

## DEPARTMENTAL NOTES

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### HISTORICAL SUMMARY OF TOBACCO EXPERIMENTS IN CEYLON

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**E**XPERIMENTS with tobacco in the Island have been conducted with a view to the production of a commodity suited to the European market. Systematic attempts in this direction, under the auspices of Government, date from the Mahallupalama trials conducted by the Ceylon Agricultural Society, which was the forerunner of the Department, in 1910.

I. The Ceylon Agricultural Society decided to experiment for one year in the production of a leaf for the European market. Twenty acres were to be opened under Sumatra and Java varieties at Mahallupalama. As it was considered inexpedient to engage the services of an expert, which would have entailed heavy expenditure, supervision of the experiment was entrusted to Mr. E. Cowan while the work was to be carried out by the Manager of the Mahallupalama Station.

In 1910 about 25 acres were planted with Sumatra and Java varieties ; in 1911 only Sumatra tobacco was planted ; the Society then dropped the scheme and work was continued on behalf of the Botanic Gardens Department.

In 1911 Mr. J. Van Leenhoff, Tobacco Expert to the Transvaal Government, visited Ceylon on a private engagement. His services were thereupon requisitioned by the Ceylon Agricultural Society to report on the Mahallupalama experiment and by Government to report on the tobacco industry in general.

The opinion of Mr. Van Leenhoff regarding the Mahallupalama experiment was that it was badly carried out and work should be stopped at once, and an expert in tobacco should conduct the work in future.

Mr. Van Leenhoff's views regarding tobacco in general, which formed the basis of future work, were as follows :

“ At present the area devoted to chewing tobacco largely exceeds that occupied by cigar tobacco, a state of affairs which

may be reversed in view of the fact that the only export market for the chewing tobacco, South India, may cease to be available.

The aim should be to abandon a large part of those fields where tobacco is grown at present and to start tobacco culture on land in localities where there are possibilities for cigar and cigarette tobacco."

His final conclusion was that taking all the facts into consideration, it seemed worth while to continue experimental work in Ceylon, since the prospects of growing and curing a tobacco suitable for export to Europe were not unpromising. It was essential that such experimental work should be prolonged, and that it should be conducted under expert supervision, both with cigar tobacco and tobacco of the Virginian type.

(The Department of Agriculture was established in 1912).

II. The first tobacco expert, Mr. B. F. Scherffius, arrived in Ceylon in May, 1914.

Land for a trial ground was secured at Tinnevely, Jaffna.

The object of the work was to ascertain whether good class leaf cannot be produced for the European market.

Several varieties comprising pipe, chewing, cigarette, wrapper and filler tobaccos were planted, of which a few kinds were selected for experimental work.

In 1917 after 3 years' work Mr. Scherffius came to the following conclusions :

(1) flue-cured tobacco could not be produced under the soil and climatic conditions of Jaffna ;

(2) the production of a high grade tobacco of the cigar type suitable for European markets was unlikely owing to the bad burning qualities caused by excess of chlorine ;

(3) the results by the trials with air-cured White Burley tobaccos for pipe and cigarettes were encouraging and worthy of being continued on a more extensive scale.

Mr. Scherffius left on the termination of his agreement in 1917.

In 1916 trials were also conducted on the Anuradhapura Experiment Station ; three varieties were grown ; growth was as good as in Jaffna ; the crop was air-cured and sent to Jaffna for final treatment.

The object of work in Jaffna thence forward was to popularise the cultivation of White Burley.

During the next few years White Burley was cultivated on the Jaffna station as a commercial crop and the cured leaf was sent to the Crown Agents in London for disposal. The 1919 crop realised 1s. 9d. a lb. and the reports on quality were encouraging. In 1920 propaganda work was carried out to popularise the cultivation of this crop which the Department undertook to purchase in the form of green plants from growers at the rate of 8 cents to 20 cents per plant. In 1923 there were 27 growers of White Burley and the crop realised 1s. 6d. in London. In 1934 Government inaugurated a Purchase Scheme worked by the Agricultural Department whereby cultivators received part payment for their produce, the balance being paid on completion of sale in London. The crops which were cured by growers were brought to the Jaffna Station for grading and baling before dispatch to the Crown Agents. This scheme operated till 1932 when the Jaffna White Burley Tobacco Sale Society was formed. The number of growers has varied each year. During the period 1925 to 1930 the number respectively was 268, 219, 166, 250, 270 and 243. Since then there has been a falling off and in 1934 the number was 158.

Prices have fluctuated between 1s. 1½d. and 1s. 9d. a lb. and since 1929 a drop has taken place.

The total production of White Burley tobacco in Jaffna rose to 28,386 lb. in 1928. In the three years 1932-1934 the figures were 11,140 lb., 15,175 lb. and 22,708 lb. In his report for 1932 the Director of Agriculture drew attention to the necessity of standardising Ceylon produced White Burley as difficulty was being experienced in selling the tobacco in the London markets at prices which prevailed in previous years. Since the formation of the Co-operative Sale Society, reports have been received of the deterioration of quality of Ceylon grown White Burley. The price secured for the 1934 crop was 8d. to 1s. 3d. a lb. and the 1935 crop still lies in the hands of the Co-operative Sale Society.

III. In November, 1918, Mr. W. B. Wilson arrived and was appointed as Tobacco Expert to take charge of the work at Jaffna and also establish an experiment at Teldeniya.

Foundation trials for more intensive experiments, variety tests and general observations were laid down at Teldeniya.

Eleven varieties were transplanted in April, 1919.

The crops were harvested and had to be brought over to the Experiment Station, Peradeniya, for fermenting and grading as Mr. Wilson, whose services were engaged in the first instance for one year, resigned in November, 1919.

The work was then carried on by the Manager, Experiment Station, Peradeniya, and Acting Divisional Agricultural Officer, Central, whose report for 1920 stated that 6 acres were planted out. In the report for 1921 it was stated that there was no market for the 1919-20 crops sent to England and India. Therefore the manufacture of cigars was undertaken with the crop in hand. The Teldeniya site was given up and work transferred to the newly opened agricultural station at Nalanda where, after a while, tobacco ceased to be grown.

IV. In 1923, the Director of Agriculture drew attention to the visit of representatives of the British American and Imperial Tobacco Companies and of the Indian Leaf Tobacco Development Company, all of whom confirmed the view that the only types of Ceylon tobacco suitable for the European markets were the Burley types and recommended that the trials already made with these types in the Jaffna district should be extended to others. The recommendations more precisely were: (1) White Burley in Jaffna and possibly elsewhere should be continued; (2) attempts should be made to grow a thin cigar wrapper leaf in the Dumbara area; (3) experiments should be made with flue-curing.

V. In 1931 White Burley, was tried in Tamankaduwa and on the agricultural stations at Vavuniya, Anuradhapura and Ganewatte. At Ganewatte experiments were inaugurated to determine the best means of curing for which purpose a small flue-curing shed was constructed.

Since then systematic work has been conducted on both Ganewatte and Wariyapola stations.

In 1933, a suitable type, *viz.*, Harrison's Special for cigarettes was selected and grown at Wariyapola and Ganewatte, and two flue-curing barns erected.

VI. In 1934, The Ceylon Tobacco Co., Ltd., arranged for a visit by Mr. Cooper, an American expert, who spent 3 weeks at Ganewatte and Wariyapola and gave a thorough demonstration in the handling of the tobacco crop, besides conducting training classes which a number of Agricultural Instructors attended.

Four flue-curing barns were constructed, 2 at Ganewatte, 1 at Wariyapola and 1 at Maho.