

**The Early Missionaries of the Baptist Missionary Society ,**  
**and the Establishment of the Madampe Baptist Church.**

By Nihal Munasinha- Madampe Baptist Church.

After the occupation of our Maritime Provinces by the British, In the year 1812, Baptist were probably the pioneers among the protestant Christians who pioneered the spread of the Christian Gospel among the natives. Rev. James Chater who was born on 6th February 1779 was send to Serempore in North India by the Baptist Missionary Society of England. He was opposed by the Government and went instead to Burma. He retired from Burma due to the war and the failing health of his wife Anna Debora, they arrive in Colombo on the 18<sup>th</sup> April 1812, and commenced preaching in 1813 in a dis-used warehouse in the Pettah, probably behind a shop in the North side of Prince Street, just west of the old Dutch Governor's residence; Five years after his arrival Rev. Chater settled at Grandpass, and built a residence and a chapel there. The church which was formed there was the first native Baptist Church in the island. He died on the ship *Seppings* on 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> January 1829 on his voyage home for recovery of his health leaving a widow in Ceylon and 8 orphaned children in England. Rev Chatter's first convert was a Buddhist priest, named Theophiles,



Figure 1

*[The white colonnaded building is the Dutch Museum (former Dutch Governor's residence, about 1690),*

*Looking westwards down Prince Street, the Pettah, Colombo, in 1983.*

*Chapel Lane heads off to the right between the two yellow buildings in the foreground.*

*The single storied yellow building next to the white Museum building may have been the old Pettah Chapel, unless it was just to the rear of it.]*



*[A reverse view up Prince Street, looking east. The Dutch Museum in the left middle distance.  
Chapel Lane is at the other end of the Museum building]*

Rev. Chater was succeeded by Rev. Ebenezer Danial born on 6<sup>th</sup> September 1784. Who had been a Baptist pastor since 1821, he arrived in Colombo on 14<sup>th</sup> August 1830 with his wife Sarah and three daughters. On his arrival he found that the work that was started and carried out by Rev. Chater single-handed for so long was languishing. But Rev. Danial's apostolic fervor soon revived the mission, and his manifold activities during the 14 years he served this country and the Baptist Mission is remembered

In the year 1834 three youth from Madampe had gone to Colombo to receive education, during which time there had been a flood which had inundated north of Colombo. The three youth, Daberera, Gunaratne, and Jayawardene had witness Rev. Danial kneeling and praying to God, to prevent the flood waters spreading further. While he was praying the waters had come up to the point he was and thereafter subsided. After witnessing this they were convinced of this foreigner's faith and were converted to Christianity. On their return to their home town Madampe they initiated the move to establish a Baptist Church in Madampe.

In 1835 Mrs. Danial and her three daughters who had been involve in missionary work among the native women and girls had to leave the island on account of broken health and Mrs. Danial died a fortnight before the boat reached England. By the end of the year Rev. Danial had many new village stations and fresh schools thus it necessitated another Missionary from England for which a request was made in the year 1836.

On 2<sup>nd</sup> November 1838 Rev. Joseph Harris from Saint Albans arrive in the island, with his wife and family at that time the total membership was 135. There were six stations served by two Europeans and five native missionaries, 17 schools containing about 450 children. In 1839 the rapid extension of missionary work and there encouraging results necessitated still more help from England and a printing press was urgently applied for.

In 1841 Rev. Charles C Dawson with his wife Susanna and family, arrived and was stationed in Kandy. Very short time tracts and school books were printed in Sinhalese and in Portuguese.

In 1844 Rev. Danial died. Nothing could bear better testimony to his worth and excellence than the feverish suspense in which the whole community was placed during the short period of his illness. Persons of all classes and ranks, Protestants of other denominations including Buddhist either visited his sick-chambers or made anxious inquiries of his state.

On 16<sup>th</sup> September 1844 Rev. Jacob Davis of Winchester, with his wife Elaza arrived in Colombo he died in Colombo in November 1849 aged 33.

In January 1846, Rev. James Allen who was born on 16 April 1810, arrived in Colombo with his wife Jane and two Daughters, his third son was born in Kandy in 1848. He was responsible for building a new chapel in Pettah in 1851, he died on 30 April 1866.

In March 1851 Rev. Harris with his wife and three children sailed for England, their ship foundering during a storm in the Indian Ocean loss all on board.

In 1853 Rev. Charles Carter arrived in Colombo at a time the membership had reached 500. By the year 1858 Rev. Carter began the translation of the New Testament to Sinhala direct from Greek. The first edition was issued 5 years later

1862 Rev. Hendry Robert Pigott was appointed as assistant to Rev. Fredrick D Waldock.

By the year 1864 The Grandpass Baptist Church was self-supporting.

1866 Rev. Allen Died.

The Mission Herald of October 1889 reports the establishment of a mission point at Madampe.

On 21 January 1870 the foundation stone was laid for the construction of a Church in Madampe, on a land donated by Don Davith Wijesundara Gunasekara, Sandaratnes and C E Corea. Which consisted three blocks of land, and on 6<sup>th</sup> April the same year this Church was dedicated by Rev. Hendry Robert Pigott. It was the beginning of the spreading of the gospel in the North Western Province of the Island. By 1871 a Sinhala school was established by the Baptist in Madampe.

Madampe Baptist Church has had its ups and downs in the course of the 150 years of long history.. In the year 1915 the Baptist Missionary Society conferred local autonomy upon their various congregations. One of the privileges of this local autonomy was that the congregation should support their owe minister, another was that they should have certain powers of church government. The Central Society maintained a certain measure of control over the local congregation by means of its title to the properties on which they worshipped, therefore they did not vest the properties in the congregation. During this period the minister in charge of the church was one Rev. Jayawardena. To gather with him a certain section of the Congregation decided to be independent of the Central Society, which led to a dispute and. The Central Society gave notice on 27<sup>th</sup> February 1916 to the congregation to quit and restore possession of the premises on April 1<sup>st</sup> 1916. Failure to comply with this notice the Central Society instituted action in the District court Chilaw to eject the minister in charge Rev. Jayawardena and the congregation and restore possession of the property . The District Judges ordered was in favour of the Baptist Missionary society and thus Rev. Jayawardene and part of the congregation appealed "The Baptist Missionary Society Vs. Jayawardene ( 90-DC. Chilaw, 5 502 - 1918 ) The Supreme Court too dismissed the action with cost and ordered the congregation and the minister to quit the premises and restore the possession to the Baptist Missionary society.

Arising out of this matter a subsequent case Jayawardene vs. The Baptist Missionary Society. 393-D C Chilaw 6,777 as reported in 25 N L R 97 the court was of the view that the Congregation is not an entity as its members are constantly changing.



*Rev. Henry Robert Pigott.*

**Rev. Pigott** and his wife Ellen initially settled into a house in Mattakuliyah, a northern suburb of Colombo. where their first child, Annie, was born in March 1863.

In the same month, it was reported that Rev. Pigott was "*...sedulously attending to the language, to which he devotes nearly all his time, preaching once Lord's Day at the Pettah Chapel.*"

The July 1863 issue of the Baptist Missionary Herald reported that:

*"The Church at Pettah has kindly arranged to assist Rev. **PIGOTT** by sending some of their number as deputies to the stations in the Jungle. The attendance at the new chapel in Mattakuliyah continues good. Rev. **PIGOTT** has, however, visited most of the stations, and particularly examined the schools. He preaches twice at the Pettah chapel each Lord's day."*

By April 1864, the **PIGOTT**s had moved to Slave Island, a suburb about 2 km east of Fort, to be nearer the Baptist Chapel in Pettah, the market district of the city, in a building which was built in 1851, on the north side of Prince Street, Pettah, probably on the corner of Chapel Lane, about two doors west of the historic and elegant Dutch Museum (see above).

Here, Rev **Henry** and Ellen's next two children, Aileen and Frank were born.

The Missionary Herald of November 1864 reported:

*"Mr **PIGOTT**, in addition to his Sinhalese work, has begun a service in the Fort, and another in the Jail. Mrs **PIGOTT** also visits the Jail once a week to instruct the Sinhalese and Tamil prisoners."*

By February 1865, **Henry** was "*much encouraged*" by the prospect of having three Europeans to baptize. But he must have been dis-heartened in the next month, when they lost baby Aileen, and he and Ellen were forced to go to a coffee plantation 13 miles from Gampola, for the restoration of Ellen's health, she being then already six months pregnant with their third child.

And the Missionary Herald of September 1865 recorded a bigger work schedule for **Henry**:

*"Sunday: Pettah Chapel, preaching twice. Tuesday: Preach at Fort. Wednesday: Prayer meeting. Thursday: 4 p.m. Preach at Wadicalle Jail, 7 p.m. Mission House, Maradana. Friday: Preach in Fort."*

During this time, Ellen had opened a limited free school for poor girls in Matakuliyah, which was delayed by lack of funds until July 1863. By 30 June 1864, Treasurer **Henry PIGOTT** was able to report that there were five free pupils, and one paid, with accounts amounting to £72. The teacher was Donna Velloe PERERA. By 1865, there were nine pupils, and in 1866, Ellen took over Mrs ALLEN's school, when that lady returned to England due to ill health - this school had been intended to train young women to go into the countryside and evangelize the natives, but that aim was modified after Ellen PIGOTT took over.

In 1865, **Henry** was presented with an inscribed gold fob watch; it marked three years in Ceylon, which may have been an original "contract" commitment which his parishioners were keen to see extended?



*[Gold fob watch presented to **Henry** in Colombo in 1865 - still in family possession.]*

**Henry**'s name, mis-spelled as PIGGOTT, is recorded on a List of Pastors which is hanging on a wall in the vestibule of the Cinnamon Gardens Baptist Chapel. This building was not built until 1877, so it is evident that the dates for **Henry**, 1863-1868, are for the period he served at the Pettah.



*[Photos of the Cinnamon Gardens Baptist Chapel, Colombo (below), and the List of Pastors within (above), taken by Tim WALDOCK of Sydney during his September 2015 visit to the chapel designed and built by his great-grandfather, Rev Frederick D. WALDOCK.*

*WALDOCK had served, after **Henry PIGOTT**, as Pastor of the Pettah Chapel before the new Chapel was built at Cinnamon Gardens which was one of the most beautiful Chapels at that time.*



**Henry** also preached in a newly constructed chapel, in Ferguson Road, also to designs of Rev WALDOCK, Rev James ALLEN died in Colombo on 30 April 1866, aged 56; a memorial tablet to him was removed from the Pettah Chapel when it was closed in 1905.



*[The Baptist Chapel on Ferguson Road, Mattakuliyah, built by Rev F.D. WALDOCK.]*

Further severe ill-health struck the PIGOTT family, as the Missionary Herald of January 1870 reported:

*"Mr and Mrs PIGOTT are continuing their labours... generally enjoying good health... Mrs PIGOTT had been very ill but was recovering. The youngest child had died of malignant sore throat, and a fortnight later the eldest boy caught the disease, and was in danger for two days, but was happily restored. Mr PIGOTT too had suffered."*



*[The Mission House in Maradana, Colombo, where several of the PIGOTT children were born.] (Present Headquarters of the Sri Lanka Baptist Sangamaya)*

Within a few years, ill-health was to affect the family connections back in England. As early as 1872, Ellen's father was suffering from effects of heart disease, when he had written a sad "final" letter to his children. But he was to live on for another 3 years.

**Rev. Henry**, who had to await Rev WALDOCK's arrival back in Ceylon, had not yet made his departure for home by 1 July.

Rev. Henry was back in England in 1877; on Tuesday 9 October, he attended the Missionary Resignation and Valedictory Service at Stow Hill Chapel, where leave was taken of "...Mr **H.R. PIGOTT**, of Ceylon... returning to the mission Field" [Report of the Autumnal Session of the Baptist union of G.B. and I., held at Newport, Monmouthshire, 8-11 October 1877],

Back in Ceylon, Rev. **Henry** and Ellen were moved to Ratnapura, in the Sabaragamuwa District, 63 miles off Colombo. Their youngest child, Ellen, was born there in 1878; and Rev. **Henry** opened a new church there in 1883,





*[The Baptist Church at Ratnapura, photographed in*

*1982, a year before it's centenary.]*

They returned to Maradana by July 1885, with regular excursions to the cooler climate in Nuwera Eliyah. Last formal mention of them in published records was made in the Missionary Herald of October 1889:

*"On August 15... Madampe, 43 miles N.E. of Colombo - the mission station here was commenced by Mr PIGOTT in 1870... The Rev **H.R. PIGOTT**, our good indefatigable missionary, with his equally zealous missionary lady, and their two daughters... singing of hymns, especially by Mrs PIGOTT."* And illness was to have the last say.

On 25 December 1889, **Henry** and Ellen, with two daughters, undoubtedly Effie and Mary, set sail for Sydney, in the 2nd Class Saloon on the R.M.S. *Ballarat*. Their plan may have been to take furlough leave with their son Harry, and return when Ellen's health had improved. But her illness was severe, and in time, **Henry**, having decided to remain in Australia. Tendered his resignation to the Baptist Missionary Society, citing his plans to enter into a tea importing business with his son.

However, the sale of Rev. **Henry's** household goods, by auction slated for 7 Dec 1889, at the Mission House at Maradana [Courier and Middlesex Chronicle, 29 Jan 1890], indicates that Rev. **Henry** had probably already made up his mind not to return.

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*The source of this article is from the following.*

- 1. The information obtained from Mr. David Pigott –Great Grand Son of Rev. Pegott, who is the Executive, Policy & Corporate affairs of the Mission Australia, in Sydney - Australia.*
- 2. Twentieth Century impression of Ceylon, Edited By. Arnold Wright 1907*
- 3. Madampe Eithihasika Toraturu Edited by. C Victor Munasinha*
- 4. Case record ( NLR) of The Baptist Missionary Society Vs. Jayawardena (1918)*
- 5. Case record - Jayawardene Vs. The Baptist Missionary Society. 25 N.L.R. 97. June 15<sup>th</sup> 1923.*

