

DEPARTMENTAL NOTES

TREES: MEMORIAL AND HISTORICAL

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IT has become customary in most countries to commemorate times of public rejoicing, visits of royal personages and similar occasions by planting trees. The coronation of Their Majesties King George VI and Queen Elizabeth on 12th May, 1937, was such an occasion, and from the demands met by the three botanical gardens of the Department of Agriculture, in addition to plants known to have been supplied from private sources for this purpose, it can be inferred that the people of Ceylon did not lag behind those in other parts of the Empire in commemorating this important national event. Peradeniya Gardens supplied for this purpose 3,200 plants of which 2,600 were fruit plants; the gardens at Hakgala supplied 388 plants of which 228 were fruit plants; and Heneratgoda Gardens 590 of which 360 were fruit plants. Several local residents also raised supplies of jak and other fruit plants for free distribution to villagers and others on this occasion.

In England the planting of large numbers of trees at this time was foreseen and a special coronation planting committee was formed long in advance. The plantings were there regarded as likely to become of historical interest. Selections of useful varieties of trees were made and suitable labels of a permanent character provided. For the latter purpose, the committee designed a plaque in three styles and two sizes in white metal with silver letters on a black ground or black letters on a silver ground.

In Ceylon large numbers of copies of a list of selected flowering, shade, spice and fruit trees suitable for the occasion,

together with general instructions to be followed when planting such trees and notes on their subsequent care, were issued from the Royal Botanic Gardens, Peradeniya.

The event was not overlooked at Peradeniya and it was commemorated by the planting of a handsome flowering tree by Mrs. E. Rodrigo, wife of the Acting Director of Agriculture, in the Royal Botanic Gardens. The tree so planted was a pink form of *Lagerstroemia Flos-reginae* (*S. muruta*) a tree indigenous to Ceylon. This is a strikingly handsome flowering tree of the mid-country, which flowers profusely in large showy panicles of pink flowers from April to July. Not only is the tree a very suitable one in itself for the occasion but its specific name *Flos-reginae*, indicating as it does a royal flower, is also applicable to the occasion. It was mentioned at the tree-planting ceremony that in the Royal Botanic Gardens there have been many similar plantings to commemorate visits and other interesting events.

The first of these, as far as can be ascertained from records, was the planting of a 'Bo' tree (*Ficus religiosa*) by King Edward VII in 1875.

The second occasion was the planting of a 'Na' tree (*Mesua ferrea*) by the Tsar of Russia in 1891.

In 1899, Prince Henry of Prussia on his visit to the Gardens planted a Flamboyante (*Delonix (Poinciana) regia*) near the trees mentioned above.

A 'Cannon Ball' tree (*Couroupita guianensis*) was planted to commemorate the visit of King George V and Queen Mary in 1901.

In 1902, an African breadfruit tree (*Treculia africana*) was planted by Mrs. J. C. Carruthers, wife of the Acting Director of Botanic Gardens, to commemorate King Edward VII's coronation.

The next planting was in 1911 of a 'Horse Cassia,' (*Cassia grandis*), by Mrs. J. C. Willis, wife of the Director of Botanic Gardens, to commemorate King George V's coronation.

In 1919, to commemorate the cessation of the Great War, a plant of the beautiful *Tabebuia rosea* was planted by Lady Stockdale, wife of the Director of Agriculture.

A few years later, in April 1922, H. R. H. the Duke of Windsor, when Prince of Wales, planted a 'Munamal' tree (*Mimusops Elengi*) to commemorate his visit. This was a departure from the custom of planting a flowering tree since 'Munamal' is noted chiefly for its medicinal uses, of which it has many.

In 1925, H. M. the King of the Belgians visited the Gardens and planted a tree of the well-known 'Queen of Flowering Trees' (*Amherstia nobilis*) a row of which border the entrance to the Royal Botanic Gardens. Subsequently a specimen of the 'Orchid Tree' (*Monodora tenuifolia*) was planted by H. R. H. the Duke of Gloucester in 1929 to commemorate his visit to the Gardens.

All these trees have been planted around the Great Circle and undoubtedly no better locality could have been chosen as a site for these now historical trees. It is extremely satisfactory to note that, with one exception, all survive and are flourishing, the exception having been uprooted and fatally damaged many years ago in a storm.