, who was to conduct the service, had to look for the three errant Scots whom he found in the DDPC Bar. After the service the Padre remarked that "*the Brandy/Ginger fumes had the effect of rendering the children docile*"- and he added, tongue in cheek, "*I may recommend it for future Christenings* (John Powrie was drowned while on a fishing trip with friends on the Brahmaputra when their boat capsized. The others made it to safety but John was drowned. His body was never recovered.) (LB)

November 19 2006

THE HELICOPTER MAN.

If you read the saga of the Margherita Bridge you will now be aware

of the frustrations of waiting for ages for a train to come through, ironically it always seemed to coincide with a cinema night at the Digboi Club.... we always tried to get to Digboi as [a] they had a much better projector than ours and [b] the hall was much lighter and airier and [c] they, as Oil guys, could afford the best films but [d] the best of all, there were the girls from the Oil Company Secretarial Pool for us bachelors to have a good drool & ogle over, and, with luck more intimate conversations.

It so happened this one particular Sunday evening, a crowd of us had been up in the Jungle and onto the river to have a bit of fishing and fun in the water. We arrived at the Margherita Bridge just as the boom came down, the usual impatient wait, once the train came through and the boom went up and the light on to green, it was " go like the clappers lads, we'll be late for the film ."

I was normally in the lead car as my fairly new Ambassador could get up a fair speed and I could clear the way

This particular evening, it was still light, the car following was a Fiat driven by one B.C. " Pony " Ponnappa, we were going exceedingly well, as the pedestrians were behaving and walking along the " kutcha " at the side of the road, coming towards us on the right side was a man carrying a very long bamboo, there was a man carrying terra cotta pots, used for tea drinking, in baskets suspended from a pole over his shoulder, and various other walkers with their marketing on their heads.... I can only assume it, but the guy with the bamboo must have been called by someone in the field to his left, he turned to see who it was and about 10/12 feet of Bamboo pole came out across the road, I was no further than twenty yards from it, I told the passenger to duck, as did I .. the bamboo struck the car on the makers sign on the bonnet, just below the makers emblem [gismo]... that saved our bacon, I had been doing about 50 m.p.h. when I hit it.. ... I was told never to stop if one hit anything and it was possible to still continue, I slowed right down and looking in the mirror I could see the most amazing sight...

The Bamboo man instead of letting go was hanging on to his precious pole and was rotating like a helicopter, I was told later that his pole hit the pot carriers' baskets demolishing a load of the contents, he also managed to inflict some hefty whacks to others who were too close to get out of the way, as [all this incident had spread across the road, those in the cars behind me were forced to stop, they were immediately assailed by the crowds who demanded recompense for the pot man and treatment for the pole carrier who evidently had a nasty looking wheal all round his neck like a dog-collar. .. Pony, bless him, paid about Rs 75/- in compensation [a lot in those days] which he ensured I coughed up later... I meet Pony and his wife Sundari in Bangalore as regularly as I go there. He never lets me forget " the Helicopter Man " By the way, we all just made the film and the girls were there !! *TONY PICKFORD.*

THE MARGHERITA BRIDGE.

AND A CLOSE SHAVE

For those of you who ventured up beyond Digboi, you will be familiar with the Margherita Bridge, with its girder construction taking both rail and road

simultaneously across the Dehing River, it had boom gates and traffic lights at both ends to control the single lane traffic, on the Margherita side the gate and lights were a fair distance from the bridge as one had to negotiate the main Bazaar area and the road and rail line ran parallel to each other to join at the bridge, both rail & road were on an embankment on a sharp curve, there were always a multitude of people, animals, dogs and other Indian road impedimenta so it was slowly as she goes, for both cars and trains.

The gatekeepers were always a bit hasty in closing the road traffic off and the wait for the train could last a long time, long queues could form. There were two types of rail traffic, the normal passenger type and the goods trains, the latter being very heavy and long as they carried coal from the Ledo Coalfields owned by the Assam Railways & Trading Company, the rail width was " metre gauge " therefore very narrow, the locomotives were huge Pacific type, coal fired, brought out during World War II by the Americans to feed the Stillwell road into Northern Burma, their efficiency had dropped dramatically since 1944/5 but the North East Frontier Railway in their wisdom always overloaded the trucks or added more on, I was told that in excess of 4000 tons of coal could be on one goods train.

Having now set the scenario, an incident occurred which was very frightening at the time but was a cause for many a laugh afterwards. It was early evening and it had just got dark, there were a crowd of us waiting to go across from the Margherita side to go to Digboi Club cinema night and as the goods train was coming past from our side, we would be the first to go, following it over the bridge at a safe distance, or so we thought.... as the red tail light of the guards van disappeared round the bend and off towards the Bridge, our light went green, the boom gate went up and off we went, we had just got onto the bridge, still able to see guards van light in the distance when it dawned that the light wasn't getting any farther away, in fact, there was a little man complete with flag and lantern running towards us, shouting for us to go back out of the way and that the train was coming back over the bridge and back to Margherita Station.... panic... the damned guards van was getting dangerously close... not trying to be disparaging, but the average Indian driver has no idea about reversing, three cars ended up backing over the embankment, down the bank and into the shops in the Bazaar, the train missed hitting the lead car head-on but did smash the mudguard and light on the drivers side..... it was that close !! Evidently what had happened was that the engine driver had not got a full head of steam, when he started at the Station, there were extra trucks in the train, so the old engine didn't have enough power to pull everything up the incline at the other side of the bridge, so the driver was going to back the whole lot back through the Station about half a mile from the gates, get the gatekeeper to shut all gates and get people and other moveable obstructions off the line in the Bazaar and make a concerted dash for the bridge with a full head of steam. We were in the middle of all this lot getting people out of damaged cars and calming the wives down and some of the blokes too, placating shopkeepers, luckily no one was badly hurt, there was a pause as the train thundered past again, only about three feet away, belching cinders, steam and smoke, rocking dangerously as it squealed round the bend and off over the bridge, about five minutes later the gateman showed up and said " Its clear, sir, you can go now " very droll we thought we didn't get to the film, we left the bent cars and shop wreckage promising to be back in daylight, we did get to Margherita Club though, just back up the road, to calm the shakes & bolster up our spirits somewhat.

I remember it well

Tony Pickford.

I think this was another even closer shave with the Railways as told to me by Bob Jones. (LB)

The Margherita (Dehing River) bridge and the North East Frontier Railway were known to all who were with the Makum Namdang Tea Companies and The AR and T. Everyone would have

stories but a couple that I remember, one amusing and the other hair raising come to mind.

It was the norm to race the train to the various crossings, so that when one left the Digboi Club after picture night, one would encounter the train at various crossings, the most notable of which was the one at Powai which had an attendant and a boom gate. Initially this caused frustration as bureaucracy took charge! The train was nowhere in sight but the attendant dropped the boom gate. This led to confrontations but these were quickly resolved when the planters, when confronted by the recalcitrant bureaucrat and a closed gate, turned off the engine and had a doze!! This, off course, annoyed the gate attendant and he resumed to normal practice.

On one such journey from Digboi there were 6 young planters in Austin Rufus's Fiat.

*The driver was Shaun Northcote and as was usual the car raced the train. The destination was Dehing TE and as they turned into the entry, which was a short garden entrance road which led to a very steep incline over the track, the train was rapidly bearing down and the young planters in unison cried **'STOP'***

Shaun did indeed stop. The train passed and they proceeded only to find that the overloaded Fiat stopped astride the railway track. Everyone exited and the car was pushed from the track. A potential disaster in the demise of six young tea planters had been averted!

On a happier note, 3 young planters were proceeding to Margherita from Digboi with their escorts for the evening when, as they were crossing the Margherita bridge, the car broke down! With alacrity two young planters and the three ladies got down and started to push the car. While pushing the car another vehicle came on to the bridge and inadvertently assisted by lighting up the scene. As the stalled car reached the other side and allowed the other vehicle to pass, a silent acknowledgement, with bowed heads was given to Jim Maltby, Superintendent of the Makum Namdang Tea Company!!!

Many have stories of the trains and Margherita Bridge !

The White Ants at No 5 Bungalow.. Margherita T.E. By Tony Pickford

It wasn't long after the roof-rack incident with Eric, myself and Superintendent Christie that the higher authority decided to split us up and I was posted to John Moran at Margherita Tea Estate, the oldest in the group, in fact everything on Margherita was old, the

Manager's bungalow burnt down eventually, the rumour that floated around after was that it had got past any further attempts to keep it standing, so some " persons " were offered a sum to put a match to it.... true or not... we never found out, anyway, I was to be the Garden Assistant and I was to share No: 5 Bungalow with a gentleman who went by the name of John Barrow-Williams... I had met John very briefly once but, as a Senior Assistant, he didn't mix with the lower orders... funny that, as it was generally understood that No 5. Bungalow was a punishment billet..... wonder what he had done wrong. I think it was his dress code.

John arrived at the Manager's Office so we could meet, this guy was something to behold... starting from the top.. Panama Hat which, once removed, revealed perfectly coiffured wavy hair,... shirt... by Gieves of London in twill cotton with button down breast pockets, cravat from the same shop [I assumed]... shorts... with knife edge crease [spotless] looked like Austin Reed of Regents Street... calf length socks with turn-down tops matching the shirt and shorts in colour, brown brogue shoes by Veldtscheon.... first time I've seen one of these types outside a glossy magazine, I thought... when introduced his accent was pure upper class Oxford... my God thought I , this is the chap I am to share a house with.

We didn't meet again till the lunch break when John picked me up in his car... some car... it was made by the Willys Co based on a Jeep Station Wagon but it was an open tourer called a Jeepster, it was in Cream with red upholstery, it was something else, one felt one was really travelling in style going in it.

We arrived at the Bungalow, where my ' man ' had already arrived and was unpacking what meagre belongings I had, it was a typical Assam Chung Bungalow, on stilts. Going upstairs onto the Verandah, I noticed there were rings and lines marked out in chalk, leading on through to the Sitting Room and Dining Room, John said, for Petes sake not to walk on the other side of these marks as there were White Ants in the floor boards and one could go through onto the concrete floor, 10 feet below, evidently, he had been sitting down the previous night and a leg of his chair had gone through a floorboard, [said hole was now ringed with chalk], all the cabinets in the Sitting and Dining Room were standing on bricks to stop the Ants getting into them. I remember going into the bedroom on tip toe in case the boards gave way.... anyway, time passed and I too, got into the chalk marking thing.

One thing had intrigued me was a largish area on the Verandah of new floorboarding, when I asked about it John said " The damnest thing you know, it was six months ago, I came back from the garden to find a ceiling fan on the floor where I parked the car, the bloody ants had got into the support beam holding up the fan, the whole lot had given way and the big old D.C. fan had descended, gone straight through the rotten floor boards onto the concrete below, brought a rather nice coffee table I had with it too " " What if I had been sitting up there and what if my car had been parked there, bloody frightening thought isn't it ? "

One morning, I was going to the Office in the car as I had to go into town afterwards, so I knocked on John's door, asking if he wanted a lift, to be answered by a faraway voice telling me he was in the loo and would be out in a minute, I heard the chain being pulled, we had those noisy cast iron cisterns which required a hefty pull, the next thing was a shout and some very foul language.. John arrived at his door, a dirty reddish colour and soaked through, the cistern had come off the wall and emptied its rusty water contents all over him... the White Ants had struck again by eating the wooden plugs holding the screws which held up the tank. I don't think Messrs Austin Reed or Gieves would have approved of his colour modification.

On asking John about his wife, he definitely had one, but she was never there, he informed me that her name was Marianne and she had a Boutique in Knightsbridge in the West End of London and the business required her full time attention but that she did pop across to India as and when she could but always without warning, its the phones.. he said... It was about a month later, we had just sat down to lunch when a car arrived with a large amount of horn application.. John's reaction was to say that it was damned uncivilised to come during the lunch hour and whoever it was should be damned well taught some manners, the next thing we heard was a female voice which shouted in a demanding sort of tone " Joohhnn " " Oh shit," said John " its Marianne " Dropping knife and fork, John shot out of the Dining Room across the Sitting Room, another " Oh shit " as his foot went through a floor board [he'd forgotten the chalk marks !!] out across the Verandah still at a fair gallop, going down the stairs he grabbed the banister railing for guidance and to sustain balance, said banister broke off at the base and John complete with about ten feet of banister and hanging supports flew out onto the lawn, he managed to land on his feet but tripped over all the woodwork he was holding [he forgot to let go !!] and performed a delightful belly flop on the grass. The next thing I heard was this powerful female voice saying " John, will you never stop being such a bloody fool and come and get my bags from the taxi " I couldn't do a thing for laughing as quietly as possible, luckily he hadn't hurt anything except his pride, once again Mr A.Reed and Mr Gieves had further modifications done to their original designs & colours. Marianne, extremely smart and expensively dressed, proved to be delightful, I had also grown fond of John, in his very eccentric way.

I remember one evening, coming back from the Club, we noticed that for once the Watchman had put on some lights on the back verandah of the Bungalow, John remarked as we parked the car that he didn't realise they were there, we eventually went to the Dining Room to have our usual " cutlet " supper, I said to John that I thought the room was rather cold and there was a hell of a draught, the Watchman appeared with our meal and remarked that there had been an incident " Look, sir, the wall has gone, its lying in the garden" sure enough our whole wall had collapsed outwards into the garden and the lights we had seen were the Dining Room lights, all 110 volts D.C. of them, clearly visible from the road once the Dining Room wall had fallen out.... the White Ant had struck again.

John & I stayed in the Bungalow amongst all the dust and rubble whilst they rebuilt the wall and got rid of the Ants.... they didn't actually, they returned !!!

A lesson in breast feeding for the Superintendent ,Makum/Namdang Tea Co., James Maltby Esq.

Back in the very early sixties, there was a move by the Superintendents wife, Joyce Maltby, to promote welfare amongst the garden labour... where I was posted as a Garden Assistant, sessions were held once or twice a week at an appropriate place in Dehing T.E. after working hours where the young girls of the garden were taught needlecraft, basic cooking, baby care and other work, the boys were taught the more manly skills of growing vegetables and simple carpentry etc., The scheme actually took off quite well, it was then decided to extend this idea to a once weekly welfare meeting for the garden labour when anyone could come with complaints and queries to the Office to be listened to by the Garden Assistant & the Garden in-charge and have the problem adjudicated upon on the spot, mine was Wednesday evenings.

I remember the line watchman bringing a Munda woman [Bihar tribal] who had obviously been beaten evidently by her husband, the husband was called for, I grabbed him by his vest and hauled him half way through the window so that his tender parts were caught on the window catch on the sill, I, more than forcefully, asked him who the hell he thought he was and why I should not call the Police.

It transpired that his wife had very recently given birth to a child, but she was unable to breast feed it, which meant hardship to them financially, because he

had to get milk supplement [Ostermilk] which in those days was prohibitively expensive. In his innocent tribal villagers mind he thought beating her would shock her into producing milk.

I told him that all that was required was that his wife would need a small breast operation by the garden doctor to get her milk flowing and issued a chit to the Hospital for her to go, for him a fine and extra work on the Garden and three months probation to not lay a finger on his wife again or it would be straight to the Police for him..... another case successfully solved, I proudly thought.

Jim Maltby, the Superintendent, came on his weekly garden visit and, possibly prompted by his wife, asked to see the Welfare Register, he picked on this particular case.... I was in the Garden and was called to his car when it reached the area I was in and he asked if he could see this woman to check for himself.... amongst 500 women, it took myself and the Garden Staff a bit of searching, she was eventually found and the Superintendent, Jim Maltby, the Manager Peter " Peewee " Bursnall, myself, the Garden in-charge and a couple of foremen, all trooped along and stood round the poor woman who was, ironically, breast feeding her new-born.

Jim, as always, was imposingly dressed in an immaculate powder blue Safari suit.. he bent down and asked the woman in his terrible " coolie bhat " ...
" Sab kuch tek hai, hum dekta hai, dudh ata hai " [Everything alright, I am seeing milk is coming] with which the woman took out her other breast, very swollen, gave it one good squeeze and a stream of milk hit Jim in the middle of his chest and dribbled [flowed more like] down the front of his suit and trousers... there was a stunned silence, Jim bless him said nothing but mustering as much dignity as he had left, walked slowly back to his car with Peewee behind him, absolutely red in the face in trying to stop laughing, they got sedately into the car and disappeared towards the Factory, once they had gone out of sight, all of us fell about laughing, the woman was completely puzzled as to why we were killing ourselves, as though what she had done was an everyday occurrence.

Jim never again picked up the Welfare Register, neither did he ever bring the subject up again. I did send the Garden Doctor a note to say that the Superintendent had experienced the excellent quality of his work

October 26 2006

John Moran

Here are two stories of John Moran, who was my Manager in the early days of my time in tea, back in the late fifties and early sixties.

I had been in tea only a very short while when Horace Murray committed suicide, as he was a widower the actually internment at Margherita Cemetery was an all male event... the distance from the road to the actual Cemetery was quite far so it was decided that the junior Assistants would carry the coffin two-thirds of the way and Horace's close compatriots would carry him the final bit to the grave. The coffin was made of ' green ' wood and very heavy, as it had been made in a very great hurry to get Horace into the ground hastily, it had no ' finish ' to it at all. Anyway off we went with six of us carrying the coffin on our shoulders, when we got to the change-over point, his colleagues duly slipped in under the coffin, took the weight and, we continued on.....

John Moran had taken over from me, so I walked beside him.... after about 50 yards, I noticed John looking decidedly grey in colour, on asking him if he felt O.K. " No, I'm not " sez he " What's the problem, do you want me to take over ? " " I don't think you'll want to ", he sez " ... " Why ? " I asked... " *Horace is leaking* " said John " and its going down the back of my neck and onto my collar, now its started down my back, under my shirt " With horror I dropped back a bit to see what was happening.... it soon became obvious..... As it was an all-male ' do ', the ladies not to be out-done had sent a huge bouquet of Arum Lillies which were resting on top of the coffin, they had attached a plastic container with water in it, to keep the flowers fresh, this was leaking right above John, coming down the side of the coffin and into his collar. Poor old John was convinced Horace had gone pop in the Assam heat. Later, we often smiled at this incident.

#there is no indication of Horace Murray's grave in the Margherita Cemetery records but all of that time know that he was buried there. (LB)

The Indo / China War of 1962

The Indo / China War of 1962, threw up many stories, thank God no tragic one's for the Planting Community who really rallied round after the cease-fire and ensured that the returning Indian troops were looked after and cared for as they had had a very rough deal as they had been totally unprepared for War and the conditions they had to fight under.

When the War was at its height and the Chinese were making huge in-roads into the Assam Valley, it was decided to evacuate all the wives of the Planters, Oil guys and the Timber and Coal people too....once they had gone, regular meetings of the remaining men were held in the Clubs affected, up the North end of the Valley.... mostly it was propping up the Bar and general chatter, certain married Members turned up on a very regular basis who normally were rarely seen when their wives were in station. During one particular drunken session, John Moran, who was Vice-President of the Club, announced to all that " I'm damned if those b....y Chinese are going to get the Imported Liquor that stocked in our cellar !!" " Abdul, [the Head Barman] go get the keys and give them to me, I am going to ration out the Scotch Whisky and French Brandy to those who want it " There weren't that many takers, so John said magnanimously " I'll take most of it and you guys are welcome to come to my Bungalow and drink it and get a bite to eat as well

" This went on from a week to a fortnight on virtually a nightly basis, John being a good Committee Member religiously signed for every bottle..... calamity struck... the cease-fire was declared... over a period of time things returned to near normal... being on the Committee at Margherita at the time... the Head Clerk came and asked what to do about John Moran's bill, on enquiring why he had asked, it transpired that John Moran's bill had come to just a little under Rs 10.000/-..... a brand new Ambassador car was Rs 14.500/- in 1962. A flat bed truck was called for from the Estate, the Bar Chits were put in a shoe box and it was rope onto the centre of the truck, the driver was strictly instructed to approach by the front drive and park under the porch and give " Moran - Sahib " the box...luckily John saw the funny side regarding the method of delivery but was not at all amused at the size of the Bill..... John, bless him, to prevent loss of face and to keep his dignity, paid the the Bill.... it took him a year in monthly payments, a large chunk of his bonus and long absences from the Bar to prevent further indebtedness. There were lots more of us who had to try to

explain to our returning wives, why things were a little tight

Tony Pickford

#I was standing on the main road just outside the Bogapani entrance at 2.30am watching all the trucks and buses passing on their way to various airstrips. I had a transistor radio glued to my ear and tuned in to Voice of America. Just as the last car passed the radio told me that a cease fire had been announced-my first thought, like many all over Assam, was the Club Bill!! (LB)

R.W.Powell- Bob joined the Makum Company and arrived in 1963.

Jones(Bob) He spent his formative years in the Congo and as a result could speak fluent French(albeit with a Belgian accent!) His first posting was to Margherita and his manager there was Peter (Peewee) Bursnall. Bob, being new and polite, kept calling Peewee "Sir" until he was kindly but firmly told "Don't you Sir me, Cock"! When Bob visited his new friends at Namdang he had a guitar slung over his shoulder-and on request he treated us all to the three chords he knew. We were impressed.

Bob was married in Shillong, to Dorothy, and they have two children, Louise and Jill. He speaks extremely fluent Hindi and Khasi. Bob was smarter than most-he stayed on! After a considerable time with the Makum Company he went to Shillong and is still actively engaged in tea planting and manufacture. There are many stories and treasured incidents about Bob:-He fell into the Tirap while fishing-he wouldn't let go of the rod so Eric Singh had to dive in to save him-the next week Eric fell in-so Bob saved him! Bob and I often went on Local Leaves to Shillong and Calcutta together. These were always a lot of fun and we encountered many interesting people and had many amusing encounters. I remember when a very persistent rickshawala, outside the Lytton Hotel, was deflated when Bob plonked himself in the rickshaw and said "Barrackpore jaiga" The man set off but after a few yards lowered the shafts and looked around with a beaming smile (Barrackpore is about 26 kms from the Lytton)-the smile and the laugh that was had was worth ten rupees-the persistence stopped and was replaced with a smile and a deep

Salaam!

The Traubs took us to the 'Golden Slipper' which was noisy and rowdy. There was plenty of 'spectator sports' there and we witnessed an all in battle between dissenting Anglo Indian groups and the air turned blue with invective and chairs went flying through the air!

Then there was a visit by Bob and I to the infamous den of iniquity, 'Isiaahs' in Freeschool Street- just to satisfy curiosity-the visit was very short as the scarred and tatooed 'shippie's' resented the presence of two clean cut young planters dressed in whites. One matelot sauntered past our table, cleaning his fingernails with a long pointed dagger and as he passed he gave us a leering grin!! Two pint bottles of beer were downed in seconds and our eyes were well averted from the girls- a satisfactory escape was made-curiosity about Isiaahs now sated! (*It is no more, it was closed down in the late 90's*)

I also recollect that one time a number of us travelled from Margherita to participate in a Cricket match 'INDIA v's U.K.' I'm not to sure about the venue but I think it was at Dibrugarh. The match was a bit like the famous tied test at Madras in 1986 between Australia and India, where conditions and humidity taxed both team's players to their limits. With the India, UK match, the very hot and humid conditions were, however, somewhat made easier through the frequent calls for 'Drinks' breaks. The drinks were unlike a 'proper' cricket match. They were a collection of Beers, Gins, Brandies and Whiskies. After some time, fielders lay down on the grass, bowlers ran through the bowlers end stumps and batsmen, because they could not see clearly complained of 'bad light' The Umpires, who had also availed of the 'Drinks' breaks had difficulty in reaching decisions. It was eventually by the mutual agreement of the India and UK players that the match be declared as 'Drawn'

Most sport was taken seriously, particularly Rugby but there could sometimes be tragic consequences. I remember a Rugby match in Digboi between the Dooars and Assam. The day was stinking hot and the Assam team was a player short. The players canvassed amongst the spectators and applied pressure to an athletic looking 21 year old who had arrived just a couple of months before. This young man kept saying that he didn't play much competitive sport and was reluctant to join in but the pressure mounted with things like 'letting the side down' etc. Anyway, he finally relented-took to the field-and was dead within 20 minutes. It was later discovered that he had a congenital heart condition and that medical advice forbade strenuous games. His parents came out from the UK and attended the funeral of their only son. I cannot remember names but I remember the day well, what the young fellow looked like, and the conditions of play. A sad day.

(On a happier note, a short tale from Phil Bayley about an Establishment that all Planters either knew or had heard of- 'Aunties')

January 12th 2002

Planters and their Aunties

It was company policy for assistants to be sent every now and again to a course at Tocklai Experimental Station, now a Tea Research Centre, where it was presumed their knowledge of all aspects in the cultivation of tea would be advanced. This assumption was doubtful but it can be said that their education in other things were greatly advanced. For instance their evenings were spent at either of three places. One would be at the Tocklai Guest House where they would study their notes from the days lectures, presumably with the intention of eventually rising to be a Superintendent. The second would be an evening at the Jorhat Gymkhana Club and the last but not least **AUNTIES** where many a planter was introduced to the facts of life.

Stories tell us that Auntie was a middle aged tribal lady whose business

was originally in the sale of thatch for cold weather repairs to labourers houses on tea gardens in the Jorhat area. It was when she found that she could sell more thatch when accompanied by young

ladies from her tribe that she expanded her compound with many more thatch huts and business boomed .

Aunties was situated between Tocklai and Borbhetta where they had experimental tea plots but , in order to enter the compound , it was necessary to drive up an embankment , cross the railway line,marked 42, and down the other side . Unfortunately one planter spent Saturday night at Aunties but on Sunday morning his car became stuck on the railway line just when the burra mems were on their way to church and were shocked to see the ladies of ill repute trying to push him out of trouble .

Then there was the assistant from Soraipani who always took the train from Mariani to Jorhat because the roads were so bad . After a good binge at Jorhat club he proceeded to Aunties but Auntie wasn't too pleased to have to buy his return ticket and the girls to lift him into the carriage . It was also reported that some members of one Tocklai course were apprehended during a police raid on Aunties but they had the presence of mind to give the names of Tocklai lecturers during interrogation much to the annoyance of these gentlemen who were later summonsed .

'Aunties' thrived till the late 80's and it was closed down by the authorities when an assistant was murdered and the body was found on the railway line.

Planters will remember the visit of the Duke of Edinburgh in 1961 and it appears that Auntie erected a huge banner in the front of her compound with the greetings:

“WELCOME HOME YOUR MAJESTY”

I don't know if the following story is urban legend like the shooting of Assamese Turkeys (Vultures) by newcomers but I was told by Simon Penney that it did take place at a Bogapani annual concert to fete the visiting director, Jack Kilburn. The Merchant of Venice, was set as a one act play, and put on by Bogapani Staff.

As the hessian curtain is opened it reveals a gentleman sitting at a table. There is a loud knock from the side of the rudimentary stage.

Seated Man: **KAUN HAI? (WHO IS IT)**

Muffled Voice from behind the door: **HAMRAH NAM SHYLOCK HAI (MY NAME IS SHYLOCK)**

Seated Man **KYA MANGTA? (WHAT DO YOU WANT?)**

Voice from behind the door: **HAM ADHA SEER GOSHT MANGTA. (I WANT A POUND OF FLESH)**

The seated man kicks back his chair and shouts: JAO SALAH, KABBHI NAHIN MILEGE!!

(BE OFF YOU BUGGER YOU'LL NEVER GET THAT)

THE CURTAIN CLOSES AND THERE IS APPLAUSE.

One that I did see with my own eyes at another of Mr Kilburn's visit was....

Aksing was the performer on the stage and he was going to sing.

The Harmonium player gave a few introductory bars and Aksing launched into his song....but there was no sound.

He smiled and apologized, took a sip of water and started again-but the same thing happened!

After four or five false starts and dirty looks from the harmonium player, he finally launched into song.

He went on and on and on.....and on.....and on.....and on.....

People started squirming in their seats and I'm sure Jack Kilburn too was hoping for it to finish. The Bara Babu obviously thought so as well and from the side of the stage his umbrella snaked out and the handle went round Aksing's neck. A good yank on the brolly had the singer off the stage in no time. There was grateful, loud and sustained applause for the Bara Babu!!

Bob Jones told me about the time that Pissy Cross and he were travelling to Dibrugarh with Peewee in his jeep. Pissy had a badly upset tummy from something he had eaten the night before and en route he asked Peewee to make an urgent stop. Peewee complied and Pissy scampered into a nearby paddy field and squatted amongst the green camouflage. Peewee in the meantime took his box brownie that he always carried in his jeep and went into the paddy where he took interesting photos of Pissy's rear! When the photos were developed Peewee picked the best, stuck these on Christmas cards, and these were sent to all their mutual friends in the district!!

With his annual Capital Expenditure Programme that was forwarded to London for Approval, Peewee usually sent a card on which a photo of the abandoned Margherita No 1 Leaf Chung House was pasted. This Chung had long strips of torn hessian flapping in the wind, bits of broken wire sticking out everywhere, and broken wooden stairways hanging on by a nail and the roofing iron was rusted and many sheets were missing. Peewee's Capital Expenditure submissions usually requested a swimming pool for the managers residence!(and it was always knocked back)

Derek Wood joined the Makum Company after leaving the Doom Dooma Company where he had been a very senior manager, He was a nice person and I remember one evening at Margherita Club when Peewee launched into his familiar 'monkey joke' Derek said: "Come off it Peewee, that's a feckin old joke, Quick' as a flash, Peewee retorted, 'Well, it's a feckin old monkey'!!

CHAPTER 10

PLANTERS DOGS.

Many planters had dogs and other animals as pets and companions and they were of all shapes and sizes. Peewee Bursnall had a boxer dog which he named 'Cavers' after a friend of his who was manager of Bazaloni TE. Chris Gathorne had a cocker spaniel, "Flossie" which used to accompany him on his treks into the Patkoi hills in NEFA. Colin Bryant had a little Dach 'Edward'. Simon Penney's yellow Labrador 'Brutus' and the brother of Brutus was 'Kim' whose owner was John

Moran.

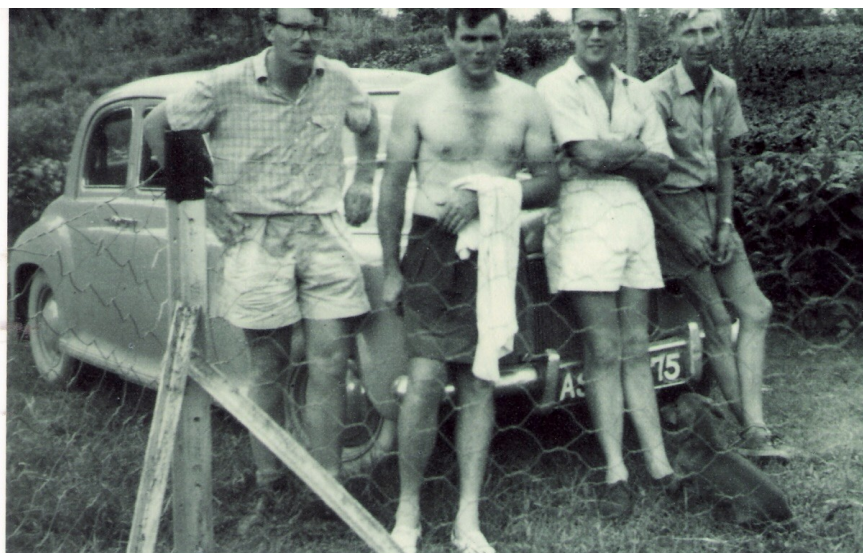
I had my little bull terrier cross, 'Paddy,' which was given to me as a tiny little pup by Jimmy and Jean Beven, from their pure bull terrier 'Suzy'

Paddy gave me endless hours of enjoyment and he slept on the covers at the end of my bed until the fleas became too much for both of us. The Namdang Factory bungalow was a chung bungalow – it not only had a ghost and a live-in colony of bats in the bottom room, it now had fleas in plague proportions! They lived and multiplied in the floor board joints and when friends visited they burned the numerous fleas on their white socks with cigarettes!

The living conditions eventually became totally unbearable and I spent a weekend with friends after liberally dousing the bungalow floors with 'Diazanone' This did the trick and Paddy and I moved back home.

One day, he appeared to be quite agitated, his tail was down and his body was shaking. I took him to the hospital where **Dr Jim Baird**, a very good, and very sympathetic Doctor, said he thought it could be the onset of rabies. He gave some medicine and said he hoped it wasn't but if it was there was nothing that could be done. In the event of it being rabies I would have to put the dog down and then have 14 injections of anti rabies vaccine in my stomach. He told me to isolate Paddy and observe him. I played with him for some time in an empty room in the bungalow but he was becoming more agitated and wanting to attack the servants as they passed the room. I threw a golf ball to him and he put his teeth right through it and I had to prise this off. I left him in the room, locked the door and came back some time later. He was trembling violently and salivating. I tapped a window pane and he jumped up trying to bite my hand. I got the gun, broke a window pane and told him to sit, which he did. He sat quietly and looked at me with his head tilted to one side and he quizzically looked at me and gave a little plaintive whine just before I shot him. I cried my eyes out for a long time.

(Colin Bryan from Margherita TE told that he had once witnessed one of his Garden Babu's who had rabies. The poor man was tearing flesh off his arm with his teeth and he died a horrible death)



Peter Bartlett Mike Hardie Colin Bryant Arthur Donkin
(and 'Edward' (barely visible) at Colin's feet)

Much later, I got another dog, a yellow Labrador and he was also a great companion. I had him vaccinated against Rabies as I knew that I couldn't go through another trauma of shooting one's beloved pet. Dogs and planters went well together. When visiting friends on other gardens the dog

would invariably be brought along and I think the dogs like meeting up too, just like their masters. I once heard someone say that if he was to be reincarnated he would want to come back as a planter's dog!! Many would agree with this sentiment.

Sometimes a group of us would explore beyond the perimeter of the outgarden, Namtok. The dogs were usually brought along. Beyond the perimeter, which was of course NEFA, the jungle was thick and exotic and there were no trails. Every so often we had to stop to 'de-leech' ourselves and the dogs.

The dogs picked them up on the pads of their feet and we got them through the lace eyelets of our shoes and on our ankles. One could clearly see the relatively small leeches on the low branches of shrubs or on blades of grass. As a warm blooded animal-or man- passed, the leeches would release to try to attach themselves. When fully gorged they would be nearly as thick as a pencil and have a visible yellow stripe down their back. We made them release by touching them with a lighted cigarette. If they had attached to the soft part of the ankle it sometimes resulted in a long to heal sore and a scar which remained for many years.

My one and only 'Shikar' took place on the outer fringes of Namdang, near Pilkhana Line, where a leopard had made a kill.

Many of the young Indian assistants claimed to have been on great shoots and the tales of beaters, Elephants, Tigers and Maharaja's abounded. I was impressed by the stories and agreed to participate in the Leopard hunt. Eric (of course) was there and Polly and quite a number of others. There was a great collection of armaments from a 16 gauge(I don't know what this would have done) 12 bores with LG shot, .375 Magnums and some other rifles.

The beaters went into the tea and the racket of tin cans, shouting, whistles, began. As they advanced through the tea the guns were all ready BUT the shooters were positioned, in line, about 50 yards from each other DIRECTLY OPPOSITE!!!!. As the beaters advanced a furry animal exited the tea and was promptly blown apart by the many guns that opened up-bullets went whizzing past me from my 'friends' directly opposite and no doubt they would be having the same experience. The net result was one badly riddled civet cat!! I never joined a shooting party again as I now know first hand the meaning of 'friendly fire'!

The perimeter of Dirok TE had virgin jungle and abounded in wild life and some of us went there on occasions(no guns)

While getting there I recollect our car got stuck in a nullah and was pulled out by a friendly passing Mahout controlled Elephant. On one other visit we hung about in the jungle too long and it became dark. Being in a pitch black jungle with all the branch breaking, growling, high pitched calls, barking, grunting and other noises, it was with great relief we found our way back to the car and went straight to Margherita club for a drink or two to stop the trembling!

On Planters Dogs, I should, perhaps finish this chapter with an amusing story of Phil Bayley's about Vic Pearson's dog 'Boodha' I knew the dog well and Vic took him everywhere. When I (and just about everyone in Upper Assam) heard of the exploits of Vic's dachshund we had a great laugh. The story as told by Phil:-

April 2002

The Labrador and the Dachshund by Phil Bayley.

It was in the 1950's when I was in Hoogrijan that Vic Pearson asked me to look after his two dogs while he was on Home Leave for 6 months and, as he was a great bachelor friend of mine, I was only too glad to help out, although in retrospect 6 months is a long time to be responsible for other people's animals.

I can't remember the name of the beautiful black Labrador bitch but the brown long-bodied Dachshund was called " Boodha ". Anyway time went on and it was when Vic was due back from leave that I noticed the Labrador had put on weight and, on Vic's return, I explained that the poor

thing must have come on heat and it was well known that the Sahib's dogs always preferred line Pie-dogs when romance was in the air .

A little later six pups were born and Vic was quite pleased with them but , as time went on , he noticed that each pup developed a long body and long legs with black and brown markings .

As this was a serious matter , it was decided that a " Burra Bichar " of all my bungalow servants was required and this was done between the bottle-khana and the kitchen . Each servant gave the usual reply " mallum nai " but eventually the night chowkidar spilt the beans as follows :-

" Hazoor . Your bitch was on heat and she was only interested in " Boodha " and he was having considerable difficulty , so I brought my stool from the back verandah and lifted him on to it . Otherwise I was worried for " Boodha's " health!!!!!!

So if today you see long legged and bodied dogs in Tingri district , you will know where they came from!

(the Labrador's name was 'LANA') (LB)

CHAPTER 11

Home Leave.

In 1964 I was due for 6 months Home Leave. I decided that I would travel both ways by sea. From Bombay, I boarded the “Guiglielmo Marconi”, a brand new 28,000 ton liner of the Lloyd Triestino line. The sea journey was to take me from Bombay to Aden then to Sicily and Naples where I would journey by train to Paris and then on to Dover. The ship would have stops in a few ports, and I would have an overnight in Messina, in Sicily.

I had heard a lot about shipboard romances and I quickly got a passenger list from the purser. On this list I put pencil ticks at all the 'Miss' entries!! However, a day or so into the voyage I thought that I perhaps wasn't tanned enough and I wanted to make a good impression on my Mum when I returned to the cold greyness of Belfast!. So I lay on deck, the sun blazing down-the ships 20 knot speed giving a cooling breeze-one inevitably felt serene and drowsy. I fell asleep! Many hours later I woke up, done like a lobster! I went to my cabin where the 'shakes' started. Next day the doctor came gave me an injection of something and informed me that I had sunstroke and would be confined to my cabin!

Skin started coming off me in strips-I was a mess. I tore up my pencilled passenger list of single girls and concentrated instead, on recovery!



Guglielmo Marconi



First Class Lounge G.Marconi

By the time we got to Aden I was feeling pretty good and did a lot of shopping in this duty free port. I bought stereos, the latest records, cameras, perfumes-the lot, I was cashed up and as I hadn't seen my family for a long time, I wanted to buy fairly good presents for them. The ship had a stop at Sicily and Messina and Taormina were out of this world. Looking at Mt Etna was awesome, yet funnily enough it reminded me of the fireworks I had as boy 'Vesuvius' 'Etna', the little conical fireworks, and here I was standing looking at the real thing. From Sicily on to Naples-I would never drive in Naples! A day visit to Pisa and then by train through Northern Italy and France, to Paris. I was really enjoying myself.

In Paris I bought a copy of 'Lady Chatterley's Lover' as there had been something in the press about it and I was curious. It seems 'the something in the press' was, that it had been banned in Britain and here I was on the cross channel ferry bound for Dover! The customs did indeed give me a hard time, not over the book but on the amount of 'stuff' I had brought as gifts for friends and family. My suitcases were emptied and all these gifts were lined up- Mr Doughty, that was the name of my inquisitor. I have never forgotten it.

His colleagues, from time to time, came over to have a look at the booty. By the time I was finally cleared, four ferries had come and gone and the day trippers, with their bottle of duty free French perfume, had a long look at my spread out stuff! Nineteen pounds duty (which I could afford) was charged and I packed up and went happily on my way thinking that if I ever met Mr Doughty in different circumstances, I would have a few choice words to say to him for the embarrassment he caused.

From Dover, I travelled to Poole where I picked up the hire car that the company had arranged-a nice Riley 4/72. Much better than the Ambassador, ASE 685, that I had left at Namdang!

I had someone to meet in London, who stayed at Golders Green so I bought a map and set out. One thing I learnt is: do not try to read a map while waiting at traffic lights!! A horn sounded behind me as the lights changed.... and I ran into the back of the car in front!! Fortunately the owner was a Minister of Religion so he did not abuse me too much! But he did say "That was clever" I stayed a couple of days in London and John and Marion Phillips took me to lunch. After lunch, John could hardly contain himself and wanted to show me something.

In the rooming houses at Paddington, he pointed to signs on the front doors, with great glee.

NO COLOURED OR IRISH

(this, of course, was prior to the anti-discrimination laws that were eventually passed in Britain but I had a laugh along with John)

While driving to Stoke on the M1 Motorway a truck way up ahead must have thrown a stone-it shattered the windscreen and I was blinded for quite a few seconds. By punching a hole I was able to see but my face and hair were full of little pieces of glass. I was beginning to think that me and this car were not compatible! I made it to Stoke by late evening and after a few weeks with my Mum and family, I was off to Belfast on the Stranraer/Larne ferry to visit my brother.

In India, as I was preparing to go on leave to the UK Jimmy Beven had just returned. He gave me an EP record of a new singing group called 'The Beatles' and he said that were destined for big things and that I would no doubt hear more of them when I was on leave. I most certainly did! The EP that Jimmy gave me had the very early Beatles songs '*Love me do*' '*Thank you girl*' '*She loves you*' '*I want to hold your hand*'

When I arrived in Belfast I soon realized that there was a music revolution happening all over the British Isles, -the TV programmes, the pirate radio stations were all churning out great music. I had noted that many of the budding musicians seemed like just average people so I thought, if they can do it, I can do it! On an impulse I went to the biggest music shop in town and looked at a few guitars. While I was doing this a young lad came in, selected a guitar, plugged it into an amplifier, and let fly. It was very impressive and I later learnt that he was the lead guitarist from Van Morrison's band 'THEM' (Van Morrison lived about 50 yards from us in 'Hindford Street')

I ended up buying a guitar that had two pick ups and a tremolo arm. I also bought an amplifier with two input jacks and finally I bought a book called 'TEACH YOURSELF TO PLAY IN A DAY"

I don't think I was able to tune the guitar in a day let alone play. So, as my leave was rapidly drawing to a close, I went to have guitar lessons. The man I went to was a bit of a purist and played classical guitar. He put me on running up and down monotonous scales and after the second day I had the temerity to ask him if he could teach me a few Cliff Richard pop song chords as I would soon have to leave to return to India. While he muttered that the request was somewhat unorthodox, he nevertheless complied and I eventually left Ireland's shores being able to play three chords in two keys!



Gully Gully Men at Port Said



P & O Liner 'HIMALAYA'

The ship back to Bombay was the 'Himalaya' and there were a number of planters on board-**John Wetherall** was from South India while **George Barrie and Ralph Twist** were from Assam. George was an accomplished saxophone player and was stationed at Misa. I later learnt that George could be quite cantankerous at times and this was in evidence at the AGM meetings of Misa Club.

Bill Addison told me that at one meeting the President started with “Before I formally open this meeting I would like George Barrie to acknowledge that the toilet door is painted green” George concurred and said it was green. “Thank you, George, for that, Ladies and Gentlemen, I would ask you to note that this is the first and only time that George and I will agree on anything this evening” “The Meeting is now opened”!

Ralph Twist eventually retired to Upper Shillong and when I visited there I usually brought him a very large jar of Marmite or Promite. He had a wealth of stories and I wish I had recorded them. He was the son of a prominent Land Agent in London and he told me that the family at one time owned the land on which Lord's Cricket ground now stands. In Shillong, Ralph was always impeccably groomed, wearing a three piece suit with either a tie or cravat. He would do his own 'Bazaar' in the Shillong Bazar Bazaar.

He was a renowned 'Water Diviner' (known locally, somewhat disparagingly I thought, as ‘the Paniwala’!) and he pointed the stick to many sources of water all over Shillong, our house included. Sadly, Ralph died on the 2nd January 2004 in Shillong. George Barrie also died after a long confinement in Cattray Nursing Home in Scotland.

When I returned from leave and made my way to Namdang I proudly showed Bob Jones the guitar and all that went with it.

CHAPTER 12

After Home Leave.

I have not mentioned what all the virile young bachelors did when they were not working, drinking, playing sport or other physical activities and I will only briefly touch the subject.

Simon Penney told a story of an new assistant who arrived in the earlier days and was met by a Mr Connell who was a senior manager of the Makum Company and an assistant, Jim Maltby. After the niceties had been exchanged and exhausted the new assistant asked "what does one do for one's oats about here"? And Connell, after a Hmpff or two said "you'd better speak to Maltby about that, he knows about these things!"

Suffice it say that we did alright and in fact were the envy of assistants from other districts who often wanted to spend the weekend with us. We, after all, had AR&T and the Assam Oil Company on our doorstep and were rarely short of female company. Nuff said!

Bob and I practised diligently on our guitars and gradually started to sound a little bit musical. Bob wrote to his Mum requesting an upgrade to a semi acoustic Hofner guitar. We gave my solid guitar to the Namdang carpenter to copy the solid body and neck. With pick ups from Hong Kong and a fretboard from Calcutta, we had a four stringed bass guitar which we gave to Douglas Russell. We were almost in business!

The Drummer found us-Ron Aston from Rangagora, of the Jokai Company. He was a lovely, lovely Liverpudlian and a very accomplished drummer indeed. He had sat in on some jamming sessions with the Silver Beatles in the Cavern Club before they were famous. Ron could twiddle and spin the sticks and beat so fast they were a blur. We had an arrangement with Digboi Club that if we could borrow and use their drums we would play at any of their functions (when we were good enough)

The first tune we learnt was 'Blue Moon' and Austin and Muriel Rufus invited us to their daughter Lesley's Birthday party (she was three) and told us to bring the guitars. *(Lesleys husband is currently manager of BehaliTE and Lesley is an Administrator in the WM's school at Tezpur)*

We put in extra practice and had mastered three tunes for this debut event-one for each year of Lesley's Birthday! When we set the gear up we knew the listeners were all friends so they would be sympathetic. Chris Gathorne called out play 'Blue Moon' -Bless him-he knew.

It went off reasonably well but we spent the next 15 minutes in another room analysing the tape recording of the tunes just played-and noting the mistakes!

Some visits to Shillong, help from the Vanguards and from Peter Baxter, and practice, got us to a reasonable standard. We didn't sing, although we could all hold a tune-because we could not work out how to prevent noisy feedback through the microphone. So we played instrumentals,the Shadows and Ventures tunes. We improved but I kept saying we needed to get better.

Ron came to us one day and said his Superintendent's daughter was coming out from the UK and they were holding a Birthday party for her at Panitola Club. He wanted us to provide the music. I told Ron to tell him that we weren't good enough as yet. Ron came back the next day saying that his Superintendent was going to sack him if we didn't play. So we agreed!

Panitola club was beautifully decorated and we got there early and had the guitars in perfect tune. Contrary to our fears, it was a great success and we carried the dance till midnight before we started repeating our tunes!



Margherita Club circa 1965
THE MUDGUARDS: Bob Powell-Jones..Larry Brown...Ron Aston

Thereafter we played at Margherita, Digboi, Tingrai, Doom Dooma, Panitola, Dibrugarh and Mariani. We never took payment and drinks were 'on the house' (not that we had much time to drink!)

Through all our visits to Shillong, ostensibly to learn the guitar, a young lady called Dorothy became Bob's centre of attention. The visits to Shillong (to learn the guitar of course) became more frequent and even if a Pujah holiday of only a few days came up Bob and I hit the road. Usually we were having such a good time there that we cut return times very fine which meant we sometimes would be driving late pm early am to make a garden 7 am start. On one visit we left Shillong at 9 pm and were making good time until we got to Jagi Road when the dynamo packed in. It was a full moon that night so we conserved the battery by driving without lights by moonlight. We managed to get to Nowgong(a long, long way from Jagi Road) where the battery finally died. We had stopped in a reasonably well lit area and a young Assamese Muslim enquired if we were okay. We explained the situation and he came back with his father who immediately sent for a mechanic/electrician friend. The dynamo was out in no time and off to a workshop. It was explained that it would take a few hours and we were invited to join the family for a meal. We did accept this kind offer and Bob and I were then given a bedroom to rest in while awaiting the return of the dynamo. It was fixed and installed by 4am and after profuse thanks-and having to force money on them for the repairs, we were on our way. As I write this I reflect on just how it used to be. Myself and Bob have never forgotten the kindness that was shown to us and we have often talked about it. It is sad that today's tea planters will not have experiences like we have had.

We made it back-were mildly reprimanded and made a mental note that we would depart from Shillong a bit earlier the next time.

Bob Jones recently reminded me of the early days in Shillong after a wild night of partying, when in the Ambassador ASE 685 , my car. This was filled to capacity with the Vanguard band members, Bob Jones and I and some girls from the parties whom we were to take to their homes when we took a blind turn in Shillong and were confronted by “Jacobs Ladder” This was a steep series of steps for pedestrian access to another road. In our inebriated state this presented no obstacle to us, we reversed, gathered some speed. And flew over the 100 or so steps much to the delight of the 10 plus passengers in the car!! A short time later the car was parked at a nearby service station as it could go no further with a ripped out oil sump!!

In the meantime I was having romantic dalliances myself. I had noticed this beautiful girl at a house in Makum Junction. I made delicate overtures in contacting her parents and one evening was invited to their house so that they could give me the once over. We lived together for a while but to cut a long story short 40 + years later we have four beautiful daughters, live in Australia, and have nice properties in Shillong. All the girls speak fluent Hindi and Khasi plus smatterings of Bengali, and Assamese-and Pidgin! The eldest (Sharon) is in Arizona where she and her husband have their own business. No 2 (Natasha) has a Tourist Magazine and a position also with Apple Marketing. No3 (Laleny) came in the top five of the Miss World India Pageant held in Durban in 2002. She has degrees in Law and Psychology and works for the Defence Department in Canberra. The 'littlest' one (Sheenagh) was schooled for four years at Woodstock School in Mussoorie and now is Manager of an upmarket dress shop. Me: I'm just a maudlin' getting old but proud tea planter!!



Big Sister Sharon on her Wedding Day



Natasha (No 2 daughter)



Lalinya (No 3 Daughter) at a Beauty Pageant in S.Africa



Sheenagh (No 4 daughter) –the ‘Kah Duh’ (youngest) in Khasi Society

End of Part One