

Our Alma Mater – St Anthony’s 160 years on

by Franklyn Amerasinghe (Colombo)



And Adam said to Evethere seems to be a leaf missing’ – From an infamous sermon when the Priest lost his second page from his sermon and couldn’t continue the story of the biblical fall!!

Aha! I am sure I now have your attention! But, this ‘emasculated joke’ (shortened by circumstances of forced editorial brevity) has significance for us. This article will attempt the impossible of encapsulating the history and ethos of an organization which has defied time and trying times, to stand tall as an excellent institution carrying on rich traditions. It lacks many leaves and does not cover as much as Eve would have liked to cover!

An educational organization is not to be evaluated like any other, and the litmus test is whether we as past students could say verily, St. Anthony’s was a second mother to us. To me, I would say that the evaluation firstly, comprises looking at the historical characters in the form of Principals and Teachers who constructed the infrastructure and moulded the school, properly nurturing the cohort of students into worthwhile citizens, whether they remained in Sri Lanka or sought fresh pastures abroad. I would include as the second element whether the organization provided a fertile pasture for the students to ruminate and build their own distinctive characters and establish friendships of a lasting nature. I think your gathering today is indicative of success in this second element. The close bond among Antonians is commendable.

The founder of SACK was Fr. Zoppi a Franciscan who was not originally slated to come to Ceylon - but serendipitously - on his way from his missionary work in China back to Europe - was diverted by Bishop Bravi who was Co-adjutor to the Vicar Apostolic of Colombo, to be missionary in charge of Kandy. It is reported that he was the initiator of both the school which became Good Shepherd Convent, Kandy and SACK. Fr. Rosati, our Principal in centenary year had this to say about Monsignor Bravi, the second character of significance: “ the first of our order (OSB) to come to Ceylon, a man

who combined deep scholarship and administrative ability, a wide culture, and a high sense of refinement, the early St. Anthony’s owed almost everything , even as history records it, to the extent of having books sent by him all the way from Colombo during a period when commercial communication was maintained by the Kandy Commercial Coach...” Monsignor Sillani also is remembered with great gratitude as he fought a lone battle to obtain state aid for the school, which eventually came in 1869 to our school and thanks to Silani to others as well!

Two Principals in the early years who built the school premises in Kandy were identified as Fr. Maurus Craner and Fr. James Caspersz, the latter of whom built the first science laboratories for the school.

Two personalities to be remembered in relation to the shift to Katugastota and the setting up of the College, as we know it, are Bishop Bede Beckmeyer, who was an old boy and Fr. Lawrence Hyde also an old boy. Much is owed to Fr. Hyde who apparently faced daunting financial odds in developing the College. As students we were told that the adage was that Antonians were thick skinned as we had two Hi(y)des, a reference to Lawrence and Basil, two Principals. We however had during our time ‘Three Hides’ (Royston, Basil and Cuthbert),



Rev. Fr. Dom Lawrence Hyde, OSB (Principal 1921–1943) and Rev. Fr. D. Angelo Rosati, OSB (Principal 1944–1957)

Fr. Lawrence Hyde, was succeeded by Fr. Rosati who was responsible for constructing that magnificent edifice which we proudly claim as our school hall. He was the Principal of the school in the Centenary year and the school was greatly honoured by its ability to attract as the chief guest Viscount Soulbury, who was just about to depart from

Sri Lanka. It is also interesting that for the Chief Guest at the Centenary dinner the Chief Guest was Sir Oliver Goonetilleke who took over as Governor General. In his speech he recalled the trying times that Fr. Hyde had successfully navigated in the war years when the premises were occupied by the forces. He also identified some old Antonians who had done the school proud such as Robert Wright, and NH Keerthiratne (the father of Mihindu and a Minister of the same vintage of MD Banda) both extraordinary boxers as well as all round sportsmen. He also spoke of Sir Cyril E.S. Pereira, QC, who was an Old Antonian and also a teacher for a time before he became a practicing lawyer. Sir Cyril was also a Member of Parliament and an entrepreneur of note. Sir Oliver referred to MD Banda, who was the Minister of Education, as: "a man who is not prepared to sell his conscience or the principles of his belief for any short lived popularity." A trait that we Antonians have been known to carry.

St. Anthony's, we will not tire of stating owes, much to great teachers and coaches like Fr. Columban, PBA Weerakoon, George Macky, Robert Wright, George Denlow, Dr. Arasanayagam, Kannaiah, MS Mendis and many others too numerous to name. They made it possible for us to become what we are.

In terms of role models in sport, we have many heroes to be proud of. Let me start with the Cricketers: Jack Anderson, ACM Lafir, Charlie Joseph, W. Premaratne, Franklyn Burke, Muralitharan, the Kalpage brothers, Marlon Von Hagt, Bernard Perera and Mahes Goonetilleke. In Rugby we have produced Priyantha Ekanayake, Gavin Stevens, Chan Fa and Dole. Some of the great athletes such as RAF Perera, Rajaguru, Ivan Boteju, Steven Joseph, Kenny and Bunny Stevens come to mind and in soccer, one can't go past TOM Deen. I must mention separately Ranjith Samarasekera who was a record breaker in Athletics and an outstanding cricketer as well. However, his contribution to the school as an old-boy marks him out for extra special recognition. The school is said to have produced many national champions in Badminton as well.

In public life we have produced many eminent personalities. Pride of place should be given to the four Tennekoon brothers – Herbert who became Governor of the Central Bank and was also an Ambassador; Reginald who was a lawyer became a Member of Parliament, Victor was the Chief Justice and George became the Dean of the Faculty of Medicine having been Professor of Pathology. We have produced a Governor General – William Gopallawa; and Ministers MD Banda, NH Keerthiratne, ACS Hameed, KDMC Bandara and TB Ilangaratne. We also produced another Chief Justice – Asoka de Silva and Judges Victor Perera and Dr.ARB Amerasinghe who graced the Supreme Court. Dr Amerasinghe was also Chairman of the Law Commission (his judgment in the Eppawela Phosphate case against the government established the principle that the State could not utilize the natural resources of the country to the detriment of future generations). Which reminds me of Prof. C Surikumaran, who won the coveted Bede Memorial medal in 1940 and was the head of the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP). And the world renowned scientist, Dr Malik Peiris who discovered the SARS virus. The roll of honour could go on and on, but this is not about celebrating the success of individuals but of saluting the great school which produced them.

I must say that modern communications have helped us to be more in touch globally and see and hear voices from the past all bonded together by a love of a school which had something special about it. The bonding is by the super- glue provided by an institution with visionary Principals and Teachers who imparted everlasting and ever true values.

Enjoy the occasion and raise your voices in praise of the Maroon, Double Blue, our standard, which flutters all over the world!!

