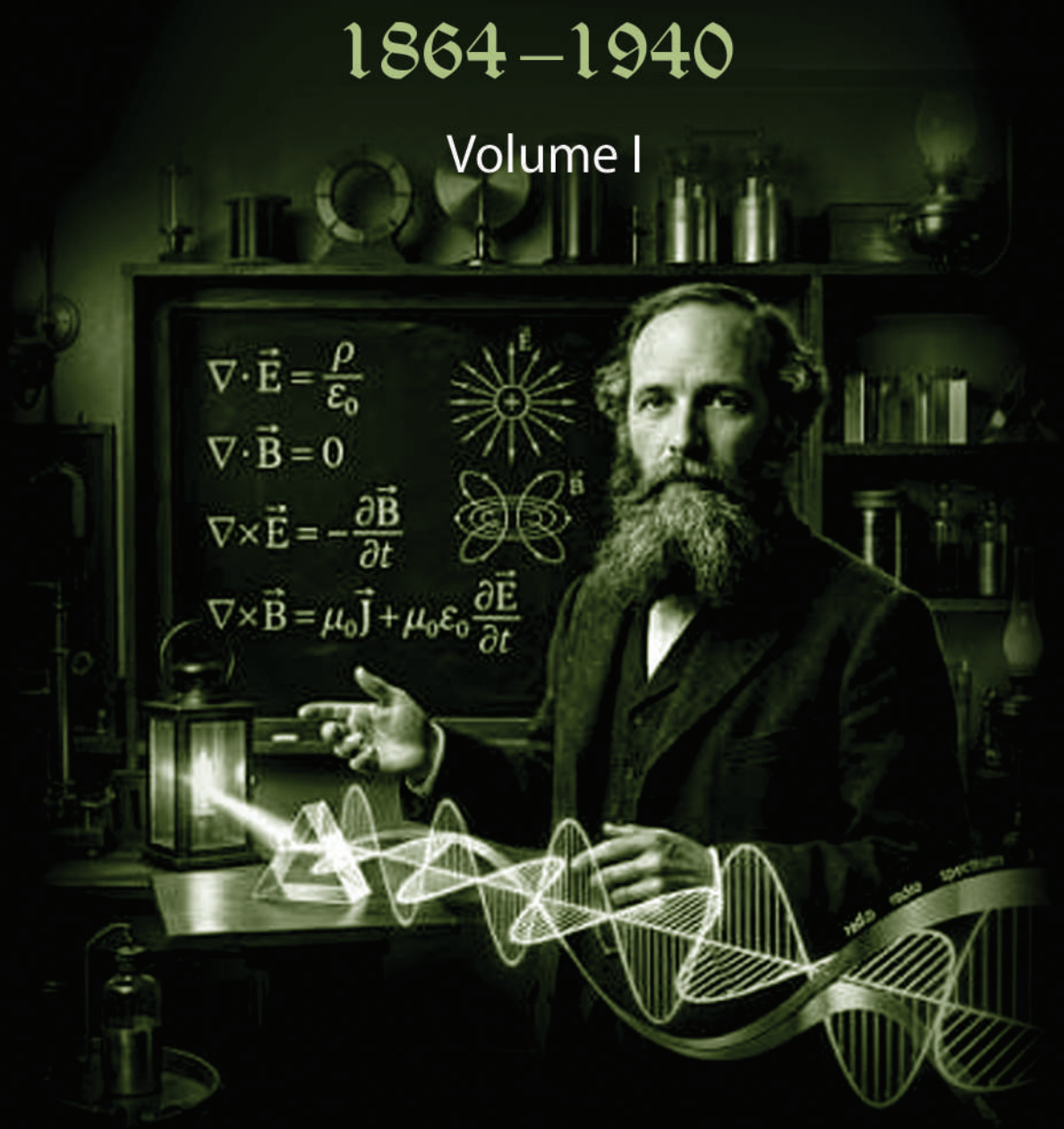
A Century of Radio Broadcasting

Chronological Milestones and Socio-Political-Cultural Dimensions in the Evolution of Radio in (Ceylon) Sri Lanka

1864–1940

Volume I



Dr. Dhammika Dissanayaka

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A Multi-Volume Scholarly Series

Volume I
From Electromagnetic Theory to the Consolidation of Public Broadcasting in (Ceylon) Sri Lanka (1864–1940)

Author
Dr. Dhammika Dissanayaka (Ph.D.)

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MR. EDWARD HARPER

"FATHER OF BROADCASTING IN CEYLON"

Member of the Institution of Electrical Engineers (M.I.E.E.) Member of the Institution of Radio Engineers (M.I.Radio E.)
Arrived in Ceylon on 21 July 1921 Chief Engineer, Ceylon Telephones and Telegraph Department
Pioneer of Wireless Broadcasting in Ceylon Whose Vision, Skill, and Dedication
Established the Foundations of National Broadcasting
1921 – 1931

His Legacy Lives On In Every Voice Carried Across the Airwaves Of Sri Lanka



A Reverential Tribute to Mr. Edward Harper

"Father of Broadcasting in Ceylon"

Mr. Edward Harper, occupies a place of profound honour in the history of broadcasting in Sri Lanka.

Born in the United Kingdom in 1873, Mr. Harper arrived in Ceylon on 21 July 1921, at a time when the island stood at the threshold of a new era in communication. The airwaves were then silent, and the science of wireless broadcasting had yet to take root within the country. Endowed with distinguished training in electrical science and guided by remarkable foresight, he introduced to Ceylon the transformative possibilities of wireless communication, opening pathways for voices to travel beyond physical boundaries.

Serving as Chief Engineer of the Ceylon Posts and Telegraph Department, Mr. Harper devoted himself with quiet determination and professional excellence to the development of wireless transmission. Through meticulous experimentation, technical ingenuity, and steadfast commitment, he established the earliest foundations of broadcasting in Ceylon, converting fragile experimental signals into a service of public value and national significance.

During the formative decade between 1921 and 1931, his pioneering efforts harmonised scientific advancement with public service, and administrative responsibility with creative vision. From these modest yet visionary beginnings emerged an enduring national institution one that would educate, inform, entertain, and culturally unite the people of the island.

More than a century later, the influence of Edward Harper continues to resonate through every broadcast that traverses the airwaves and reaches listeners across generations. His legacy remains deeply embedded within the historical and technological evolution of Sri Lankan broadcasting.

With enduring gratitude and reverence, his name remains immortalised as the ***"Father of Broadcasting in Ceylon,"*** *a visionary pioneer and quiet architect of the nation's airwaves, whose contributions continue to echo through the living history of sound and communication.*

His pioneering spirit, noble and rara excellence continue to resonate in every voice borne upon the airwaves of Sri Lanka, at all times.

Dr. Dhammika Dissanayaka

Tribute Dedication

This volume is offered with profound respect and gratitude to the pioneering engineers of Telegraphs, and Radio Broadcasting in Ceylon, whose vision, intellect, and unwavering dedication gave birth to the nation's broadcasting heritage.

Mr. Edward Harper
Mr. Ayampillai Nadarasa
Mr. W. E. De Silva
Mr. Benat Wijethilaka
Mr. D. P. Jayasekara
Mr. A. W. Dharmapala
Mr. E. C. Wijekoon
Mr. W. V. E. De Silva
Mr. N. S. Wickramasingha
Mr. David Buell

In an era defined by scarcity rather than abundance when equipment was limited, experimentation was fraught with uncertainty, and recognition was seldom granted these men worked in silence and perseverance, guided not by acclaim but by duty. **With steady hands and disciplined minds, they transformed wires, valves, and fragile signals into instruments of national connection.**

Their labour demanded more than technical competence; it required courage to imagine what did not yet exist, patience to endure repeated failure, and faith in a future they themselves might never fully witness. Through nights of trial and days of quiet resolve, they forged the earliest pathways of wireless communication, allowing voices to travel where silence once prevailed and bringing the world closer to Ceylon.

History has not always spoken their names aloud. Yet their presence endures felt rather than seen in every transmission that crosses the air, in every broadcast that unites distant communities, and in every moment when a voice reaches a listener across the island. The century of broadcasting we commemorate in 2025 is sustained by foundations laid through their unseen toil a hundred years ago.

May this dedication stand as a humble act of remembrance and honour to these silent and unsung heroes the founding engineers of Ceylon's radio era whose legacy continues to live in every signal that travels the ether and in every voice that carries the spirit of a nation.

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Acknowledgements

This centennial study, **A Century of Radio Broadcasting: Chronological Milestones and Socio-Political-Cultural Dimensions of the Evolution of Radio in (Ceylon) Sri Lanka, 1864–1940, Volume I,** has been made possible through the generous support, encouragement, and collaboration of numerous individuals and institutions, to whom I wish to express my deepest gratitude.

I wish first to acknowledge the **Sri Lanka Broadcasting Corporation (SLBC),** the direct successor to the pioneering Colombo Broadcasting Service, for granting access to historical archives, annual reports, and institutional documents that form the backbone of this research. The cooperation extended by the SLBC's Research and Documentation Division, together with the dedicated staff of its archival and engineering sections, was invaluable in facilitating this century-spanning scholarly inquiry.

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I gratefully acknowledge the intellectual guidance and inspiration provided by mentors in the fields of communication, history, and cultural studies, whose insights shaped both the analytical framework and interpretive direction of this work. Their scholarly engagement enriched the study's methodological and theoretical balance, particularly in situating Sri Lanka's broadcasting heritage within broader global and postcolonial contexts.

Special appreciation is extended to the many **pioneering broadcasters, announcers, engineers, producers, and administrative communicators past and present** whose creative dedication and professional commitment laid the foundations upon which a century of broadcasting was built. The oral testimonies, interviews, and recollections shared by **senior personnel of Radio Ceylon and the Sri Lanka Broadcasting Corporation** added an invaluable human and experiential dimension to this research.

I also acknowledge with gratitude the assistance of **university research librarians, archivists, and technical staff,** who facilitated access to scarce materials, rare documents, and early programme schedules essential to reconstructing the historical narrative of Ceylon's broadcasting evolution.

Finally, I wish to express my heartfelt appreciation to my family, whose love and encouragement have been a constant source of strength. **I am especially grateful to my beloved mother and my late father,** whose passing forty years ago remains an enduring source of remembrance and inspiration, and to whose guidance and values I owe a profound personal and intellectual debt.

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I owe particular gratitude to **my beloved daughter, Bhagya Dissanayaka; my son-in-law, Ruchika Samarawickrama; and my granddaughters, Ranya and Ruheli,** who provided me with every comfort, care, accommodation, rest, and companionship during the extended period I spent in Sri Lanka compiling this book. Their kindness, patience, and unwavering devotion sustained me through moments of both joy and fatigue, for which I remain eternally grateful.

To all who contributed, in ways large and small, to the realization of this centennial historical publication, I offer my profound gratitude. This work stands not only as a scholarly record but also as a collective tribute to the enduring legacy of broadcasting in Sri Lanka a medium that has connected, informed, and inspired generations for a hundred years.

Author's Note

Purposes, Scope, and Historiographical Background (1864–1940)

This volume is presented as a foundational contribution to the centennial study of radio broadcasting in Sri Lanka (Ceylon), examining the formative period from the scientific origins of wireless communication in 1864 to the consolidation of colonial broadcasting institutions by 1940. It seeks to document and interpret the intellectual, technological, administrative, and cultural processes through which radio emerged as a new medium of public communication in the island. The study situates Sri Lankan broadcasting within both global developments in electromagnetic science and the specific conditions of colonial governance, tracing how an imported technology was gradually transformed into a socially embedded cultural institution.

The year 1864 marks a decisive intellectual turning point with James Clerk Maxwell's theoretical formulation of electromagnetic waves, which laid the scientific foundations for wireless communication. From this theoretical breakthrough emerged a succession of experimental and practical innovations associated with figures such as Heinrich Hertz, Guglielmo Marconi, Karl Ferdinand Braun, and others that culminated in the development of wireless telegraphy and, eventually, broadcasting. This volume places the Sri Lankan experience within that wider international trajectory, emphasizing that local broadcasting did not arise in isolation but was part of a global transformation in communication, science, and imperial connectivity.

Scientific Foundations and Early Wireless Developments

The early chapters of this volume trace the transition from scientific theory to applied communication technology during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Wireless communication initially served strategic, maritime, and administrative purposes within imperial networks, linking colonies to metropolitan centres. In Ceylon, these developments intersected with the existing infrastructure of the Posts and Telegraph Department, which provided the technical and institutional framework for early wireless experimentation. The introduction of radio technology thus formed part of a broader colonial modernizing project that sought efficiency, control, and connectivity across imperial space.

The Emergence of Broadcasting in Ceylon

The origins of broadcasting in Ceylon are rooted in the pioneering spirit of early wireless experimentation during the early 1920s. The public demonstration of wireless broadcasting conducted on 22 February 1924 at the Central Telegraph Office in Colombo marked a decisive moment in the island's communication history. When regular broadcasting officially commenced on 16 December 1925 under the Ceylon Telegraph Department, Ceylon became one of the earliest territories in

Asia to establish an organized broadcasting service. These modest experimental transmissions initially limited in range, audience, and content nevertheless signalled the arrival of a new auditory public sphere.

During the formative phase between 1923 and 1935, broadcasting remained closely aligned with colonial administrative priorities and technical expertise. Programming was initially oriented toward urban and expatriate audiences, with a strong emphasis on Western music and informational content. Yet even within this constrained framework, the seeds of cultural adaptation and localization were evident. Memoranda advocating the inclusion of indigenous music, the gradual introduction of Sinhala and Tamil elements, and the growing awareness of radio's cultural potential signalled an emerging shift from purely colonial utility to broader social engagement.

Colonial Consolidation and Cultural Expansion

By the late 1930s, broadcasting in Ceylon entered a phase of institutional consolidation and cultural expansion. The Colombo Broadcasting Service evolved into a more structured organization with improved technical facilities, expanded transmission capacity, and increasingly diverse programming. Regular services in Sinhala, Tamil, and English reflected the island's linguistic and cultural plurality, while locally produced music, talks, and dramatic forms began to define a distinctly Ceylonese broadcasting identity.

Although broadcasting remained under colonial control, it increasingly functioned as a cultural intermediary between the state and society. Radio became a medium through which notions of progress, education, and cultural refinement were articulated, negotiated, and disseminated. The establishment of initiatives such as organized musical ensembles and culturally oriented programming demonstrated an early recognition that broadcasting could serve as a vehicle for cultural representation and preservation, not merely as an administrative or technical service.

Broadcasting, War, and Regional Significance

The outbreak of the Second World War marked a critical juncture in the history of broadcasting in Ceylon. Between 1939 and 1940, the strategic importance of radio communication expanded dramatically, both for information dissemination and for regional coordination within the British Empire. Although the full wartime transformation of broadcasting would unfold in subsequent years, the late 1930s already witnessed heightened investment in infrastructure, personnel, and organizational capacity. These developments positioned Ceylon as an emerging broadcasting centre within the wider South and Southeast Asian region, setting the stage for later wartime and postwar expansions.

Purpose and Historiographical Orientation of the Study

The purpose of this volume is not merely to compile a chronological account of early broadcasting milestones, but to offer a critical historical interpretation of how radio emerged as a technological and cultural institution

within a colonial society. The study adopts a historical qualitative mixed-method framework, integrating documentary and archival research with interpretive analysis and selective quantitative data. Primary sources including scientific writings, government gazettes, administrative correspondence, institutional reports, programme schedules, and contemporaneous press material form the evidentiary backbone of the research, supplemented by relevant secondary scholarship.

Historiographically, the volume seeks to bridge several fields of inquiry: the history of science and technology, colonial administrative history, communication studies, and cultural history. By doing so, it challenges narrowly technological or institution-centred narratives and instead presents broadcasting as a multidimensional phenomenon shaped by scientific knowledge, imperial structures, and local cultural dynamics.

Structure and Scope of the Volume

This volume is organized chronologically and thematically to reflect the major phases in the early history of broadcasting. The opening sections examine the scientific and technological foundations of wireless communication from 1864 onwards. Subsequent chapters focus on the introduction of wireless technology to Ceylon, the establishment of experimental and regular broadcasting between 1923 and 1925, and the institutional and cultural development of broadcasting up to 1940. Each chapter situates broadcasting developments within their broader political, social cultural, and intellectual contexts, ensuring historical coherence and analytical depth.

Concluding Reflection

By concluding in 1940, this volume deliberately limits its scope to the formative and colonial phase of Sri Lankan broadcasting history. It captures the moment at which radio had moved beyond experimentation to become an established public institution, poised on the threshold of wartime transformation and later national redefinition. In doing so, the study lays the essential groundwork for subsequent volumes that will examine broadcasting's role in wartime mobilization, post-independence nation-building, and modern media transformation.

It is hoped that this volume will serve as both a scholarly foundation and a historiographical reference for future studies of broadcasting in Sri Lanka and South Asia, illuminating how a technology born of nineteenth-century physics became, by the early twentieth century, av powerful medium of communication, culture, and public life.

Introduction

Research Methodology, Sources, and Archival Approach (1864–1940)

The present study adopts a historical qualitative mixed-method research framework, integrating documentary, archival, and interpretive analyses with selective quantitative data. This methodological orientation is shaped by the broad temporal and conceptual scope of the inquiry, which traces the evolution of radio broadcasting from the scientific foundations of electromagnetic theory articulated by James Clerk Maxwell in 1864 to the consolidation of colonial broadcasting institutions in Ceylon by 1940. Rather than presenting a purely chronological narrative, the study seeks to examine radio as a technological innovation embedded within wider socio-political, cultural, and administrative processes of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century modernity.

The historical component of the methodology forms the core of the research design. It employs systematic documentary and archival investigation to reconstruct the intellectual origins, experimental practices, and institutional emergence of broadcasting. Primary sources include scientific papers and patents relating to wireless communication; colonial administrative records; Government Gazettes; official correspondence; early licensing regulations; annual reports of the Colombo Broadcasting Station and the Colombo Broadcasting Service; and programme schedules preserved in institutional and private archives. These materials are supplemented by contemporaneous newspaper reports, technical journals, listener correspondence, and policy memoranda that illuminate public reception, regulatory intent, and the cultural meanings attributed to early broadcasting.

Secondary sources such as scholarly histories of radio technology, biographies of pioneering figures, and studies of imperial communication networks are used to provide interpretive depth and comparative context. All sources are subjected to critical scrutiny and cross-verification, with particular attention paid to authorship, institutional provenance, and historical bias, ensuring methodological rigor, evidentiary reliability, and historiographical balance.

The qualitative dimension of the study extends beyond empirical reconstruction to interpret the cultural, political, and ideological significance of broadcasting during its formative phase. Through thematic and discourse analysis, the research explores how radio functioned as a mediating technology between colonial authority and local society; how linguistic, musical, and educational programming reflected evolving cultural identities; and how broadcasting articulated notions of progress, modernity, and public order within a colonial framework. This interpretive approach enables a nuanced understanding of radio not merely as a technical apparatus, but as a cultural institution shaped by imperial governance, scientific rationalism, and emergent public spheres.

Selective quantitative analysis is incorporated to support and contextualize qualitative findings. Data relating to transmission power, frequency allocation, geographical coverage, licensing figures, and programme output

are employed to illustrate measurable patterns of institutional growth and technological consolidation between the 1920s and 1930s. These quantitative indicators are not treated as autonomous metrics, but are interpreted alongside policy decisions and administrative reforms, demonstrating how technical expansion intersected with regulatory structures and cultural production.

The study follows a convergent mixed-method design, wherein historical documentation and empirical data are examined concurrently and synthesized during interpretation. This approach allows broadcasting to be understood as a multidimensional phenomenon scientific, technological, administrative, and cultural rather than as a linear sequence of inventions or institutional milestones. The chronological framework adopted in the study, organized around key phases between 1864 and 1940, facilitates this synthesis by situating developments within their specific intellectual and colonial contexts. For example, nineteenth-century scientific discoveries are analyzed as part of the broader transformation of physical science; the experimental broadcasts of the 1920s are examined as expressions of colonial modernity; and the organizational reforms of the late 1930s are interpreted as steps toward institutional consolidation and state recognition.

Given the extended temporal arc of the study, particular emphasis is placed on contextual chronology the interpretation of events and policies within the technological capabilities, administrative priorities, and ideological assumptions of their respective periods. This ensures that early broadcasting practices are not evaluated through anachronistic standards, but understood in relation to contemporary scientific knowledge, imperial communication strategies, and cultural expectations.

The research further adopts an interdisciplinary perspective, drawing upon the history of science, communication studies, colonial history, and cultural analysis. This enables the Sri Lankan experience to be situated within a broader international framework, linking local developments to global milestones such as the maturation of electromagnetic theory, the rise of wireless telegraphy, the institutional influence of the British Broadcasting Corporation, and parallel experiments in other parts of the British Empire and Asia.

Finally, the study acknowledges the historiographical challenges inherent in reconstructing early broadcasting history, particularly the dominance of official narratives and institutional records. To address this, the methodology incorporates audience perspectives and cultural reception wherever evidence permits, using listener correspondence, press commentary, and programme descriptions to recover the lived experience of early radio. This reflexive stance highlights broadcasting as a participatory social phenomenon and not merely an administrative or technical enterprise.

Through this integrated historical qualitative mixed-method framework, the study seeks to document and interpret the formative trajectory of radio broadcasting from its scientific origins to its colonial institutionalization by 1940. In doing so, it aims to contribute to the broader scholarship on media history by demonstrating how early broadcasting functioned as a critical nexus between science, empire, culture, and emerging public communication in Sri Lanka and beyond.

Introduction to Volume I

From Electromagnetic Theory to Consolidation of Public Broadcasting in Ceylon (1864–1940)

The history of radio broadcasting in Sri Lanka formerly Ceylon cannot be adequately understood without situating it within the wider scientific, technological, and institutional transformations that unfolded globally from the mid-nineteenth century onwards. Broadcasting did not emerge as an isolated colonial innovation, nor was it simply a mechanical extension of earlier telecommunication systems. Rather, it was the outcome of a prolonged historical process in which scientific discovery, imperial communication networks, and local adaptation intersected to produce a new medium of mass communication.

Volume I of this centenary study examines these formative processes from 1864 to 1940, tracing the evolution of radio from abstract scientific theory to a functioning colonial broadcasting service with distinct cultural and institutional characteristics. For analytical clarity, this volume is organised into three interrelated chronological and thematic phases, each representing a decisive stage in the emergence of broadcasting in Ceylon. **These phases correspond to Part I (1864–1920), Part II (1920–1935), and Part III (1935–1940).** While each period is treated as a distinct historical moment, the volume emphasises continuity as much as change, demonstrating how successive developments built upon earlier foundations.

Part I (1864–1920):
Scientific Foundations and Global Precursors

The first phase, spanning 1864 to 1920, constitutes the pre-broadcasting era, during which the intellectual and technological conditions necessary for radio communication were established. This period begins with James Clerk Maxwell's formulation of electromagnetic theory in 1864, a landmark in modern physics that provided the theoretical basis for wireless transmission. Subsequent experimental confirmation by Heinrich Hertz in the late nineteenth century, followed by technical refinements by figures such as Oliver Lodge, Karl Ferdinand Braun, Nikola Tesla, and others, transformed electromagnetic waves from theoretical constructs into practical tools of communication.

During this phase, wireless communication developed primarily as wireless telegraphy, serving maritime, military, and imperial administrative purposes. The British Empire played a central role in this process, integrating wireless systems into its global communication infrastructure. Ceylon's own Posts and Telegraph Department already operating telegraph services since the mid-nineteenth century formed part of this imperial network, providing the institutional and technical groundwork upon which later broadcasting initiatives would depend. Part I thus situates the origins of broadcasting within a global scientific and imperial context, establishing that radio in Ceylon was the local expression of a far-reaching international transformation rather than a sudden colonial experiment.

Part II (1920–1935): Introduction,
Experimentation, and Institutional Formation

The second phase, covering the years 1920 to 1935, marks the transitional period during which wireless technology was introduced to Ceylon and adapted for public broadcasting. This phase begins with the arrival of Edward Walter Harper in 1921 as Chief Engineer of the Ceylon Telegraph Department, an event that proved decisive for the island's broadcasting history. Under Harper's leadership, experimental wireless transmissions were initiated, and the Ceylon Wireless Club was established, fostering technical experimentation and cultivating an early listening public.

The most significant milestone of this phase occurred on 16 December 1925, when regular broadcasting commenced from Colombo with the establishment of what would later become known as the Colombo Broadcasting Station. Operating initially under the Posts and Telegraph Department, the station represented one of the earliest broadcasting ventures in Asia. Though modest in scale, these early broadcasts signalled the transformation of wireless from a point-to-point communication system into a public medium capable of reaching diverse audiences. Throughout the late 1920s and early 1930s, broadcasting in Ceylon underwent gradual institutional consolidation. Administrative structures were refined, technical facilities improved, and programming expanded to include music, educational talks, religious content, and news. Importantly, this period also witnessed the early incorporation of Sinhala and Tamil content, reflecting local cultural realities within a colonial framework. Part II thus examines how experimentation, imperial influence, and indigenous participation combined to establish broadcasting as a permanent public institution.

Part III (1935–1940):
Expansion and Colonial Consolidation

The third phase, spanning 1935 to 1940, represents a period of expansion, professionalisation, and colonial consolidation. By this stage, broadcasting in Ceylon had moved beyond its experimental origins to become a recognised public service with growing administrative coherence and cultural influence. Increased state involvement, regulatory oversight, and budgetary support reflected the colonial government's recognition of radio as a strategic instrument of communication. This period witnessed a significant broadening of programme content, particularly in the realm of music and cultural broadcasting. Sinhala, Tamil, and English programming expanded in both quantity and sophistication, contributing to the professionalisation of performers, announcers, and producers. Broadcasting emerged as a site of cultural negotiation, balancing imperial norms with indigenous artistic traditions and audience expectations. Equally important was the strengthening of institutional and intellectual ties with the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC).

These connections provided technical guidance, programme models, and professional standards that influenced local broadcasting practices. At the same time, the development of local news services, radio drama, and cultural productions enabled the Colombo Broadcasting Station to articulate domestic concerns and cultivate indigenous creative talent. Part III thus captures the moment at which broadcasting in Ceylon achieved

institutional maturity within the colonial system, setting the stage for its later transformation during the wartime years and the post-independence era.

Conclusion

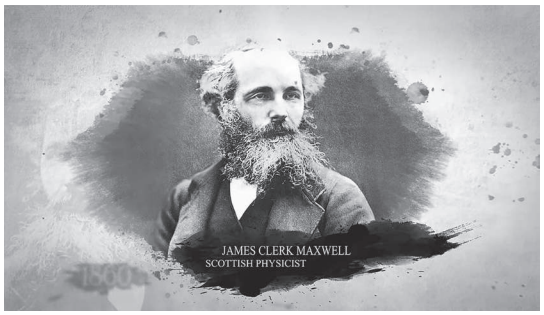
Taken together, the three phases examined in this volume trace the gradual evolution of radio from scientific theory (1864) to colonial public institution (by 1940). Volume I demonstrates that broadcasting in Ceylon emerged through a layered historical process shaped by global scientific discovery, imperial communication policy, and local cultural engagement. By the end of this period, radio had become an integral component of the island's public life, poised to assume an even more significant role during the Second World War and in the post-independence decades explored in subsequent volumes.

1864

Historical Background to the Commencement of Broadcasting in the World (1864–1920)

The emergence of broadcasting as a global medium was the culmination of scientific discoveries, technological experimentation, and social transformation spanning the latter half of the nineteenth century and the early decades of the twentieth. Its origins lie not in entertainment or mass communication, but in fundamental advances in physics that redefined humanity's understanding of space, energy, and communication.

The intellectual foundation of broadcasting was laid in **1864** , when the Scottish physicist **James Clerk Maxwell** formulated the electromagnetic theory of light. Maxwell's equations demonstrated that electric and magnetic fields could propagate through space as waves, travelling at the speed of light.[1] Although purely theoretical at the time, this insight established the scientific possibility of wireless communication.Two decades later, **Heinrich Hertz** experimentally confirmed the existence of electromagnetic waves (1886–1889), proving that such waves could be generated and detected in laboratory conditions. Hertz's work transformed Maxwell's equations into physical reality and opened the path for practical wireless communication.[2]



James Clerk Maxwell



Heinrich Hertz

Building upon these discoveries, inventors and engineers across Europe and North America sought to harness electromagnetic waves for signalling. Among them, **Guglielmo Marconi** played a decisive role in transforming theory into a usable communication system. During the 1890s, Marconi developed apparatus capable of transmitting coded **wireless signals** over increasingly long distances, refining antenna design, grounding techniques, and signal detection. **His successful transmission across the Atlantic Ocean in December 1901between Poldhu in Cornwall and St. John's, Newfoundland demonstrated that wireless communication could transcend continental boundaries.[3]** This achievement marked the transition from experimental science to practical global communication.

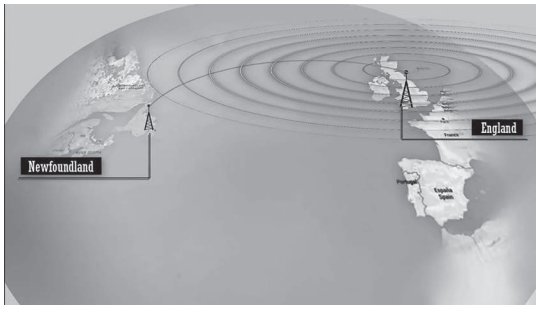


Guglieimo Marconi

Early wireless telegraphy served primarily maritime, military, and commercial needs. Shipping companies, naval

authorities, and news agencies rapidly adopted the technology, recognizing its strategic and economic value. However, the next decisive step in the evolution of broadcasting was the transmission of the human voice and music. In December 1906, **Reginald Aubrey Fessenden** conducted what is widely regarded as the first radio broadcast of speech and music from Brant Rock, Massachusetts. His Christmas Eve transmission, which included a violin performance and a spoken message, was received by ship operators along the Atlantic coast, demonstrating the possibility of radio as a medium of mass communication rather than mere point-to-point signaling.[4]





Cornwall to Newfoundland
Marconi's successful transmission across the Atlantic Ocean in December 1901between Poldhu in ***Cornwall and St. John's, Newfoundland*** *demonstrated that wireless communication could transcend continental boundaries.*

Technological advances soon followed. Lee de Forest's invention of the Audion vacuum tube in 1906 enabled the amplification and modulation of radio signals, making continuous-wave transmission feasible. This innovation transformed radio from an experimental curiosity into a practical system capable of supporting regular broadcasting. By the eve of the First World War, radio technology had matured significantly, though its development was temporarily redirected toward military communication during the conflict.[5]

The post-war period marked a decisive turning point. With the return of peace, surplus equipment, trained technicians, and growing public interest converged to create the conditions for civilian broadcasting. Amateur radio operators in the United States and Europe began transmitting music, news, and speech to local audiences. This informal experimentation soon gave way to organised broadcasting. On 2 November 1920, station **KDKA** in Pittsburgh transmitted the results of the **U.S. presidential election,** an event widely regarded as the birth of regular public broadcasting.[6] The success of **KDKA** demonstrated the commercial and cultural potential of radio and inspired the rapid establishment of broadcasting stations across the United States.



KDKA Radio, Pittsburgh
KDKA's logo from the 1920s.
Already they were known as broadcast pioneers. So began the first broadcast by a commercially licensed radio station. KDKA went on the air in Pittsburgh as the world's first commercially licensed station on November 2, 1920. ***Westinghouse Electric's KDKA was the first official station, starting a radio boom across the nation and the world.***

Parallel developments occurred in Europe, though shaped by different political and institutional frameworks. In Britain, broadcasting evolved under a coordinated public-service model. **The British Broadcasting Company**, **formed in 1922** by a

consortium of wireless manufacturers and later reorganised as the **British Broadcasting Corporation in 1927,** operated under the guiding philosophy articulated by **John Reith:** that broadcasting should inform, educate, and entertain.[7] Across continental Europe, broadcasting was typically placed under direct state control, serving cultural, educational, and national objectives. These diverse models illustrated how radio could be adapted to differing political traditions while remaining a powerful instrument of mass communication.

By the early 1920s, therefore, the essential technological, institutional, and cultural foundations of broadcasting were firmly established. From Maxwell's theoretical insights in 1864 to the first scheduled broadcasts of the early 1920s, radio evolved into a transformative global medium. This international trajectory formed the backdrop against which broadcasting would later emerge in colonial and postcolonial societies, including **Ceylon,** where local experimentation and global influence converged to create a distinctive broadcasting tradition.



First Commercial Radio Station
KDKA in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, became the first commercial radio station in the United States, broadcasting the results of the U.S. presidential election on November 02 1920. This event marked the beginning of regular, commercial broadcasting.



1922



1927

Footnotes

1. James Clerk Maxwell, A Treatise on Electricity and Magnetism (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1873).
2. Hugh G. J. Aitken, Syntony and Spark: The Origins of Radio (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), 45–67.
3. Guglielmo Marconi, The Autobiography of Guglielmo Marconi (London: Bodley Head, 1931), 74–79.
4. Hugh G. J. Aitken, Syntony and Spark, 337–339.
5. Susan J. Douglas, Inventing American Broadcasting, 1899–1922 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), 201–230.
6. Erik Barnouw, A Tower in Babel: A History of Broadcasting in the United States to 1933 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), 57–60.
7. Asa Briggs, The Birth of Broadcasting (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961), 15–28

1867

Foundations of Wireless Broadcasting: Global Origins and the Beginnings of Radio in Ceylon (1867–1925)

The origins of broadcasting in Ceylon were inextricably linked to the global evolution of wireless communication in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Scientific breakthroughs by James Clerk Maxwell and Heinrich Hertz provided the theoretical and experimental basis for wireless transmission, while institutional

developments such as the establishment of the British Broadcasting Company (1922) and the British Broadcasting Corporation (1927) set the administrative and organizational precedents for colonial broadcasting systems within the British Empire.[1]

By the early 1920s, these technological and institutional models had reached the peripheries of the Empire, including Ceylon (modern-day Sri Lanka), where the introduction of wireless telegraphy had already transformed maritime communication. The decisive step toward organized broadcasting, however, was initiated by Edward Harper, an engineer of the Ceylon Telegraph Department who arrived in the island in 1921.[2] Recognized today as the "Father of Broadcasting in Ceylon," Harper's vision and experimental ingenuity transformed Ceylon into one of the earliest broadcasting nations in Asia.[3]



The British Broadcasting Company (BBC) 1922

The British Broadcasting Company (BBC) was formed on October 18, 1922, by leading wireless manufacturers to create regular radio broadcasts, with its first transmission, the famous "2LO Calling," happening on November 14, 1922, from London, featuring news and music under the leadership of General Manager John Reith, initially funded by set sales royalties before becoming the public British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) in 1927.

In 1923, Harper founded the Ceylon Wireless Club, a pioneering association of radio enthusiasts and technical officers dedicated to experimenting with radio transmission and reception.[4] using old components from telephones and telegraph department, Harper and his colleagues constructed a rudimentary broadcasting unit at the Central Telegraph Office in Colombo.[5] The first experimental transmission, reportedly consisting of gramophone music, was successfully broadcast to a small group of listeners equipped with crystal receivers in the vicinity of Colombo Fort.[6]



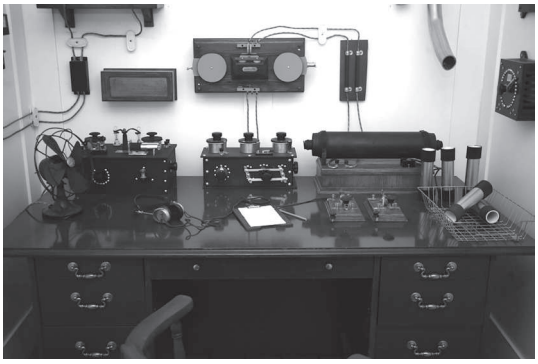
The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) 1927

The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) has played a significant role in shaping British culture. With its long and illustrious history, the BBC has become an integral part of the nation's identity. From its inception in 1922 to the present day, the BBC has not only entertained and informed the British public but has also influenced the way they think, act, and perceive the world around them.

Encouraged by the experiment's success, Harper expanded the tests, and by late 1924, the Ceylon Telegraph Department had established regular experimental broadcasts under official supervision.[7] The Administrative Report of the Postmaster General for 1924, compiled by Mr. Maurice Salvador Pinto Sreshta, explicitly recognized these wireless experiments as the most significant advancement in the field of telecommunication during that year.[8] The report marks the first official acknowledgment of broadcasting as an emergent public service in the island's administrative records.

These early transmissions culminated in the formal inauguration of Colombo Radio on 16 December 1925, an event that positioned

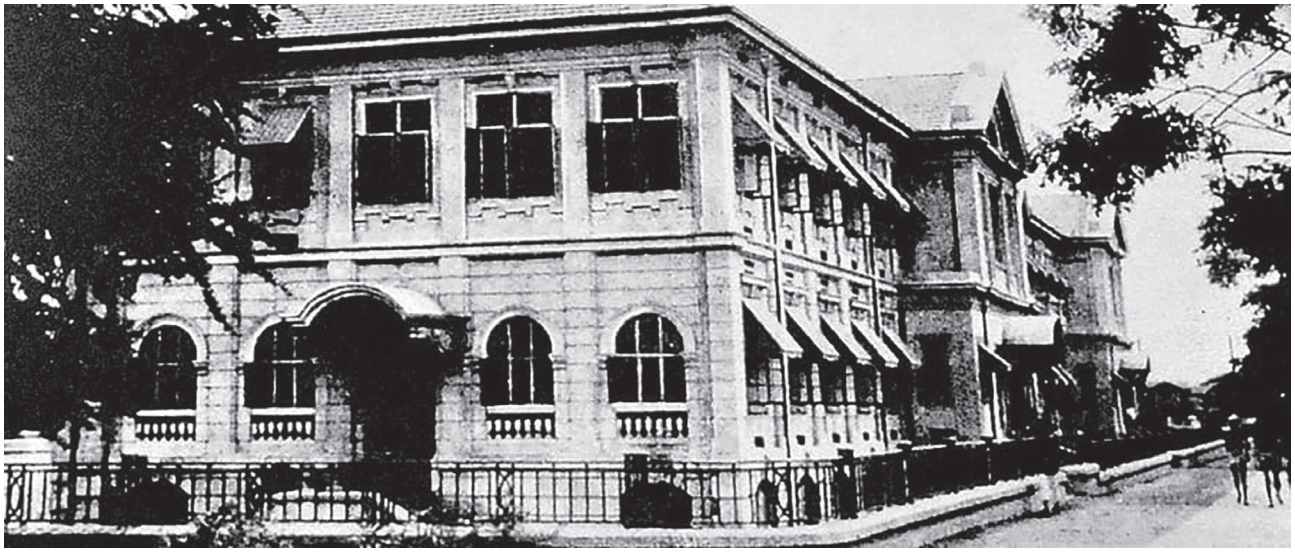
Ceylon among the earliest nations in Asia to operate an organized broadcasting service.[9] The inaugural broadcast, transmitted from a small room in the Central Telegraph Office using a 1.5 kW medium-wave transmitter, was received as far as Madras and Bombay, confirming the technical success of the operation.[10]



Maritime Communication In 1922,
maritime communication was transitioning from traditional visual, audible signals to widespread use of wireless telegraphy (radio), primarily using Morse code generated by spark-gap transmitters. This era was characterized by the widespread use of spark-gap transmitters and the emergence of new technologies like radiotelephony and early radioteletype.

The pioneering efforts of Edward Harper and the Ceylon Wireless Club coincided with the formative years of the British Broadcasting Corporation. The BBC's model of public service broadcasting operating as a national trustee, emphasizing educational, cultural, and informational content served as the institutional prototype for subsequent developments in Ceylon's broadcasting framework.[11]

Thus, the establishment of Colombo Radio in 1925 represented not merely a local technological milestone, but also the transplantation of the British broadcasting ethos into a colonial context. It marked the beginning of a process through which radio would become a central instrument of public communication, cultural exchange, and national identity in Ceylon a process that would evolve through successive administrative and political transformations, culminating in the formation of the Ceylon Radio Ceylon in 1949 Broadcasting Corporation in 1967 and the



Central Telegraph Office in 1912
In 1922, Colombo's Central Telegraph Office (CTO), a significant early telecommunications hub built around 1910-11 in Colombo Fort, was actively housing Ceylon's postal and telegraph departments, serving as the nerve center for communications, including early experiments for Radio Ceylon, which officially launched nearby in 1923, marking the building's crucial role in the island's communication history before later becoming a Sri Lanka Telecom Head Office.

Sri Lanka Broadcasting Corporation in 1972.[12]



The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) 1927

Footnotes :

1. Asa Briggs, The Birth of Broadcasting (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), 53–64.
2. "Administrative Report of the Postmaster General for the Year 1921," Sessional Papers of the Legislative Council of Ceylon (Colombo: Government Printer, 1922).
3. D. M. Colombage, Guwan Viduli Vanshaya (Colombo: M.D. Gunasena & Company, 1989), 7.
4. Ibid., 9.
5. Ibid., 10.
6. Edward Harper, "Notes on Early Wireless Experiments in Ceylon," Telegraph Department Archives, Colombo, 1924.
7. Ibid.
8. "Administrative Report of the Postmaster General for the Year 1924," Sessional Papers of the Legislative Council of Ceylon (Colombo: Government Printer, 1925), 6.
9. D. M. Colombage, Guwan Viduli Vanshaya, 13.
10. Ibid., 14.
11. Asa Briggs, The BBC: The First Fifty Years (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 17–22.
12. Sri Lanka Broadcasting Corporation, Golden Jubilee Commemorative Souvenir 1925–1975 (Colombo: SLBC Publications Division, 1975), 4–6.

A Time Line of Global Milestones in Radio Broadeasting 1864 - 1925

Scientific Foundations and Early Experiments

The period between 1864 and 1925 marked the theoretical foundation and practical application of wireless radio, evolving from a scientific phenomenon into a medium for mass communication. Chronological Events of Wireless Radio (1864–1925)

1864:
Theoretical Foundation
James Clerk Maxwell formulated his theory of electromagnetism and presented mathematical proofs predicting the existence of electromagnetic waves, which form the theoretical basis of wireless communication.[1]

1887–1888:
Discovery of Radio Waves
Heinrich Hertz experimentally proved Maxwell's theories by producing, transmitting, and receiving electromagnetic (radio) waves in his laboratory.[2]

1894–1895:

Early Experiments

Guglielmo Marconi began his experiments on radio waves at his family's estate in Italy. He found that raising the antenna height and grounding the system significantly increased the range, allowing him to transmit signals over a distance of approximately 1.5 miles (2.4 km) by the end of 1895.[3]

1896:

First Wireless Patent

Marconi traveled to the United Kingdom and was granted the first patent for a wireless telegraphy system (British Patent number 12039). He also gave public demonstrations for the British government.[4]

1897:

First Wireless Communication Over Open Water

On May 13, Marconi successfully sent the first ever wireless message across open water, from Flat Holm Island to Lavernock Point in the Bristol Channel. Later that year, he founded the Wireless Telegraph and Signal Company.[5]

1899:

Transatlantic Communication and US Navy Trials

Marconi established communication across the English Channel and the U.S. Navy conducted tests of his system, which the Navy report found to be well-adapted for squadron signaling.[6]

1900:

Tuned Circuit Patent

Marconi patented his "four-sevens" tuning circuit (British Patent No. 7777), which allowed different stations to operate on different frequencies without interference.[7]

1900:

First Audio Transmission

Reginald Fessenden, using a high-frequency spark transmitter, successfully transmitted speech on December 23, the first known audio radio transmission, from Cobb Island, Maryland. The message, "Is it snowing where you are, Mr. Thiessen?", was sent to a colleague about a mile away.[8]

1901:

First Transatlantic Radio Signal

Marconi claimed to have received the first transatlantic radio signal, the Morse code letter "S", at Signal Hill in St. John's, Newfoundland, sent from his Poldhu station in Cornwall, England. This was a monumental, though debated, achievement.[9]

1904:

Invention of the Vacuum Tube Diode

John Ambrose Fleming invented the two-electrode vacuum-tube rectifier, known as the "Fleming Valve," which became an essential, sensitive, and reliable detector in radio receivers.[10]

1906:

First Entertainment Radio Broadcast

Reginald Fessenden reportedly made the first public broadcast of music and entertainment on Christmas Eve from Brant Rock, Massachusetts, using an alternator-transmitter. Ship operators at sea heard a program that included a phonograph record and Fessenden playing the violin.[11]

1909:

Marconi Awarded Nobel Prize

Guglielmo Marconi shared the Nobel Prize in Physics with Karl Ferdinand Braun for their "contributions to the development of wireless telegraphy".[12]

1912:

RMS Titanic Disaster

The sinking of the RMS Titanic highlighted the critical importance of shipboard wireless communication for safety at sea, as the distress calls saved hundreds of lives. The Radio Act of 1912 is passed in the U.S., requiring amateurs to be licensed and mandating that ships have a radio and trained operator, partly in response to the Titanic disaster.[13]

1914-1918 :

WW I Era

During World War I, all U.S. radio stations not needed by the government are closed, and radio technology sees significant development for military use. Edwin Armstrong develops the superheterodyne receiver around this time, improving radio reception.[14]

1920:

First Commercial Radio Station

KDKA in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, became the first commercial radio station in the United States, broadcasting the results of the U.S. presidential election on November 2. This event marked the beginning of regular, commercial broadcasting.[15]

1922:

Regular UK Broadcasting Begins

Regular entertainment broadcasts commenced from the Marconi Research Centre, leading to the formation of the British Broadcasting Company (BBC) later that year.[16]

1925:

Continued Innovation

By 1925, radio had evolved into a popular and established medium, with continuous innovations. Fessenden began an autobiographical series in Radio News that year, solidifying his place as a radio pioneer.[17]

Footnotes :

1. 1. James Clerk Maxwell, A Dynamical Theory of the Electromagnetic Field, Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of London 155 (1865): 459–512.
2. Heinrich Hertz, Electric Waves: Being Researches on the Propagation of Electric Action with Finite Velocity Through Space, trans. D. E. Jones (London: Macmillan, 1893).
3. Guglielmo Marconi, "Wireless Telegraphy," Journal of the Institution of Electrical Engineers 28, no. 139 (1899): 273–292.
4. Guglielmo Marconi, British Patent No. 12039, "Improvements in Transmitting Electrical Impulses and Signals, and in Apparatus Therefor," filed June 2, 1896.
5. W. J. Baker, A History of the Marconi Company (London: Methuen, 1970), 34–36.
6. Hugh G. J. Aitken, Syntony and Spark: The Origins of Radio (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976), 312–315.
7. Guglielmo Marconi, "Transatlantic Wireless Telegraphy," Proceedings of the Royal Institution of Great Britain 18 (1902): 1–16.
8. Reginald A. Fessenden, "Wireless Telephony," Journal of the American Institute of Electrical Engineers 24, no. 2 (1905): 581–602.
9. John Ambrose Fleming, "On the Conversion of Electric Oscillations into Continuous Currents by Means of a Vacuum Valve," Proceedings of the Royal Society of London 74 (1905): 476–487.
10. Reginald A. Fessenden, "The Christmas Eve Broadcast," Radio News 7, no. 6 (1925): 537–539.
11. Nobel Foundation, The Nobel Prize in Physics 1909 (Stockholm: Nobel Foundation, 1909).
12. Susan J. Douglas, Inventing American Broadcasting, 1899–1922 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), 120–135.
13. United States Congress, Radio Act of 1912, Public Law 264, 62nd Congress.
14. Edwin H. Armstrong, "A New System of Short Wave Amplification," Proceedings of the Institute of Radio Engineers 9, no. 1 (1921): 3–22.
15. Erik Barnouw, A History of Broadcasting in the United States, Vol. 1: A Tower in Babel (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), 88–95.
16. Asa Briggs, The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom, Vol. 1: The Birth of Broadcasting (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), 37–52.
17. Reginald A. Fessenden, "The Invention of Radio," Radio News 7, no. 10 (1925): 1083–1086.

Radio Act of 1912 & 1927:

Key provisions and impacts

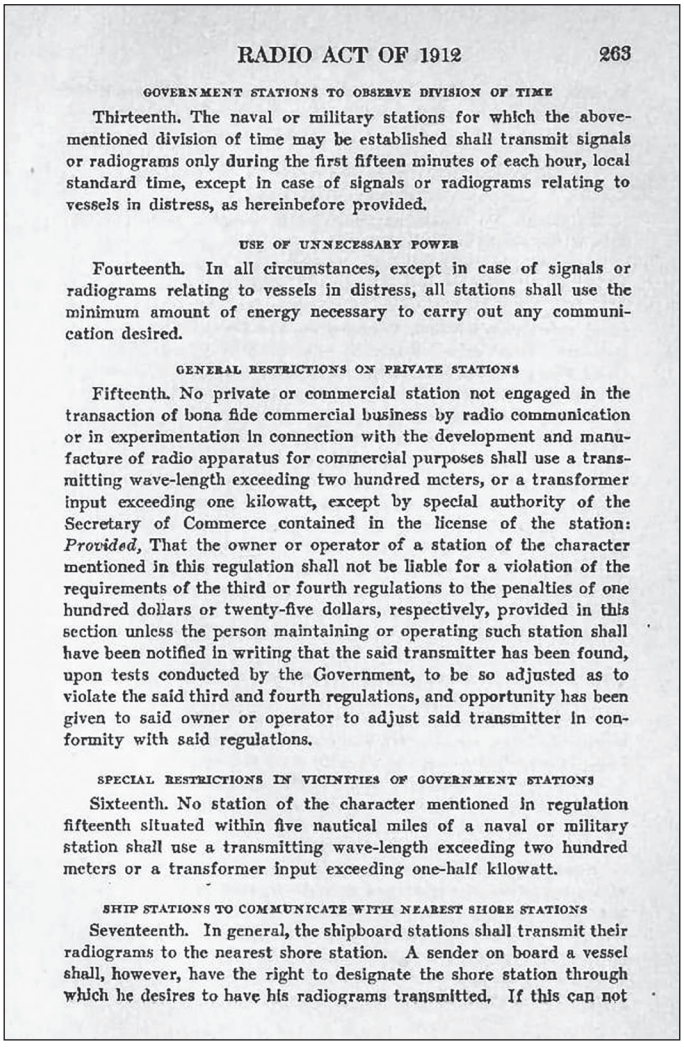
The Radio Act of 1912 was the first U.S. law to regulate radio communications, prompted by the Titanic disaster.[1] It mandated thatf all ships have licensed radio operators and maintain a continuous 24-hour radio watch for distress signals. The act also required all U.S. radio stations to be licensed, set aside specific wave lengths for distress calls, and established penalties for operating without a license or for interfering with emergency signals. Key provisions of the Radio Act of 1912

Licensing:
Mandated federal licenses for both radio operators and stations.[2]

Continuous monitoring:
Required all ships to maintain a continuous radio watch, ensuring distress signals wouldn't be missed.[3]

Distress signals:
Specified that all ships must be prepared to send distress signals on a designated international wavelength and use the correct international distress signal.[4]

Interference prevention:
Included penalties for interfering with radio communications, which was a problem during the Titanic's sinking when amateur radio operators were transmitting unnecessarily.[5]



RADIO ACT OF 1912 263

GOVERNMENT STATIONS TO OBSERVE DIVISION OF TIME

Thirteenth. The naval or military stations for which the above-mentioned division of time may be established shall transmit signals or radiograms only during the first fifteen minutes of each hour, local standard time, except in case of signals or radiograms relating to vessels in distress, as hereinbefore provided.

USE OF UNNECESSARY POWER

Fourteenth. In all circumstances, except in case of signals or radiograms relating to vessels in distress, all stations shall use the minimum amount of energy necessary to carry out any communication desired.

GENERAL RESTRICTIONS ON PRIVATE STATIONS

Fifteenth. No private or commercial station not engaged in the transaction of bona fide commercial business by radio communication or in experimentation in connection with the development and manufacture of radio apparatus for commercial purposes shall use a transmitting wave-length exceeding two hundred meters, or a transformer input exceeding one kilowatt, except by special authority of the Secretary of Commerce contained in the license of the station: *Provided*, That the owner or operator of a station of the character mentioned in this regulation shall not be liable for a violation of the requirements of the third or fourth regulations to the penalties of one hundred dollars or twenty-five dollars, respectively, provided in this section unless the person maintaining or operating such station shall have been notified in writing that the said transmitter has been found, upon tests conducted by the Government, to be so adjusted as to violate the said third and fourth regulations, and opportunity has been given to said owner or operator to adjust said transmitter in conformity with said regulations.

SPECIAL RESTRICTIONS IN VICINITIES OF GOVERNMENT STATIONS

Sixteenth. No station of the character mentioned in regulation fifteenth situated within five nautical miles of a naval or military station shall use a transmitting wave-length exceeding two hundred meters or a transformer input exceeding one-half kilowatt.

SHIP STATIONS TO COMMUNICATE WITH NEAREST SHORE STATIONS

Seventeenth. In general, the shipboard stations shall transmit their radiograms to the nearest shore station. A sender on board a vessel shall, however, have the right to designate the shore station through which he desires to have his radiograms transmitted. If this can not

The Radio Act of 1912
The Radio Act of 1912 was the first U.S. federal law regulating radio, prompted by ***the Titanic disaster,*** *mandating licenses for all radio operators, requiring ships to maintain 24/7 radio watch for distress signals, and giving the Department of Commerce and Labor power to regulate frequencies and wavelengths, establishing crucial federal control over the airwaves and setting the stage for modern broadcast regulation.*

Enforcement:
Gave the U.S. Department of Commerce and Labor the authority to issue licenses and enforce the new regulations.[6]

The Radio Act of 1927 was a landmark U.S. law that established federal control over radio broadcasting, replacing the earlier Radio Act of 1912. It created the Federal Radio Commission (FRC) to license radio stations and assign frequencies, which addressed the chaos caused by signal interference. The act mandated that broadcasters serve the **"public interest, convenience, or necessity"** and was a crucial step that laid the groundwork for the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), which was created in 1934.[7]

Key provisions and impacts

Created the Federal Radio Commission (FRC):

The act established a five-member commission to regulate radio. It took over regulation from the Secretary of Commerce, who had no authority to deny licenses or control transmission power.[8]

Licensed and assigned frequencies:

The FRC was responsible for granting licenses and allocating radio frequencies to bring order to the airwaves, addressing the growing problem of interference.[9]

Established the "public interest" standard:

Broadcasters were required to operate in the "public interest, convenience, or necessity," a principle that has shaped broadcasting policy ever since.[10]

Prohibited foreign ownership:

The act prevented foreign ownership of radio licenses.[11]

The Radio Act of 1927

Public Law No. 632, February 23, 1927, 69th Congress. An Act for the regulation of radio communications, and for other purposes.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

That this Act is intended to regulate all forms of interstate and foreign radio transmissions and communications within the United States, its Territories and possessions; to maintain the control of the United States over all the channels of interstate and foreign radio transmission; and to provide for the use of such channels, but not the ownership thereof, by individuals, firms, or corporations, for limited periods of time, under licenses granted by Federal authority, and no such license shall be construed to create any right, beyond the terms, conditions, and periods of the license. That no person, firm, company, or corporation shall use or operate any apparatus for the transmission of energy or communications or signals by radio (a) from one place in any Territory or possession of the United States, or from the District of Columbia to another place in the same Territory, possession or District; or (b) from any State, Territory, or possession of the United States, or from the District of Columbia to any other State, Territory, or Possession of the United States; or from any place in any State, Territory, or possession of the United States, or in the District of Columbia, to any place in any foreign country or to any vessel; or (d) within any State when the effects of such use extend beyond the borders of said State, or when interference is caused by such use or operation with the transmission of such energy, communications, or signals from within said State to any place beyond its borders, or from any place beyond its borders to any place within said State, or with the transmission or reception of such energy, communications, or signals from and/or to places beyond the borders of said State; or (e) upon any vessel of the United States; or (f) upon any aircraft or other mobile stations within the United States, except under and in accordance with this Act and with a license in that behalf granted under the provisions of this Act.

SEC. 2. For the purposes of this Act, the United States is divided into five zones, as follows: The first zone shall embrace the States of Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts, Connecticut, Rhode Island, New York, New Jersey, Delaware, Maryland, the District of Columbia, Porto Rico, and the Virgin Islands; the second zone shall embrace the States of Pennsylvania, Virginia, West Virginia, Ohio, Michigan, and Kentucky; the third zone shall embrace the States of North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Alabama, Tennessee, Mississippi, Arkansas, Louisiana, Texas, and Oklahoma; the fourth zone shall embrace the States of Indiana, Illinois, Wisconsin, Minnesota, North Dakota, South Dakota, Iowa, Nebraska, Kansas, and Missouri; and the fifth zone shall embrace the States of Montana, Idaho, Wyoming, Colorado, New Mexico, Arizona, Utah, Nevada, Washington, Oregon, California, the Territory of Hawaii, and Alaska.

SEC. 3. That a commission is hereby created and established to be known as the Federal Radio Commission, hereinafter referred to as the commission, which shall be composed of five commissioners appointed by the President, by and with the advice and consent of the Senate, and one of whom the President shall designate as chairman: *Provided,* That chairmen thereafter elected shall be chosen by the commission itself.

Each member of the commission shall be a citizen of the United States and an actual resident citizen of a State within the zone from which appointed at the time of said appointment. Not more than one commissioner shall be appointed from any zone. No member of the commission shall be financially interested in the manufacture or sale of radio apparatus or in the transmission or operation of radiotelegraphy, radio telephony, or radio broadcasting. Not more than three commissioners shall be members of the same political party.

The Radio Act of 1927

The Radio Act of 1927 (United States Public Law 632, 69th Congress) was signed into law on February 23, 1927. It replaced the Radio Act of 1912, increasing the federal government's regulatory powers over radio communication, with oversight vested in a newly created body, the Federal Radio Commission. It also was the first legislation to mandate that stations had to show they were "in the public interest, convenience, or necessity" in order to receive a license. The Act was later replaced by the Communications Act of 1934.


"All the News That's Fit to Print."

The New York Times.

THE WEATHER.

TITANIC SINKS FOUR HOURS AFTER HITTING ICEBERG; 866 RESCUED BY CARPATHIA, PROBABLY 1250 PERISH ISMAY SAFE, MRS. ASTOR MAYBE, NOTED NAMES MISSI

Col. Astor and Bride, Isidor Straus and Wife, and Maj. Butt Aboard.

"RULE OF SEA" FOLLOWED

PICKED UP AFTER 8 HOURS

FRANKLIN HOPEFUL ALL DAY

HEAD OF THE LINE ABOARD

Biggest Liner to the Bot at 2:20 A.

RESCUERS THERE T

SEA SEARCH FOR

Warning report from Marconi's Newfoundland station

If you opened up The New York Times on April 15, 1912, you would have read one of the most famous news alerts of the 20th century. The Times reported that it had learned from the Marconi company's Newfoundland station that the world's biggest ocean liner, the Titanic, had hit an iceberg en route from Southhampton, England.

Limited content regulation:

While it prohibited "obscene, indecent, or profane language," the FRC did not have censorship powers.[12]

Laid the foundation for the FCC:

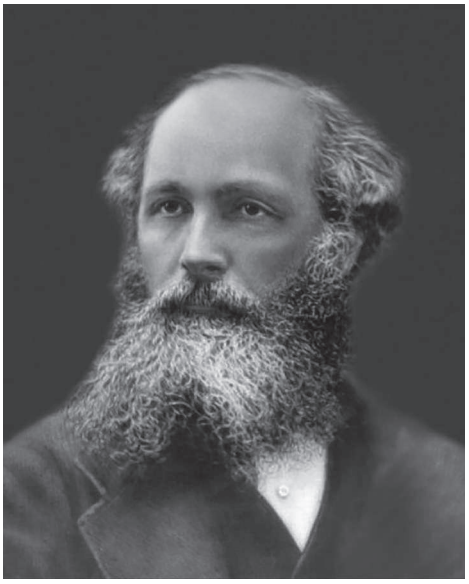
The FRC's structure and regulatory framework were a direct precursor to the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), which replaced it in 1934 with broader powers.[13]

Footnotes :

1. 1. Susan J. Douglas, Inventing American Broadcasting, 1899–1922 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), 258–262.
2. Ibid., 264.
3. Radio Act of 1912, Public Law 264, 62nd Congress (August 13, 1912).
4. Douglas, Inventing American Broadcasting, 266.
5. Hugh G. J. Aitken, Syntony and Spark: The Origins of Radio (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), 378–383.
6. Radio Act of 1912, Public Law 264.
7. Philip T. Rosen, The Modern Stentors: Radio Broadcasting in the United States (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1980), 42–48.
8. Ibid., 50.
9. Erik Barnouw, A Tower in Babel: A History of Broadcasting in the United States, vol. 1 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), 114–120.
10. Radio Act of 1927, Public Law 632, 69th Congress (February 23, 1927).
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12. Barnouw, A Tower in Babel, 125.
13. Christopher H. Sterling and John M. Kittross, Stay Tuned: A History of American Broadcasting (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2002), 83–86.

James Clerk Maxwell

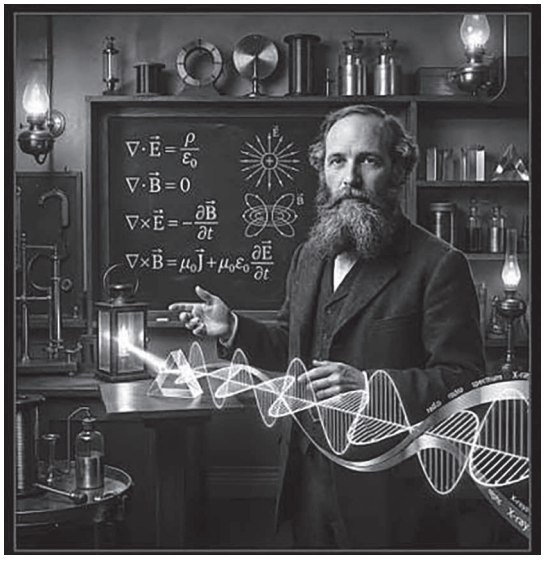
James Clerk Maxwell was one of the most influential scientists of the nineteenth century.



James Clerk Maxwell

His theoretical work on electromagnetism and light largely determined the direction that physics ould take in the early 20th century. Indeed, according to Albert Einstein, "One scientific epoch ended and another began with James Clerk Maxwell."[1]

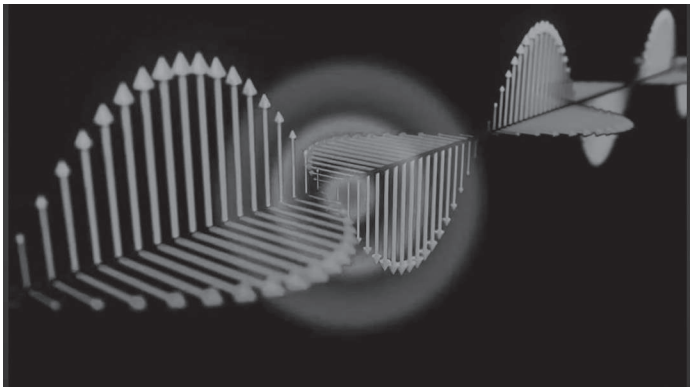
When he was born on June 13, 1831 in Edinburgh, Scotland, the scientist-to-be was only known as James Clerk, but the surname of Maxwell was added to his appellation when his father, an attorney, inherited an estate from ancestors with that name. Maxwell was an only child, and his mother died from cancer when he was 8 years old. A tutor was at first engaged to educate him, but then, in 1841, he was enrolled at the Edinburgh Academy.[2] His interests were wide ranging, and at the age of 14 his first paper was published. The subject was geometry, and his skill in this and other mathematical spheres would aid him in his many scientific endeavors. Maxwell began studying at the University of Edinburgh in 1847 and published two more papers while still a teenager.[3]



James Clark Maxwell
James Clerk Maxwell's great experiment, 19th Century By discovering that the lines of force from a magnet travel with the speed of light Maxwell (1831-1879) established the identity of electric waves and prepared the way for wireless telegraphy.

Maxwell transferred in 1850 to Cambridge University, where he was an exemplary student and won various awards, including the Smith's Prize. He graduated in 1854 and accepted a Trinity College fellowship. As a fellow, Maxwell began research into two topics that he would investigate throughout his life: color and magnetism.[4] This work resulted in the publication of two papers in 1855, **"Experiments on Colour, as perceived by the Eye, with remarks on Colour-blindness"** and **"On Faraday's Lines of Force."**[5] That same year, Maxwell was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society of Edinburgh, and the following year he received an appointment as professor of natural philosophy at the University of Aberdeen's Marischal College.[6] His father, with whom he had been very close, died shortly before the appointment was made, and Maxwell inherited the family estate. In 1858, he married Katherine Mary Dewar, whom he met through a colleague at the college.[7]

During his years at Aberdeen, Maxwell carried out research into a number of areas, but became particularly occupied with the nature of Saturn's rings, the subject of the Adams Prize of 1857. Deciding to compete for the prize, he spent two years attempting to find a way to accurately determine the composition of the rings. Eventually he theorized, using purely mathematical reasoning, that the rings could not be stable if they were comprised of a homogenous solid, leading him to conclude that the rings must be made of an unknown number of unconnected particles.[8] Maxwell's theory, finally proven a century later when the Voyager space probes were sent to Saturn, won him the prestigious prize. This research lead to more general inquiries into heat and the kinetics of gases. In 1859, Maxwell developed a statistical description of velocity distribution among the molecules comprising a gas, which would eventually be expanded into the Maxwell-Boltzmann distribution law.[9]

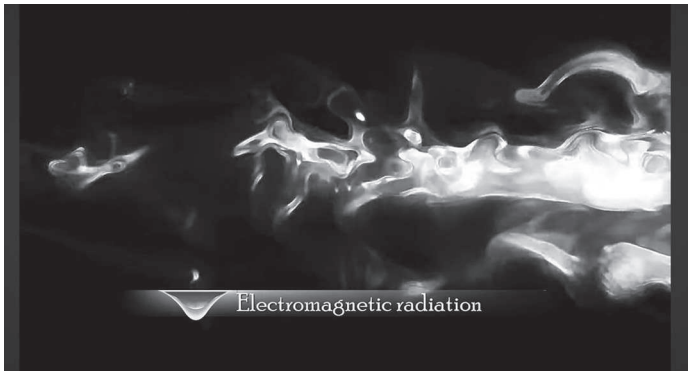


Maxwell's electromagnetic theory, *unified by James Clerk Maxwell's equations, showed that electricity, magnetism, and light are interconnected aspects of the same phenomenon: electromagnetic waves, which are self-propagating disturbances in electric and magnetic fields that travel at the speed of light, forming the entire electromagnetic spectrum from radio waves to gamma rays.* ***The theory explains how changing electric fields create magnetic fields (and vice versa) and predicted the existence of these transverse waves, laying the groundwork for modern physics and wireless technologies.***

Maxwell accepted a professorial position at King's College, London in 1860. The five years he was associated with the institution are generally regarded as his most scientifically profitable. At this time, he applied his earlier studies of color vision and optics to photography, producing the world's first color photograph in 1861.[10] To do this he developed a trichromatic process, in which the same subject was photographed through red, blue and green color filters, and the three resulting images were combined into one. Also during his King's College years, Maxwell continued his work with gases, which would culminate in his important treatise "On the Dynamical Theory of Gases" in 1867, and made groundbreaking advances in the area of electromagnetism.[11]

It is for his electromagnetic theory that Maxwell is most commonly credited with fundamentally changing the course of physics. To arrive at his theory, Maxwell borrowed and extended ideas previously developed by several other scientists, including Michael Faraday, William Thomson (Lord Kelvin), and Carl Friedrich Gauss, among others. From his attempt to translate the experimental findings of Faraday into the language of mathematics, Maxwell arrived at a set of equations that comprehensively describe the production and the relationships between electric fields and magnetic fields.[12] Based on the equations, simply known as Maxwell's equations today, he was able to predict that waves of oscillating electric and magnetic fields travel in space at a particular speed, which he calculated was roughly equivalent to the speed of light (later, more accurate means of measurement confirmed exact equivalence). Subsequently, Maxwell theorized that light was just

one of many possible types of electromagnetic radiation. Maxwell's equations first appeared in 1864 in a paper entitled "A Dynamical Theory of the Electromagnetic Field," but were more completely addressed in his Treatise on Electricity and Magnetism, published in 1873.[13]



Electromagnetic radiation *is the name given to a pair of electric and magnetic fields that propagate together at the speed of light. Examples of electromagnetic radiation are visible light, radio waves, X-rays and* ***gamma rays all parts of the electromagnetic spectrum.***

According to Maxwell's theory (which, in its emphasis on fields, clearly opposed the theory of action at a distance that was popular at the time), electromagnetic waves should be able to be produced and studied in the laboratory. In fact, both infrared and ultraviolet radiation, which are just outside the visible electromagnetic spectrum, had already been discovered and investigateMaxwell's electromagnetic theory, unified by James Clerk Maxwell's equations, showed that electricity, magnetism, and light are interconnected aspects of the same phenomenon: electromagnetic waves, which are self-propagating disturbances in electric and magnetic fields that travel at the speed of light, forming the entire electromagnetic spectrum from radio waves to gamma rays. The theory explains how changing electric fields create magnetic fields (and vice versa) and predicted the existence of these transverse waves, laying the groundwork for modern physics and wireless technologies.d.[14] However, it was not until William Heinrich Hertz discovered radio waves in 1887 that additional electromagnetic radiation even further outside the visible spectrum was proven to exist. In addition to anticipating this discovery, Maxwell's theory greatly influenced the accepted understanding of the physical world and helped lead to Albert Einstein's special theory of relativity and Max Planck's quantum theory.[15]

Maxwell resigned from King's College in 1865 and relocated to the home in Scotland that been left to him by his father. He remained active in London academic circles, however, returning to England at least once every spring and continuing involvement in Cambridge University's mathematical exams. Moreover, Maxwell continued his scientific work at home, completing much of his Treatise and penning works on gases, topology and heat theory during this time. He would become much more closely associated with Cambridge in 1871, when he was appointed the first Cavendish Professor of Physics at the institution. Included among his responsibilities in the new position were overseeing the foundation of the Cavendish Laboratory and editing the research papers of Henry Cavendish.[16] Maxwell worked at the Cavendish Laboratory until 1879, when a bout with abdominal cancer, the same disease that had precipitated his mother's death, rendered him too ill to continue. He died on November 5 of that year and was laid to rest in his native Scotland.[17]

Footnotes :

1. 1. Albert Einstein, "Clerk Maxwell's Influence on the Evolution of Physics," in James Clerk Maxwell: A Commemorative Volume 1831–1931, ed. Joseph Larmor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1931), 72.

2. Ivan Tolstoy, The Great Physicist: The Life of James Clerk Maxwell (New York: Dover Publications, 1981), 3–5.
3. Basil Mahon, The Man Who Changed Everything: The Life of James Clerk Maxwell (Chichester: Wiley, 2003), 18–21.
4. Ibid., 22–25.
5. Bruce J. Hunt, The Maxwellians (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991), 11–13.
6. James Clerk Maxwell, "Experiments on Colour," Transactions of the Royal Society of Edinburgh 21 (1855); James Clerk Maxwell, "On Faraday's Lines of Force," Philosophical Magazine 10 (1855).
7. Mahon, The Man Who Changed Everything, 45–48.
8. Hunt, The Maxwellians, 20–23.
9. James Clerk Maxwell, "Illustrations of the Dynamical Theory of Gases," Philosophical Magazine 19 (1860).
10. John L. Heilbron, The Oxford Companion to the History of Modern Science (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 501.
11. Hunt, The Maxwellians, 44–51.
12. James Clerk Maxwell, "A Dynamical Theory of the Electromagnetic Field," Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of London 155 (1865).
13. James Clerk Maxwell, A Treatise on Electricity and Magnetism (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1873).
14. David E. Hughes, "The Work of Hertz," Philosophical Magazine 27 (1889).
15. Abraham Pais, Subtle Is the Lord: The Science and Life of Albert Einstein (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 105–110.
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17. Tolstoy, The Great Physicist, 240–245.

Heinrich Hertz

The discovery of radio waves, which was widely seen as confirmation of James Clerk Maxwell's electromagnetic theory and paved the way for numerous advances in communication technology, was made by German physicist Heinrich Hertz.



Heinrich Hertz

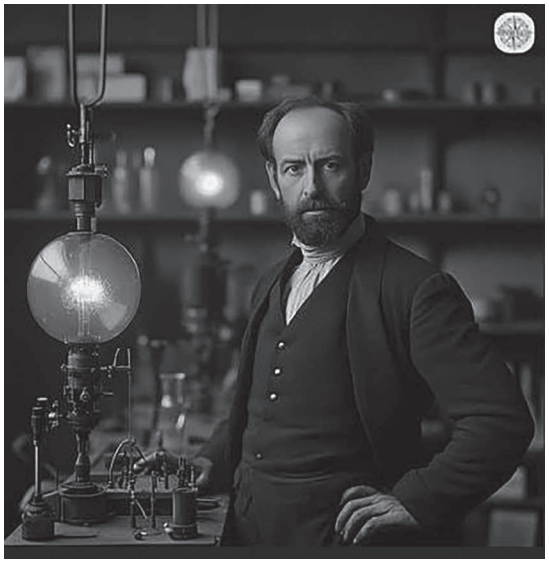
German physicist Heinrich Hertz discovered radio waves, a milestone widely seen as confirmation of James Clerk Maxwell's electromagnetic theory and which paved the way for numerous advances in communication technology. Born in Hamburg on February 22, 1857, Hertz was the eldest of five children. His mother was Elizabeth Pfefferkorn Hertz and his father was Gustav Hertz, a respected lawyer who would later become a legislator.[1] In his youth Heinrich displayed an interest in building things, and as a teenager he constructed a spectroscope and a galvanometer that were so well designed that Hertz used them throughout his college years.[2] Initially Hertz planned a career in engineering, but after a year of employment

at the public works office in Frankfurt, a summer of classes at the Polytechnic in Dresden, a year of military service in Berlin, and a brief stint in the engineering department at the University of Munich, he finally decided to pursue the subject that most deeply interested him: science.[3]

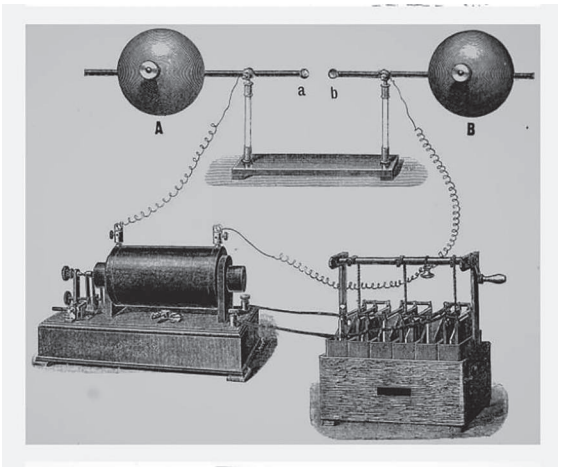
Throughout his life Hertz read works on science and carried out experiments as a hobby. But once he decided that science was to be his career, he applied himself to these tasks with even greater enthusiasm. In the winter of 1877, he studied various scientific treatises, and the following spring, he gained some laboratory experience by working with Gustav von Jolly.[4] Subsequently he enrolled at the University of Berlin, where he was privileged to study under the great German physicist Hermann von Helmholtz. With Helmholtz's encouragement, Hertz resolved to compete for a research prize to be awarded to the student best able to determine whether or not electricity moved with inertia.[5] Hertz began a series of experiments into the matter, and this mode of learning seemed to suit him. He confided in a letter sent to his family during that time, "I cannot tell you how much more satisfaction it gives me to gain knowledge for myself and for others directly from nature, rather than merely learning from others and for myself alone."[6]

In August of 1879, Hertz won the prize for his evidence demonstrating that electricity had no inertia. Another prize problem was soon proposed by Helmholtz, who wanted students to attempt to prove which of the theories of electromagnetic phenomena then circulating was correct.[7] Interestingly, Hertz did not choose to compete for this prize, but years later would be the first person to successfully provide the kind of definitive evidence that Helmholtz sought. At the time, Hertz instead embarked on a study of induction produced by rotating spheres. His work in this area helped him earn his doctorate degree ahead of schedule, in 1880, magna cum laude.[8]

Hertz's first academic post was as lecturer of theoretical physics at the University of Kiel, but due to his dissatisfaction

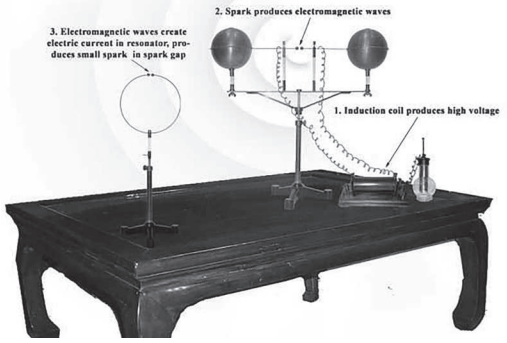


A tiny spark jumped through thin air in a German lab in1886, proving invisible waves could travel through space. ***Heinrich Hertz's experiment to test a controversial theory led to radio.*** *TV and wireless phones - though he never lived to see how his discovery changed the world.*



Heinrich Hertz's experiment on electromagnetic waves. *Illustration depicting Heinrich Hertz's experiment on electromagnetic waves: Hertz's oscillator.* ***Terminals of an induction coil (bottom left) were connected to condenser A, B. Initial spark passing between metal balls at centre, A,B, formed a path for subsequent oscillations which were measured.*** *Heinrich Hertz (1857-1894) a German physicist who conclusively proved the existence of the electromagnetic waves theorised by James Clerk Maxwell's electromagnetic theory of light. Dated 20th century. (Photo by: Universal History Archive/Universal Images Group via Getty Images)*

there he accepted a position at the Karlsruhe Polytechnic in 1885. It was at Karlsruhe, where he remained until he received an appointment as physics professor at the University of Bonn in 1889, that Hertz carried out his most important work.[9] In 1886, Hertz began experimenting with sparks emitted across a gap in a short metal loop attached to an induction coil. He soon built a similar apparatus, but without the induction coil, to act as a detector. When the induction coil connected to the first loop (the transmitter) produced a high voltage discharge, a spark jumped across the gap, sending out a signal that Hertz detected as a weaker spark across the gap in the receiving apparatus, which he placed nearby. To determine the nature of the signals that he was able to transmit and receive, Hertz developed a number of innovative experiments.[10]



Vibration and their Susceptibility
Heinrich Hertz showed that the nature of their vibration and their susceptibility to reflection and refraction were the same as those of light and heat waves. ***As a result, he established beyond any doubt that light and heat are electromagnetic radiations.*** *The electromagnetic waves were called Hertzian and, later, radio waves.*

By measuring side sparks that formed around the primary spark and varying the position of the detector, Hertz was able to determine that the signal exhibited a wave pattern, and to ascertain its wavelength. Then, by using a rotating mirror, he found the frequency of the invisible waves, which enabled him to calculate their velocity. Amazingly, the waves were moving at the speed of light. Thus, it appeared to Hertz that he had discovered a previously unknown form of electromagnetic radiation, and in the process confirmed James Clerk Maxwell's theory of electromagnetism. To further prove that this was indeed the case, Hertz continued his experiments exploring the behavior of the invisible waves.[11] He discovered that they traveled in straight lines and could be focused, diffracted, refracted and polarized. Hertz announced his initial discovery in late 1887 in his treatise **"On Electromagnetic Effects Produced by Electrical Disturbances in Insulators"**, which he sent to the Berlin Academy. He later published additional details following the series of experiments he carried out in 1888. For a time the waves he discovered were commonly referred to as Hertzian waves, but today they are known as radio waves.

In addition to his radio wave breakthrough, Hertz is notable for the discovery of the photoelectric effect, which occurred while he was investigating electromagnetic waves. Because of some difficulty in detecting the small spark produced in his receiving apparatus, Hertz sometimes placed the receiver in a dark case. This, he found, affected the maximum length of the spark, which was smaller than when he did not use the case. With further research into the phenomenon, Hertz discovered that the spark produced was stronger if it was exposed to ultraviolet light. Though he did not attempt to explain this fact, others, including J.J. Thomson and Albert Einstein, would soon realize its importance. The phenomenon of electrons being released from a material when it absorbs radiant energy, which was the cause of the stronger sparks observed by Hertz when ultraviolet radiation was used, would come to be known as the photoelectric effect.[12]

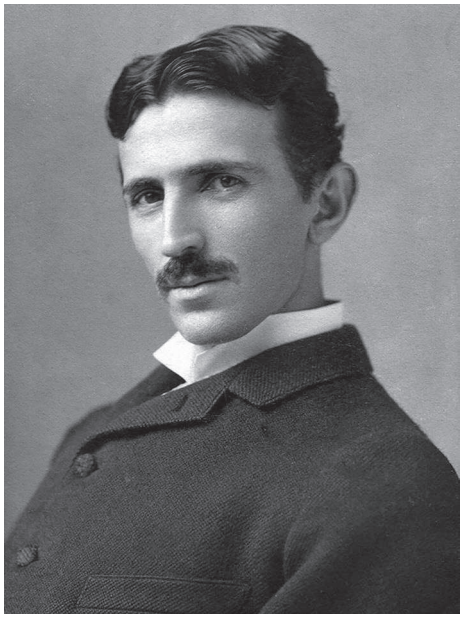
After 1889, when Hertz was teaching at the University of Bonn, he studied electrical discharges in rarefied gases and spent a significant amount of time composing his Principles of Mechanics. Unfortunately, he never saw the work published due to his premature death associated with blood poisoning on New Year's Day 1894. Only 37 years old at the time, Hertz also never lived to see the tremendous impact the discovery of radio waves would have on the world in the 20th century.[13]

Footnotes :

1. John D. Jackson and Robert L. P. Adams, Classical Electrodynamics and the Legacy of Heinrich Hertz (Berlin: Springer, 1987), 14–16.
2. Günther Joos, The Life and Work of Heinrich Hertz (New York: Dover Publications, 1955), 22–25.
3. Heinz-Otto Sibum, "Experimental Practices: Helmholtz and Hertz," in Companion to the History of Modern Science, ed. R. C. Olby et al. (London: Routledge, 1990), 566–568.
4. Joos, Life and Work of Heinrich Hertz, 31–33.
5. David Cahan, Helmholtz: A Life in Science (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 383–386.
6. Joos, Life and Work of Heinrich Hertz, 38–40.
7. Harry R. Shipman, "Hertz and the Discovery of Radio Waves," American Journal of Physics 42, no. 11 (1974): 936–940.
8. Heinrich Hertz, "On Electromagnetic Effects Produced by Electrical Disturbances in Insulators," Sitzungsberichte der Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften (1887).
9. Sir Edmund Whittaker, A History of the Theories of Aether and Electricity, vol. 1 (London: Thomas Nelson, 1951), 422–425.
10. James R. Hofmann, The Perfect Wave: Heinrich Hertz and the Transmission of Electromagnetic Energy (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2011), 112–118.
11. Heinrich Hertz, "Electric Waves," Annalen der Physik 34 (1888).
12. Nancy Forbes and Basil Mahon, Faraday, Maxwell, and the Electromagnetic Field (New York: Prometheus Books, 2014), 181–185.
13. Joos, Life and Work of Heinrich Hertz, 91–94.

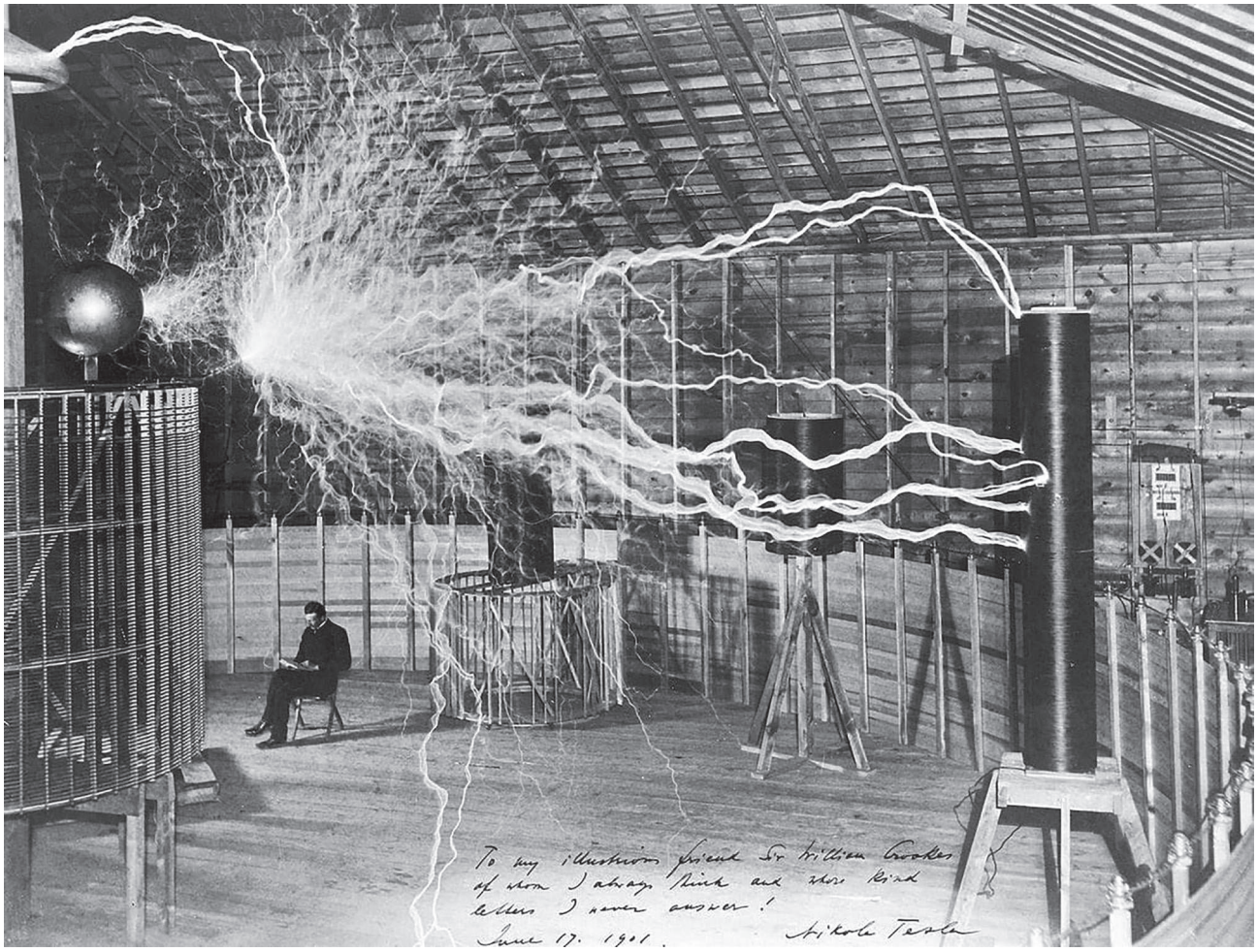
Nikola Tesla

Awarded more than 100 patents over the course of his lifetime, Nikola Tesla was a man of considerable genius and vision.



Nikola Tesla

He was reportedly born at exactly midnight during an electrical storm, an intriguing beginning for a man who would one day help light up all of America with the alternating current (AC) electric power systems he invented.[1] In addition to his AC systems, which allowed more efficient and safer power transmission over long distances than the direct current (DC)



Tesla's Magnifying Transmitter
A double-exposed photograph showing Tesla in his Colorado Springs laboratory, 1899. Tesla forced his "magnifying transmitter" to produce inefficient arcs by turning the machine rapidly on and off during the photoshoot .

systems preferred by Thomas Edison, Tesla pioneered radio technology, experimented with X-rays, invented the first boat controlled remotely and was a great proponent of wireless communication.[2] Despite his many achievements, Tesla faced numerous difficulties, often finding himself at odds with other inventors, such as Thomas Edison and Guglielmo Marconi, and struggling to stay out of debt when business ventures fell through.[3]

Tesla, the son of a Serbian Orthodox priest and his wife (herself the daughter of a priest), spent his early life in Croatia. He had four siblings. Tesla attended the Austrian Polytechnic Institute in Graz, Austria, where he developed an interest in motors and the possible uses of alternating current.[4] Subsequently he spent a term at the Charles-Ferdinand branch of the University of Prague, where his classes focused on physics and advanced mathematics.[5] In 1881, Tesla moved again, this time to Budapest, Hungary. There he worked first as an electrician and then as an electrical engineer. The following year he began working as an engineer in yet another city, Paris, France.[6] There, while experimenting in his free time from his job at the Continental

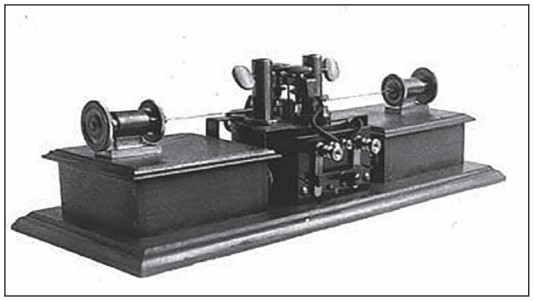
Edison Company, Tesla developed his earliest devices that used rotating magnetic fields, including the induction motor.[7]

Tesla immigrated to the United States in 1894, bringing with him a letter of recommendation addressed to Thomas Edison, a few cents and little else. The letter served its purpose well, gaining Tesla a position at Edison Machine Works. Nevertheless,[8] despite his skills in electrical design, Tesla was not suited to work with Edison, whose methods and ideas opposed his own. When Edison failed to follow through on a promised bonus, Tesla left the company.[9]



Nikola Tesla, *One of history's most visionary inventors and electrical engineers, was hard at work in his laboratory in Colorado Springs, Colorado. The image of Tesla seated in his laboratory is not just a snapshot of a man at work; it encapsulates the spirit of innovation that defined the late 19th century and set the stage for the technological advancements of the 20th century.*

By selling his rights to the polyphase alternating current power system to George Westinghouse, Tesla did little to endear himself with Edison.[10] The Westinghouse Electric Company quickly began promoting the AC system, competing against Edison's older DC system. To gain acceptance for AC power, Westinghouse and Tesla carried out numerous demonstrations, including using it to power a special electrical exhibition at the 1893 World's Fair in Chicago.[11] The rivalry was fierce, but the Tesla-Westinghouse approach gradually became the dominant means of providing power throughout the country.[12]



Tesla's radio. *Instrument for the reception of radio waves, similar to devices used from 1892 by Serb-US physicist and electrical engineer Nikola Tesla. The most successful of the early radio systems was that developed by Marconi from 1894.* ***Tesla carried out research that led to key advances in areas such as alternating current power generation and transmission.*** *A type of transformer is named for him (the Tesla Coil), as is the SI unit of magnetic flux density.*

Money he earned from his involvement with Westinghouse allowed Tesla to set up his own laboratory, where he carried out studies in many areas and invented a variety of novel devices.[13] In 1891, he developed the Tesla coil, a high-frequency transformer that produces an extremely powerful electrical field.[14] The Tesla coil later was used widely in radio and electronics. In 1898, Tesla invented a remote-controlled boat.[15] He thought the technology would be useful to the military, but for decades it remained little more than a novelty. Tesla relocated briefly to Colorado Springs, Colorado, seeking more space and better atmospheric conditions for his high-voltage experiments.[16] There he discovered terrestrial stationary waves within the Earth and measured the resonance frequency of the planet. Some of his activities in the remote laboratory became fodder for reporters, who questioned Tesla's claims that he received extraterrestrial radio signals, and damaged his reputation as a serious scientist.[17] Increasingly, Tesla became known as an eccentric, but he never let what other people said about him keep him from his scientific pursuits.[18]

Even as his Colorado lab was being dismantled to pay off debts, Tesla was planning his next major endeavor. With the financial backing of J.P. Morgan, Tesla began planning a wireless global broadcasting tower to be located in Long Island.[19] Construction of the Wardenclyffe Tower began in the early 1900s, but Morgan pulled out of the deal and the project was scrapped.[20] Without funding Tesla was unable to achieve his dream of wide-scale wireless telecommunication and power transmission, a tremendous setback for him and the world. Few of his contemporaries understood the great potential of Tesla's plan and considered the failed tower an example of his folly.[21]

Tesla died in a hotel in New York in January 1943.[22] He was in debt at the time, as he was much of his life. Money problems prevented him from fully pursing many of his inventions; ideas languished in his notebooks, never materializing. The year of his death, Tesla posthumously won his ongoing battle with Marconi regarding the patent rights to the radio, which had escalated all the way to the United States Supreme Court.[23]

In honor of Tesla, the SI unit of magnetic flux density, which was defined in 1960, bears his name. The tesla is equivalent to one weber per square meter.[24]

Footnotes :

1. Marc J. Seifer, Wizard: The Life and Times of Nikola Tesla (New York: Citadel Press, 1996), 12.
2. Ibid., 15–18.
3. Ibid., 24–28.
4. Margaret Cheney, Tesla: Man Out of Time (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1981), 31–33.
5. Ibid., 34–36.
6. Seifer, Wizard, 38–40.
7. Ibid., 42–44.
8. Cheney, Tesla: Man Out of Time, 39.
9. Seifer, Wizard, 45–46.
10. Ibid., 50–52.
11. Ibid., 53–55.
12. Cheney, Tesla: Man Out of Time, 45–47.
13. Seifer, Wizard, 60–62.
14. Cheney, Tesla: Man Out of Time, 50–52.
15. Seifer, Wizard, 66–68.
16. Cheney, Tesla: Man Out of Time, 55–58.
17. Seifer, Wizard, 70–72.
18. Ibid., 73–75.
19. Cheney, Tesla: Man Out of Time, 60–62.
20. Seifer, Wizard, 80–83.
21. Ibid., 85–87.
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Guglielmo Marconi

Through his experiments in wireless telegraphy, Nobel Prize-winning physicist/inventor Guglielmo Marconi developed the first effective system of radio communication.

Guglielmo Marconi was born at Bologna, Italy, on April 25, 1874, the second son of Giuseppe Marconi, an Italian country gentleman, and Annie Jameson, daughter of Andrew Jameson of Daphne Castle in the County Wexford, Ireland.[1] He was educated privately at Bologna, Florence and Leghorn.[2] Even as a boy he took a keen interest in physical and electrical scie>?nce and studied the works of Maxwell, Hertz, Righi, Lodge and others.[3] In 1895 he began laboratory experiments at his father's country estate at Pontecchio where he succeeded in sending wireless signals over a distance of one and a half miles.[4]



Guglielmo Marconi

In 1896 Marconi took his apparatus to England where he was introduced to Mr. (later Sir) William Preece, Engineer-in-Chief of the Post Office, and later that year was granted the world's first patent for a system of wireless telegraphy.[5] He demonstrated his system successfully in London, on Salisbury Plain and across the Bristol Channel, and in July 1897 formed The Wireless Telegraph & Signal Company Limited (in 1900 re-named Marconi's Wireless Telegraph Company Limited).[6] In the same year he gave a demonstration to the Italian Government at Spezia where wireless signals were sent over a distance of twelve miles.[7] In 1899 he established wireless communication between France and England across the English Channel.[8] He erected permanent wireless stations at The Needles, Isle of Wight, at Bournemouth and later at the Haven Hotel, Poole, Dorset.[9]

In 1900 he took out his famous patent No. 7777 for "tuned or syntonic telegraphy" and, on an historic day in December 1901, determined to prove that wireless waves were not affected by the curvature of the Earth, he used his system for transmitting the first wireless signals across the Atlantic between Poldhu, Cornwall, and St. John's, Newfoundland, a distance of 2100 miles.[10]

Between 1902 and 1912 he patented several new inventions. In 1902, during a voyage in the American liner "Philadelphia", he first demonstrated "daylight effect" relative to wireless communication and in the same year patented his magnetic detector which then became the standard wireless receiver for many years.[11] In December 1902 he transmitted the first complete messages to Poldhu from stations at Glace Bay, Nova Scotia, and later Cape Cod, Massachusetts, these early tests culminating in 1907 in the opening of the first transatlantic commercial service between Glace Bay and Clifden, Ireland, after the first shorter-distance public service



Guglielmo Marconi was an Italian inventor, known as the father of long distance radio transmission and for his development of Marconi's law and a radio telegraph system. He shared the 1909 Nobel Prize in Physics with Karl Ferdinand Braun.

of wireless telegraphy had been established between Bari in Italy and Avidari in Montenegro.[12] In 1905 he patented his horizontal directional aerial and in 1912 a "timed spark" system for generating continuous waves.[13]

In 1914 he was commissioned in the Italian Army as a Lieutenant being later promoted to Captain, and in 1916 transferred to the Navy in the rank of Commander.[14] He was a member of the Italian Government mission to the United States in 1917 and in 1919 was appointed Italian plenipotentiary delegate to the Paris Peace Conference.[15] He was awarded the Italian Military Medal in 1919 in recognition of his war service.[16]

During his war service in Italy he returned to his investigation of short waves, which he had used in his first experiments.[17] After further tests by his collaborators in England, an intensive series of trials was conducted in 1923 between experimental installations at the Poldhu Station and in Marconi's yacht "Elettra" cruising in the Atlantic and Mediterranean, and this led to the establishment of the beam system for long distance communication.[18] Proposals to use this system as a means of Imperial communications were accepted by the British Government and the first beam station, linking England and Canada, was opened in 1926, other stations being added the following year.[19]

In 1931 Marconi began research into the propagation characteristics of still shorter waves, resulting in the opening in 1932 of the world's first microwave radiotelephone link between the Vatican City and the Pope's summer residence at Castel Gandolfo.[20] Two years later at Sestri Levante he demonstrated his microwave radio beacon for ship navigation and in 1935, again in Italy, gave a practical demonstration of the principles of radar,

the coming of which he had first foretold in a lecture to the American Institute of Radio Engineers in New York in 1922.[21]

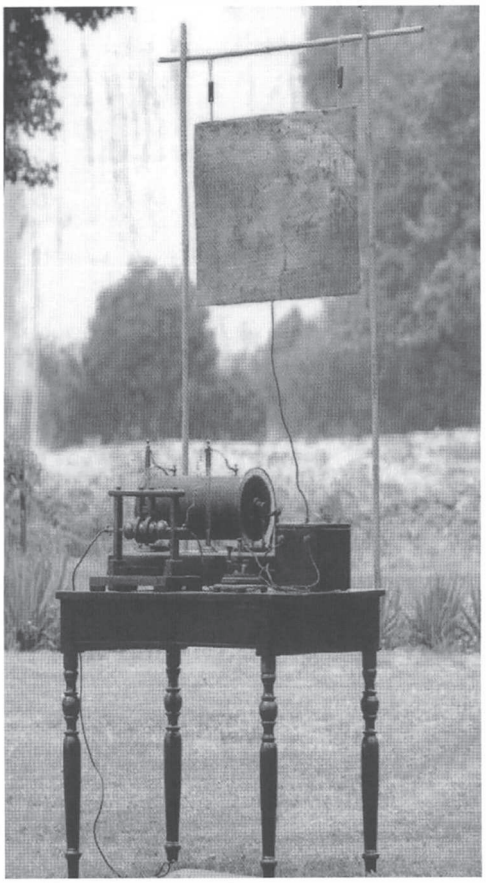
He has been the recipient of honorary doctorates of several universities and many other international honours and awards, among them the Nobel Prize for Physics, which in 1909 he shared with Professor Karl Braun, the Albert Medal of the Royal Society of Arts, the John Fritz Medal and the Kelvin Medal.[22] He was decorated by the Tsar of Russia with the Order of St. Anne, the King of Italy created him Commander of the Order of St. Maurice and St. Lazarus, and awarded him the Grand Cross of the Order of the Crown of Italy in 1902.[23] Marconi also received the freedom of the City of Rome (1903), and was created Chevalier of the Civil Order of Savoy in 1905.[24] Many other distinctions of this kind followed. In 1914 he was both created a Senatore in the Italian Senate and app ointed Honorary Knight Grand Cross of the Royal Victorian Order in England.[25] He received the hereditary title of Marchese in 1929.[26]

In 1905 he married the Hon. Beatrice O'Brien, daughter of the 14th Baron Inchiquin, the marriage being annulled in 1927, in which year he married the Countess Bezzi-Scali of Rome.[27] He had one son and two daughters by his first and one daughter by his second wife. His recreations were hunting, cycling and motoring.[28]

Marconi died in Rome on July 20, 1937.[29]

Footnotes :

1. 1. Basilio Catania, Guglielmo Marconi: Pioneer of Wireless (New York: Springer, 2000), 5.
2. Ibid., 6.
3. J. C. H. Heaviside, Marconi and the Birth of Radio (London: Macmillan, 1940), 12–14.
4. Catania, Guglielmo Marconi, 15.
5. Heaviside, Marconi and the Birth of Radio, 16.



The first equipment built by Marconi In August 1895 with the antenna properly grounded.

It was a spark-gap transmitter which generated radio waves by an electric spark between two electrodes of a Righi spark gap (left, on table). The high voltage to produce the spark was generated by an induction coil (center) powered by a battery (on floor). A telegraph key (right, on table) in the primary circuit allowed the operator to switch the transmitter on and off rapidly, producing pulses of radio waves which spelled out text messages in Morse code. The unique feature of this transmitter is that it includes Marconi's invention of a monopole antenna. Marconi found that by connecting one side of the transmitter to an elevated copper sheet "capacity area" (top) and the other side to ground (earth), he could transmit longer distances than when using the previous dipole antennas invented by Hertz. This crucial innovation reduced the frequency of the radio waves, and radiated vertically polarized waves which had a greater range. With it Marconi achieved the first radio transmissions of practical distance, about 3 1/2 miles.

6. Ibid., 18–20.
7. Catania, Guglielmo Marconi, 20.
8. Heaviside, Marconi and the Birth of Radio, 22.
9. Ibid., 25.
10. Catania, Guglielmo Marconi, 30–31.
11. Ibid., 35
12. Heaviside, Marconi and the Birth of Radio, 40–42.
13. Catania, Guglielmo Marconi, 45.
14. Ibid., 50.
15. Heaviside, Marconi and the Birth of Radio, 55.
16. Catania, Guglielmo Marconi, 58.
17. Heaviside, Marconi and the Birth of Radio, 60.
18. Catania, Guglielmo Marconi, 62–63.
19. Heaviside, Marconi and the Birth of Radio, 65.
20. Catania, Guglielmo Marconi, 70.
21. Ibid., 75.
22. Heaviside, Marconi and the Birth of Radio, 80–82.
23. Catania, Guglielmo Marconi, 85.
24. Heaviside, Marconi and the Birth of Radio, 90.
25. Catania, Guglielmo Marconi, 92.
26. Ibid., 95.
27. Heaviside, Marconi and the Birth of Radio, 98.
28. Catania, Guglielmo Marconi, 100.
29. Ibid., 102.

Marconi Radio – 1897

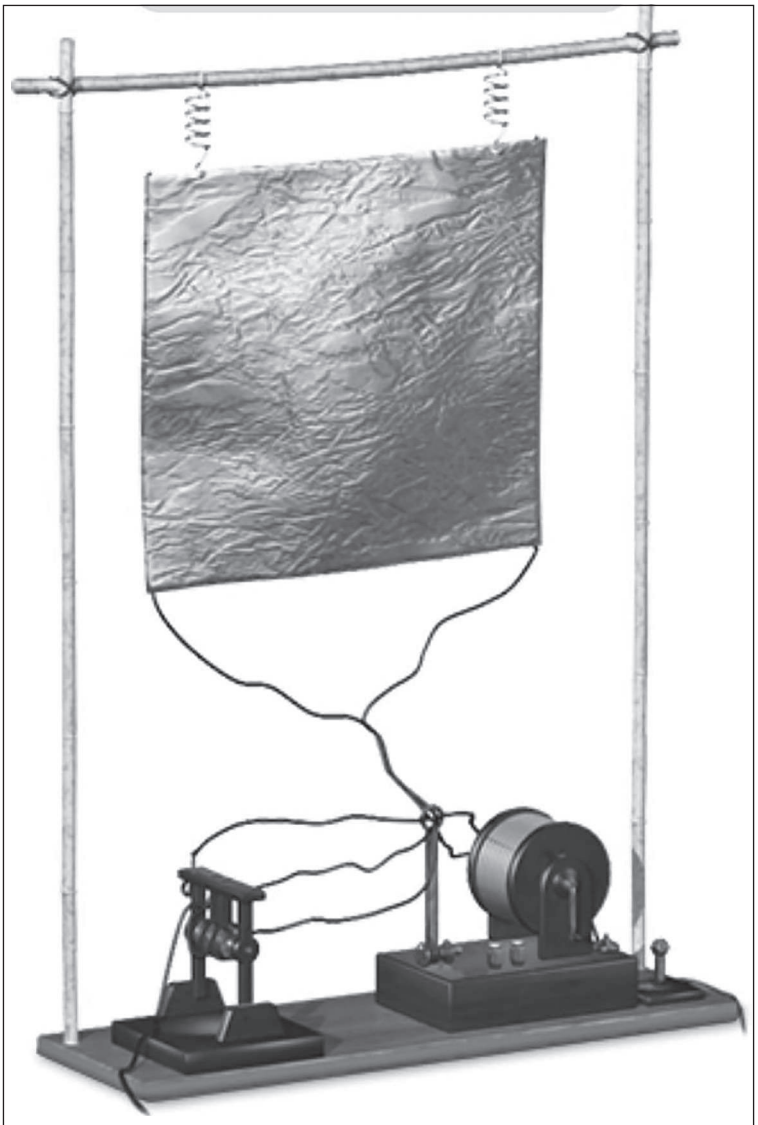
A number of distinguished scientists had a hand in the discovery of "wireless telegraphy," but it was the work done by Guglielmo Marconi that is credited with providing the basis of radio as we know it today.

Numerous researchers and scientists played key roles in the development and advancement of wireless telegraphy (as radio was known in its infancy), including such celebrated names as Nikola Tesla and Thomas Edison.[1] But the system put forth by Guglielmo Marconi was the first to be widely used.[2]

Toward the end of the 19th century, it was becoming increasingly evident that wireless communication was possible.[3] A number of theoretical breakthroughs of that era led directly to the high-tech communication system now used around the world.[4] Marconi developed a means of transmitting a signal great distances and eventually commercialized a practical system.[5]

In 1897, the London-based company headed by Marconi opened the first "wireless" factory in Chelmsford, England, with a staff of approximately 50 employees.[6] Over the next two years, he made two wireless transmissions across water to islands, leading to a major milestone in 1901 when he received the first trans-Atlantic radio signal.[7] That historic development took place in the northeast Canadian town of St. Johns, Newfoundland, with the help of a receiving antenna that was carried several hundred feet into the air by a kite.[8]

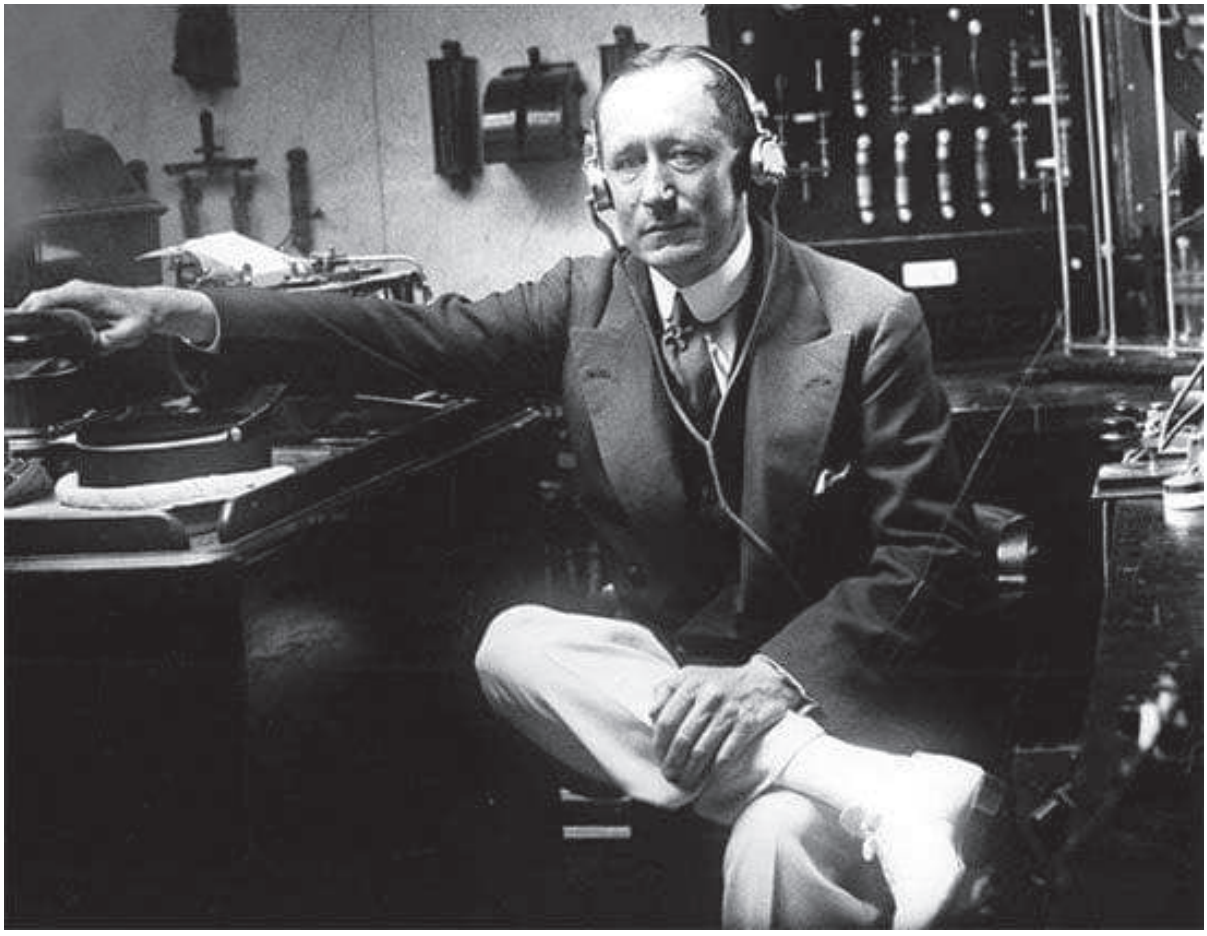
News of this development came as a shock; most scientists thought a radio transmission could only travel in a straight line, unable to bend with the curvature of the Earth.[9] The signal was sent with a frequency of roughly 500 kilohertz (kHz) and a power boost far greater than had ever been used on a radio signal.[10] The historic first message was three dots, Morse code for the letter "S," a successful test that marked the dawn of the radio age.[11]



*Recreation of the first radio transmitter with a **monopole antenna,** built by Guglielmo Marconi in August 1895 during his development of radio communication.*

Marconi's system had the following components:

* A basic oscillator, comparable to the model designed by Heinrich Hertz[12]
* A capacity area positioned above ground level[13]
* A receiver to detect radio signals[14]
* A telegraph key to transmit Morse code[15]
* A telegraph register to record the Morse code on a roll of paper tape[16]



Marconi in Elettra's Redio Lab
This Irish-Italian inventor may be one of the most important men in the history of radio. He laid the foundation for the way that we connect to people today and transformed the entertainment landscape forever.

After his history-making transmission, Marconi made swift progress. By 1902, his equipment was consistently receiving lengthy messages at distances of more than 1,500 miles at night and 700 miles by day.[17] Just a year later, the Marconi Company was regularly transmitting news stories across the Atlantic Ocean.[18]

Besides developing the technology that made radio commonplace, Marconi helped shape the history and role of this powerful new medium.[19] It was not long before literally hundreds of programs cackled across the airwaves.[20]

Marconi invented an entirely new science-based industry.[21] Largely through his persistent style and innovative thinking, a complex branch of physics became a consumer product that profoundly influenced the early 20th century and continues to evolve and influence today's culture.[22]



Marconi Multiple Tuner
It was manufactured by Marconi's Wireless Telegraph Company around 1908 and used with spark receivers on land and sea .

Footnotes :

1. Basilio Catania, Guglielmo Marconi: Pioneer of Wireless (New York: Springer, 2000), 5.
2. J. C. H. Heaviside, Marconi and the Birth of Radio (London: Macmillan, 1940), 12–14.
3. Catania, Guglielmo Marconi, 8.
4. Ibid., 10.
5. Heaviside, Marconi and the Birth of Radio, 16.
6. Catania, Guglielmo Marconi, 15.
7. Ibid., 20–22.
8. Heaviside, Marconi and the Birth of Radio, 25.
9. Catania, Guglielmo Marconi, 22.
10. Ibid., 23.
11. Heaviside, Marconi and the Birth of Radio, 26.
12. Catania, Guglielmo Marconi, 27.
13. Ibid., 28.
14. Heaviside, Marconi and the Birth of Radio, 30.
15. Catania, Guglielmo Marconi, 31.
16. Ibid., 32.
17. Heaviside, Marconi and the Birth of Radio, 35–36.
18. Catania, Guglielmo Marconi, 37.
19. Heaviside, Marconi and the Birth of Radio, 40.
20. Catania, Guglielmo Marconi, 41.
21. Heaviside, Marconi and the Birth of Radio, 43.
22. Catania, Guglielmo Marconi, 45

Karl Ferdinand Braun:

Scientific Foundations of Radio Frequency Technology



Karl Ferdinand Braun

Karl Ferdinand Braun (1850–1918) stands as one of the most significant figures in the scientific and technological evolution of radio frequency communication. While popular narratives often foreground Guglielmo Marconi as the architect of wireless telegraphy, Braun's contributions represent the crucial theoretical stabilization, technical refinement, and scientific maturation of radio systems. **His work transformed radio from an experimental curiosity into a controllable, efficient, and scalable communication technology, thereby enabling the emergence of modern broadcasting, telecommunications, radar, and electronic instrumentation.[1]**

Scientific Context and Intellectual Orientation

Braun's intellectual formation was rooted in nineteenth-century experimental physics, particularly in the study of oscillations, resonance, and electrical conduction. These areas were central to the emerging understanding of electromagnetic phenomena following James Clerk Maxwell's theoretical synthesis and Heinrich Hertz's experimental validation of electromagnetic waves.[2] Braun's originality lay not in discovering radio waves themselves, but in engineering their practical exploitation through scientific rigor, thereby narrowing the gap between laboratory physics and applied communication systems.[3] This methodological orientation distinguished Braun from many contemporaries whose wireless experiments were empirical and often technologically unstable.[4]

Semiconductor Rectification and Signal Detection

One of Braun's earliest and most far-reaching discoveries occurred in 1874, when he observed that certain crystalline substances exhibited direction-dependent electrical conductivity.[5] This phenomenon, later identified as rectification, allowed alternating currents to be converted into pulsating direct currents. At the time, the theoretical explanation for this behavior was unknown; however, its practical implications proved decisive. Braun's discovery became foundational for the development of crystal detectors, which replaced the unreliable coherer devices previously used in radio reception.[6] **Crystal detectors significantly improved sensitivity, selectivity, and stability in radio receivers, making consistent long-distance wireless communication**

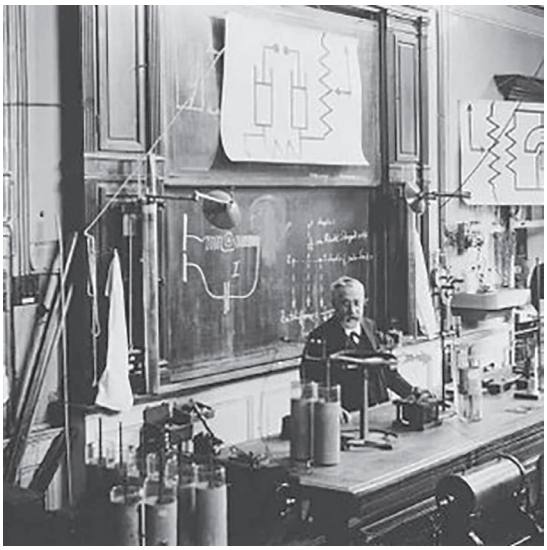
feasible. From a historical perspective, this work constitutes one of the earliest experimental encounters with semiconductor behavior, anticipating by several decades the formal emergence of solid-state physics and transistor technology.[7] Analytically, Braun's rectification research demonstrates how incremental experimental observations, even when lacking immediate theoretical explanation, can generate technological revolutions when integrated into applied systems.[8]



Karl Ferdinand Braun *in his Strasbourg laboratory, where he conducted foundational experiments in wireless telegraphy and signal control work that would later highlight the need for electromagnetic interference shielding.*

Tuned Circuits and the Control of Radio Frequency

Braun's most decisive contribution to radio frequency engineering was his reformulation of the wireless transmitter. Early spark-gap transmitters produced heavily damped oscillations with broad spectral emissions, leading to inefficiency, interference, and limited range. Braun identified the core problem as the direct coupling between the energy source and the antenna.[9] His solution was the introduction of a closed resonant (tuned) circuit, inductively coupled to the antenna. This separation allowed sustained oscillations at defined frequencies and enabled more efficient radiation of electromagnetic energy. The result was improved transmission range, reduced interference, and the conceptual foundation for frequency selectivity.[10] **From an analytical standpoint, this innovation represents a decisive shift from radiation by brute force to radiation by resonance, a principle that underlies all modern radio frequency systems, including amplitude modulation, frequency modulation, and digital transmission protocols.**[11]



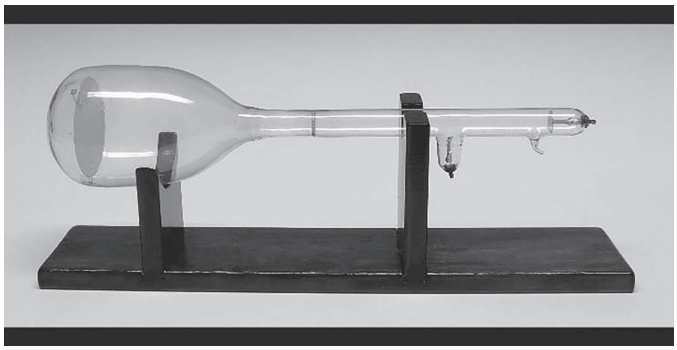
Karl Ferdinand Braun *was a German applied physicist who shared the 1909 Nobel Prize in Physics with Guglielmo Marconi for their contributions to the development of radio. With his two circuit system, long range radio transmissions and modern telecommunications were made possible.* ***His invention of the phased array antenna in 1905 led to the development of radar, smart antennas, and MIMO.*** *He built the first cathode-ray tube in 1897, which led to the development of television, and the first semiconductor diode in 1874, which co-started the development of electronics and electronic engineering.*

Directional Transmission and the Origins of Phased Arrays

Braun's later experiments extended into the spatial control of radio waves. By arranging multiple antennas and manipulating their relative phase relationships, Braun demonstrated that electromagnetic radiation could be concentrated in specific directions.[12] This marked the first practical demonstration of directional antennas and phased radiation systems. While the immediate applications were limited, the conceptual implications were profound. Directional control later became essential for radar, satellite communication, beam-forming technologies, and modern wireless networks. **Braun's work thus foreshadowed twentieth-century developments that would only mature fully with advances in electronics and signal processing.[13]**

The Cathode-Ray Tube and Visualization of Radio Frequency Phenomena

In 1897, Braun developed the cathode-ray tube that bears his name, initially as a scientific instrument for observing rapid electrical oscillations.[14] The Braun tube allowed radio frequency signals to be visualized in real time, transforming invisible electromagnetic processes into measurable waveforms. This innovation had dual significance. Scientifically, it enabled precise experimentation and calibration of high-frequency circuits. Culturally and technologically, it laid the groundwork for oscilloscopes, radar displays, television receivers, and computer monitors. Few inventions have exerted such sustained influence across both scientific research and mass media.[15]



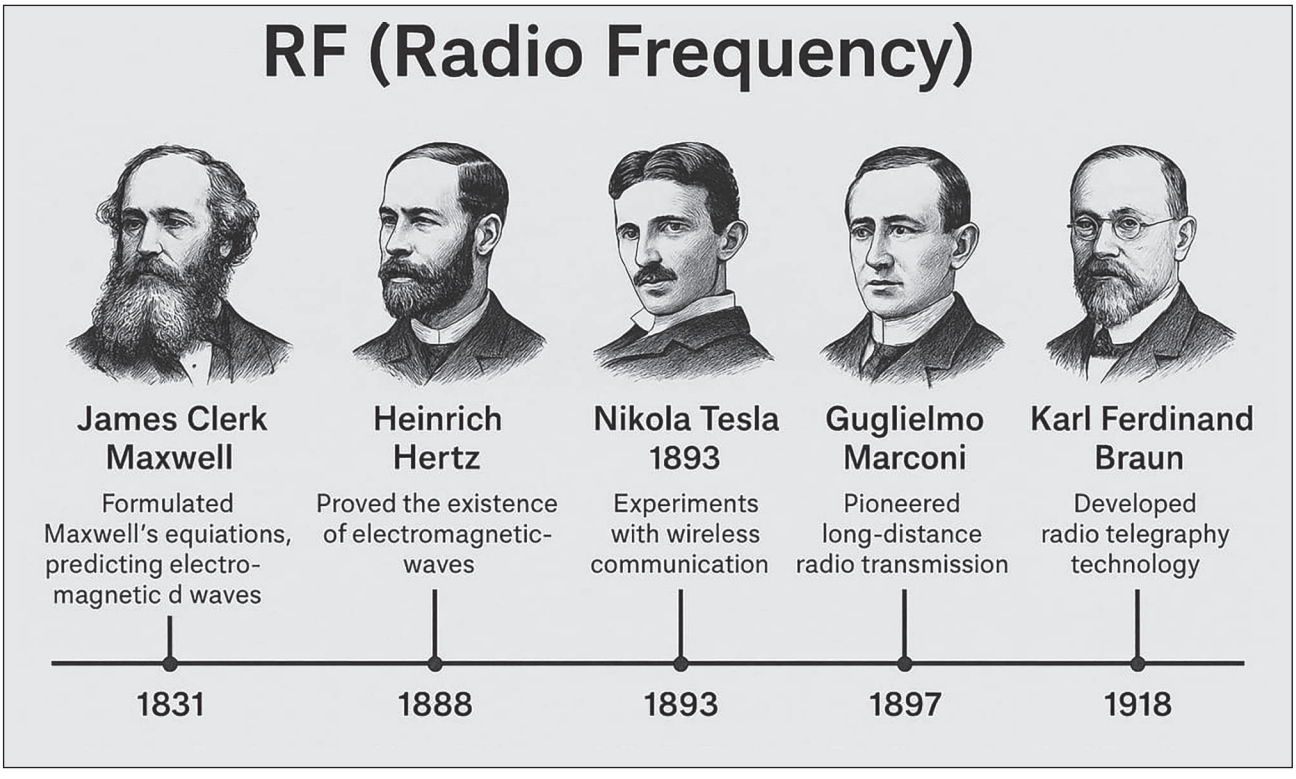
Cathode Ray Tube (First Oscilloscope)
Braun developed the first cold Cathode Ray tube with magnetically beam deflection. He used a diaphragm and a mica screen covered with phosphor to produce a visible spot. ***The principle was based on the Crookes deflection tube. Braun used this tube as an indicator tube to visualize alternating currents and described this in 1897, it was in fact the first oscilloscope***

Broader Impact on the Modern World

The cumulative impact of Braun's work is best understood analytically as infrastructural rather than spectacular. He did not merely extend transmission distances; he stabilized, standardized, and rendered radio governable. His contributions enabled:the reliable global expansion of wireless telegraphy and later broadcasting, the emergence of frequency regulation and spectrum management, the development of radar and navigational systems, the rise of electronic measurement and display technologies, and the conceptual foundations of semiconductor electronics.[16] **In recognizing Braun jointly with Marconi in 1909, the Nobel Committee implicitly acknowledged that modern radio was not the product of invention alone, but of scientific refinement, systematization, and theoretical discipline.[17]**

Footnotes:

1. Nobel Committee for Physics, The Nobel Prize in Physics 1909.
2. James Clerk Maxwell, A Treatise on Electricity and Magnetism (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1873)
3. Heinrich Hertz, Electric Waves (London: Macmillan, 1893).
4. Peter Russer, Ferdinand Braun – A Pioneer in Wireless Technology and Electronics (IEEE, 2012).
5. Karl Ferdinand Braun, "Über die Leitung von Elektricität durch Schwefelmetalle," Annalen der Physik (1874).
6. Encyclopaedia Britannica, "Crystal Detector."
7. Encyclopaedia Britannica, "Semiconductor."
8. Dhammika Dissanayaka, analytical interpretation in A Century of Radio Broadcasting, vol. I (forthcoming).
9. Karl Ferdinand Braun, Wireless Telegraphy Experiments (1898–1900).
10. John Ambrose Fleming, The Principles of Electric Wave Telegraphy (London: Longmans, 1906).
11. IEEE, "Resonance and Frequency Selectivity in Radio Systems."
12. Karl Ferdinand Braun, "Directional Wireless Transmission Experiments," 1905.
13. Merrill I. Skolnik, Introduction to Radar Systems (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1980).
14. Encyclopaedia Britannica, "Cathode-Ray Tube."
15. IEEE Milestones, "The Braun Tube and Electronic Displays."
16. Russer, Ferdinand Braun.
17. Nobel Committee for Physics, Award Citation, 1909



1832

The Postal Department of Ceylon: The First Mail Coach Service in Asia (1832)

The Kandy Mail Coach:

On 1 February 1832, the Kandy Mail Coach commenced operations between Colombo and Kandy, marking the inauguration of what is widely regarded as the first organised mail coach service in Asia.[1] This development represented a significant transformation in the colonial communication infrastructure of Ceylon, replacing earlier systems of human runners with a mechanised, scheduled postal conveyance system.

Pre-Coach Mail Transmission Systems

Prior to the introduction of the mail coach, official correspondence in Ceylon was conveyed primarily by foot messengers, a system that had existed from at least the Dutch period in the maritime provinces.[2] These runners often young men trained for endurance were minimally clothed to reduce physical encumbrance and enable rapid travel over long distances. In Sinhala usage, such messengers were sometimes referred to as ilandāriyas (or ilandāri).[3]



From the mid-1800s to the early 1900s, the postal service between ***Colombo and Kandy*** *was operated by horse-drawn carriages.*

The runner system operated predominantly for official and military despatches, usually on a weekly basis, though frequency varied depending on administrative urgency.[4] While effective within its constraints, this method was increasingly inadequate for the expanding administrative, commercial, and social demands of early nineteenth-century colonial governance.

Road Construction and Administrative Foundations

The establishment of the mail coach service was made possible by major advances in road construction following the Kandyan Convention of 1815, which brought the Kandyan Kingdom under British control.[5] Within a decade, large-scale infrastructure projects were initiated under the governorship of Sir Edward Barnes (1824–1831), whose emphasis on road building earned him the sobriquet **"the Road Maker."**[6]



Postal service between Kandy and Colombo was operated by horse-drawn carriages.

By the time of his resignation in 1831, carriage roads linked most towns of administrative importance. Barnes played a pivotal role in inspiring Major Thomas Skinner to undertake the construction of the Colombo–Kandy Road, frequently described in nineteenth-century colonial literature as the **"Simplon of the East."**[7] This project involved extensive engineering works, including bridges and cuttings through mountainous terrain, and established the physical conditions necessary for wheeled transport between the low country and the hill capital.

Establishment of the Mail Coach Service

Although road construction progressed under Barnes, it was during the governorship of Sir Robert Horton (1831–1837) that the mail coach service was formally introduced.[8] In December 1831, a prospectus was issued proposing the establishment of a daily mail coach service between Colombo and Kandy.[9]



The proposal provided for two light, four-wheeled horse-drawn carriages, departing simultaneously from Colombo and Kandy at 4:00 a.m. each day. The required capital investment was £2,000 sterling, divided into forty shares of £50 each. The Governor subscribed to six shares, while the Colonial Secretary held two, reflecting official endorsement of the enterprise.[10] Passenger fares were set at £2 10s per journey, effectively restricting regular use to colonial officials, European residents, and affluent local elites.[11] For approximately nineteen years, the mail coach remained the sole organised means of transporting mail between Colombo and Kandy.[12]

Supplementary Mail Services (1851)

By the mid-nineteenth century, increasing mail volumes necessitated additional arrangements. In 1851, an auxiliary foot-messenger service known as the Kandy Evening Mail was introduced.[13] On 11 November 1851, George Lee, then Postmaster General, issued a notice stating that letters posted before 4:30 p.m. would be conveyed by a messenger departing at 5:00 p.m. and arriving in Kandy the following forenoon. Parcels, packets, and newspapers were excluded from this service.[14] This arrangement illustrates the continued coexistence of mechanised and traditional systems well into the mid-nineteenth century.

Integration with Railway Transport (1865–1866)

A major transformation occurred with the opening of the Ceylon Railway on 2 October 1865.[15] The inaugural train, comprising ten carriages and carrying eighty-four passengers, travelled from Colombo to Ambepussa (34½ miles) in approximately two hours.[16] From Ambepussa, passengers and mails were conveyed by mail coach to Kandy, arriving at approximately 3:00 p.m. on weekdays. By January 1866, mails between Colombo and Ambepussa were conveyed entirely by rail.[17] The Royal Mail Coach thereafter operated primarily between Ambepussa and Kandy, synchronising with railway schedules and marking a transitional phase in colonial transport logistics.

Expansion of Mail Coach Networks

Subsequently, an extensive network of mail coach services developed, linking Colombo and Kandy with regional centres including Ratnapura, Negombo, Galle, Kalutara, Matara, Matale, Dambulla, Jaffna, Point Pedro, and Kankesanthurai, as well as plantation districts such as Dickoya and Dimbula.[18] Seasonal services operated during the Nuwara Eliya social season, particularly between Ramboda and Nuwara Eliya.

Certain routes employed bullock-drawn coaches, notably between Polgahawela and Kegalle/Aranayake, reflecting adaptations to terrain and economic conditions.[19]



Historic General Post Office Building in Colombo

The Colombo General Post Office (GPO) is arguably the most majestic colonial building in Fort, (Ceylon) Sri Lanka.
Construction based on the designs of H.F. Tomalin, and the project was executed by the Public Works Department.

Social Hierarchies and Operational Infrastructure

Passenger fares were explicitly stratified along racial and social lines, with Europeans and Burghers charged the highest rates, followed by Mudaliyars and other elites, and lower fares levied on "natives."[20] Such practices mirrored broader colonial hierarchies embedded within transport and communication systems.

To sustain long-distance horse travel, drinking troughs were constructed at intervals along major routes, funded by coaching companies and by private European residents, highlighting the semi-public character of colonial infrastructure development.[21]

Analytical Note:

The Kandy Mail Coach occupies a central place in the transport and communication history of Sri Lanka. Its introduction signified not merely a technological advance but the incorporation of the island's interior into a centralised colonial administrative framework. It may therefore be regarded, with reasonable historical justification, as Asia's earliest sustained mail coach service.[22]

Footnotes:

1. Frederick Medis, Transport and Communications in Ceylon under British Rule (Colombo: Government Printer, 1954), 73.
2. K. M. de Silva, A History of Sri Lanka (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), 197.
3. Medis, Transport and Communications, 69.
4. H. A. J. Hulugalle, Ceylon: The British Period (Colombo: Lake House, 1960), 112.
5. de Silva, History of Sri Lanka, 180–181.
6. S. A. Pakeman, Ceylon (London: Ernest Benn, 1929), 146.
7. Medis, Transport and Communications, 71.
8. Hulugalle, British Period, 118.
9. Medis, Transport and Communications, 72.
10. Ibid., 73.
11. Ibid., 74.
12. Ibid., 75.
13. George Lee, Post Office Notices, Ceylon (Colombo: Government Press, 1851).
14. Ibid.
15. W. A. T. Jayawardena, The Railways of Sri Lanka (Colombo: Central Transport Board, 1973), 11.
16. Ibid., 12.
17. Medis, Transport and Communications, 88.
18. Ibid., 90–94.
19. Ibid., 95.
20. Pakeman, Ceylon, 148.
21. Medis, Transport and Communications, 97.
22. de Silva, History of Sri Lanka, 199.

1880

The Posts and Telegraph Department of Ceylon: Institutional History



Commencement of the Ceylon Postal Service
The postal network pre-dates the telegraph in Ceylon. ***Under Dutch colonial administration, five post offices were established in 1798 at major port towns****, marking the genesis of what would become the national postal service.*

This document outlines the historical development of the Posts and Telegraph Department (P&T) in Ceylon (now Sri Lanka), from the inception of the telegraph service in the mid-19th century through its institutional consolidation with the postal service and eventual administrative separation in 1980. Drawing on archival and secondary sources, the narrative situates the P&T within the broader evolution of colonial and post-colonial communication infrastructure.

1. Introduction

The modern communications infrastructure of Sri Lanka has its origins in the colonial era, when European powers introduced formal postal and telegraph services as instruments of governance, commerce, and social connectivity. The telegraph first operated in Ceylon in 1857, and over the ensuing decades the telegraph and postal systems were progressively institutionalized, culminating in the establishment of the Posts and Telegraph Department (P&T) in 1880. This department remained the central administrative body for communications until the late twentieth century.



Galle Road Near Colombo Ceylon Mid 1800s
The island's telegraph service began in 1857 with the construction of a line between ***Colombo and Galle,*** *soon followed by lines to Kandy and other interior towns.*



Old Banyan tree on the ***Colombo Galle Road, near Kalutara****, Wettumakada Junction, 1875*

2. Early Developments in Postal and Telegraph Services



2.1 Postal Service Origins (1798–1850s)

The postal network pre-dates the telegraph in Ceylon. Under Dutch colonial administration, five post offices were established in 1798 at major port towns, marking the genesis of what would become the national postal service.[1] After British consolidation in 1815, the service was reorganized and expanded; by the late nineteenth century a permanent post office was established in Colombo.[2]

2.2 Introduction of the Telegraph (1857–1860s)

The island's telegraph service began in 1857 with the construction of a line between Colombo and Galle, soon followed by lines to Kandy and other interior towns.[3] In 1858 a submarine cable connected Ceylon with India via Talaimannar, ushering in international telegraphic communication.[4] These developments occurred under the supervision of colonial authorities, though initially the Telegraph Department operated with institutional ties to India under shared technical administration.[5]

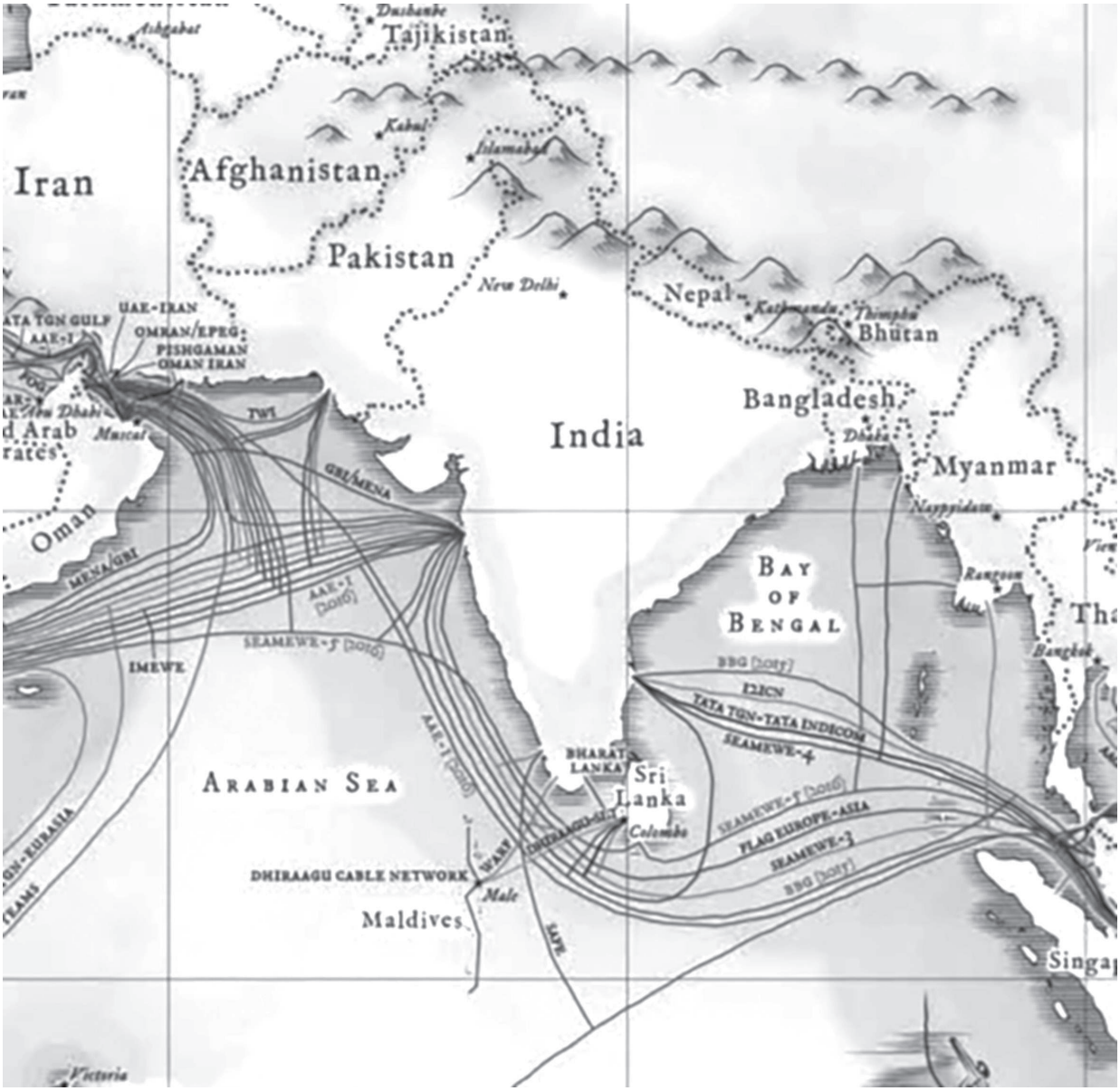
3. The Posts & Telegraph Department (1880–1914)

3.1 Formation of the P&T (1880)

In 1880 the Government of Ceylon assumed responsibility for telegraph operations previously under Indian administrative control and formally combined the telegraph with the postal service to create the Posts and Telegraph Department.[6] This merger reflected both the practical linkages between mail and telegraph services and the colony's growing need for integrated communication networks.



A royal monogram, or royal cypher, *is a personalized emblem of a reigning monarch, combining their initials with their title (Rex/Regina for King/Queen) and often a crown, used to mark official property, documents, and buildings as a symbol of sovereignty, similar to a signature but for the state.*



First submarine cable connection

While 1858 saw huge efforts with submarine cables, especially the famous transatlantic one, information points to the laying cables connecting India (via Karachi) to Europe starting in late 1858 and completing in 1859-1860

First permanent submarine telecommunications

cable connecting Thalaimannar (Ceylon) to India was laid by the Eastern Telegraph Company in 1884, providing telegraph services across the Palk Strait.

3.2 Consolidation and Infrastructure Expansion (1890s–Early 1900s)

The late nineteenth century saw infrastructure enhancement, including the construction of specialized buildings for communications. The General Post Office in Colombo, completed in 1895, housed both postal and telegraph functions alongside the telephone exchange.[7] By the early 1910s, dedicated telegraph buildings, such as the Central Telegraph Office in Colombo (completed ca. 1910–1911), served as focal points of communication services.[8]



The Ceylon Post and Telegraphs merger:
In July 1880, the telegraph services operated by the Indian Government in Ceylon were handed over to the Ceylon Government, leading to their integration with the postal service to form the Posts and Telegraph Department, a significant step in centralizing communications, eventually leading to the modern Sri Lanka Post.

3.3 Institutional Formalization (1914)

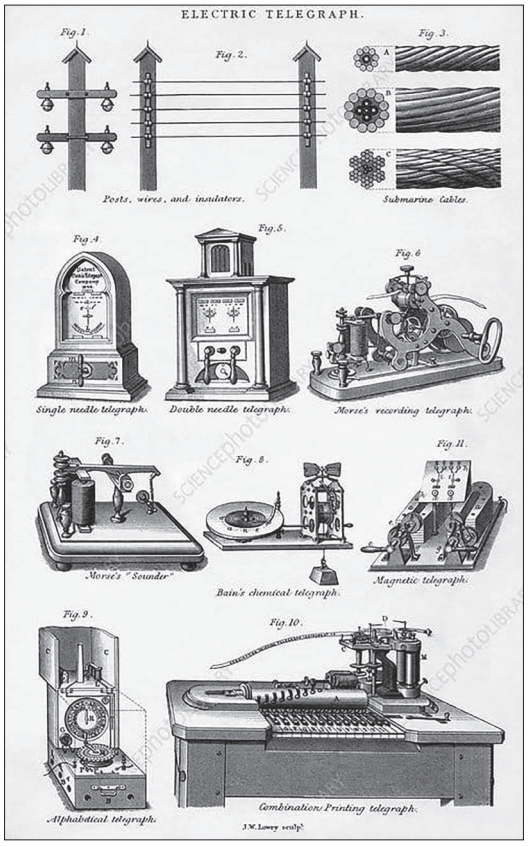
Although the postal and telegraph services had operated jointly since 1880, legislative and administrative harmonization continued into the twentieth century. In 1914 the Postal and Telegraph Departments were officially amalgamated under a single Director-General, consolidating management and operational oversight within a unified organizational structure.



Colombo Genaral Post Office, Royal Mail Trucks 1925 Ceylon

4. Mid-Century Developments and Services (1914–1948)

The P&T played a critical role throughout the first half of the twentieth century, adapting to technological change and social demand. Telegraph services remained indispensable for rapid communication, while the postal network expanded nationwide. During the Second World War and its aftermath, auxiliary units such as the Ceylon Post and Telegraph Signals Corps were raised to support military communications, reflecting the P&T's strategic importance.[9] Post-war, the department continued to serve as the principal communications (including radio broadcasting) authority into the early years of Ceylon's independence in 1948.



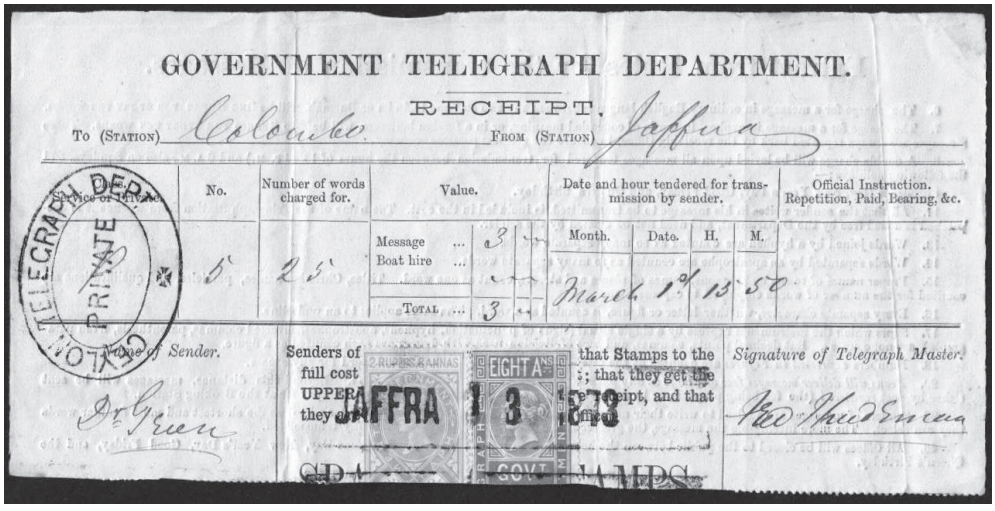
19th Century Electric Telegraph Equipment
Equipment used in the Telephone and Telegraph fields for about half a century since its inception

5. Technological Innovation and Administrative Change (1948–1980)

Following independence, the P&T continued to modernize. Services expanded beyond traditional telegrams and mail to include telephone, telex, and later satellite communications.[10] However, as telecommunication technologies advanced and the scale of operations grew, it became administratively expedient to differentiate postal services from broader telecommunications. Accordingly, in 1980 the Posts and Telegraph Department was reorganized into separate entities: the Postal Department and the Telecommunications Department, thereby ending a century of unified communications administration.

6. Conclusion

The Posts and Telegraph Department of Ceylon/Sri Lanka was a cornerstone of modern communications in the island from the late nineteenth century until its bifurcation in 1980. Its evolution from the earliest telegraph lines to a comprehensive communications bureaucracy mirrors wider technological transformations and the shifting demands of colonial and post-colonial governance.


GOVERNMENT TELEGRAPH DEPARTMENT.

RECEIPT.

To (Station) Colombo. From (Station) Jaffna

No.	Number of words charged for.	Value.	Date and hour tendered for transmission by sender.				Official Instruction. Repetition, Paid, Bearing, &c.
			Month.	Date.	H.	M.	
6	25	Message ... 3 .. Boat hire ... . Total ... 3 ..	March	1st	15	50	

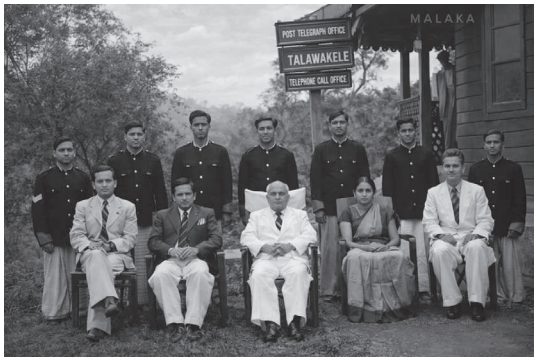
Name of Sender. Dr Green

Senders of full cost UPPER they get

that Stamps to the ; that they get the Receipt, and that Officer

Signature of Telegraph Master. Theo Thurburn

A receipt issued by the Ceylon Government Telegraph Department stating that a charge of three rupees was made for a twenty-five word telegram sent from Jaffna to Colombo on the first of March 1873 at 03.50 PM. The sender of the message appears to have affixed two rupees and eight annas and a separate eight annas stamp, making a total of three rupees.



Employees of the Talawakele Post Office, *part of the Posts and Telegraph Department, in the early 1930s.*



The Telecommunications Department 2025 (now part of Sri Lanka Telecom)



The Postal Department 2025 (now Sri Lanka Post)
Ceylon Posts and Telegraphs Department (P&T) was officially bifurcated (split) in August 1980, creating two separate entities: and the Telecommunications Department, marking a significant change in how postal and telecom services were managed in Sri Lanka (formerly Ceylon).

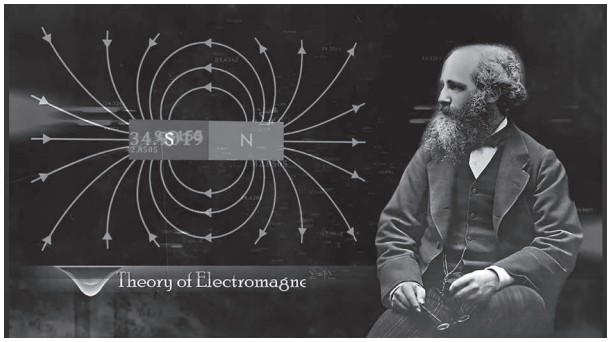
Footnotes:

1. Sri Lanka Post, "Our History," Department of Posts, accessed December 13, 2025.
2. Ibid; see also Wikipedia, Sri Lanka Post.
3. "Birth of Telecommunication in Sri Lanka," Facebook post; see also Letters Through Time: A visit to Colombo's postal museum, Ceylon Today (August 30, 2025).
4. Ibid.
5. S. F. Crofton, "Ceylon" telegraph overview, Telegraphic History.
6. Telecom Museum: A call from the past to the future, Sunday Observer; see also Sri Lanka Post history.
7. "The First Post Office of Sri Lanka," Royal College article.
8. Wikipedia, Central Telegraph Office, Colombo.
9. Wikipedia, Post and Telegraph Signals.
10. Telecom Museum summary of twentieth century services.

1920

Historical Background to the Commencement of Broadcasting and Its Early Development in Ceylon

The scientific and institutional foundations of broadcasting emerged through a series of interrelated discoveries in physics, engineering, and communications policy during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In 1867, **James Clerk Maxwell** presented before the Royal Society of London his revolutionary paper **A Dynamical Theory of the Electromagnetic Field,** which demonstrated mathematically that light and electricity were both manifestations of electromagnetic waves capable of propagating through space at a finite velocity.[1] Maxwell's theoretical synthesis unified electricity, magnetism, and optics into a single field theory, **establishing the conceptual groundwork for wireless transmission.**



The paper was key in establishing the classical theory of electromagnetism. *Maxwell derives an electromagnetic wave equation with a velocity for light in close agreement with measurements made by experiment, and also deduces that light is an electromagnetic wave.*

Two decades later, in 1887, **Heinrich Rudolf Hertz** provided the decisive experimental validation of Maxwell's equations. His laboratory experiments at the Karlsruhe Institute conclusively proved that electromagnetic waves could be generated and detected in controlled conditions, exhibiting the properties of reflection, refraction, interference, and polarization.[2] **These results transformed electromagnetic theory from abstract physics into the basis of practical wireless communication.**

Subsequent innovators such as **Guglielmo Marconi, Alexander Popov, and Nikola Tesla** applied these principles to develop radio telegraphy, **enabling point-to-point communication without physical wires. By 1901, Marconi had transmitted signals across the Atlantic, inaugurating a new era in global communication.** Within two decades, radio technology evolved from scientific novelty to an instrument of mass information and entertainment. In the United States, the **American Radio and Research Corporation (AMRAD)** opened what is regarded as the **first wireless broadcasting station in 1915,** marking the birth of organized radio broadcasting.[3]

In Great Britain, the Marconi Company led experimental broadcasts from its Chelmsford station beginning in 1920. The transmission of a concert by **Dame Nellie Melba** in June that year constituted a landmark event in broadcasting history the first professional musical performance transmitted to a mass audience by wireless means.[4] In 1922, under the technical direction of **Captain P. T. Eckersley** the company began regular public transmissions from its Writtle, Essex station, combining entertainment and informational content.[5] This marked the transition of radio from technical experimentation to social institution.

However, the regulatory framework for broadcasting remained undefined. The British Postmaster General restricted wireless receiving licenses to sets bearing the British Broadcasting Company (BBC) mark, reflecting an attempt to centralize control and ensure financial accountability.[6] The Broadcasting Committee Report of 1935 later clarified that organized public broadcasting in the United Kingdom began in November 1922, when leading British wireless manufacturers jointly formed the British Broadcasting Company.[7] License fees no less than ten shillings per annum were collected from users, half of which was allocated to sustain the company's operations.[8]

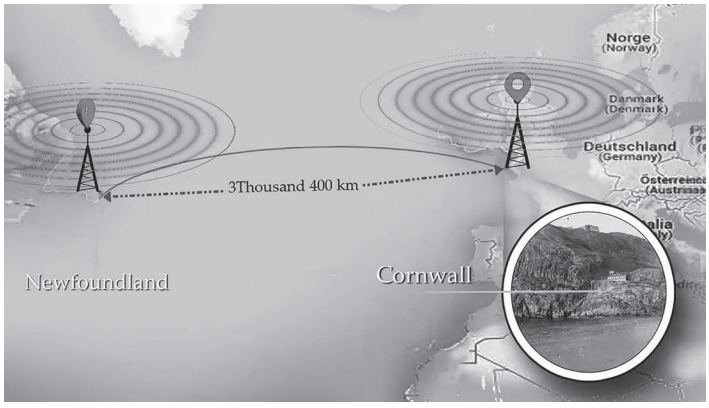


Alexander Stepanovich Popov
His story is one of independent discovery, practical application for naval communication, *and a fascinating, enduring debate about who truly deserves the title of radio's ultimate pioneer.*

Following mounting challenges related to unlicensed listening and content regulation, the **Postmaster General, Lord Bentford,** appointed a committee under **Major-General Sir Frederick Sykes** in 1923.[9] Its report (Cmd. 1951) recommended that the service's financial basis rest upon receiving-set license fees rather than advertising or private subsidy, ensuring independence from commercial interests.[10] In 1925, the Earl of Crawford and Balcarres chaired a second inquiry to determine broadcasting's future after the expiration of the company's license.[11] The committee's recommendations led directly to the establishment of the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) by Royal Charter in 1927



Dame Nellie Melba GBE *was Australia's first world-famous opera singer, and one of the greatest celebrities of her day. Born in Richmond, Melbourne, she moved to Paris and went on to enjoy an enormously successful career as a* ***prima donna*** *(the most important female singer in an opera company) in Australia, England, Europe and the United States during the early 20th century.*



Guglielmo Marconi sent the first transatlantic radio wave from ***Poldhu, Cornwall, England, to St. John's, Newfoundland, Canada, on December 12, 1901,*** *successfully receiving the Morse code for the letter "S," proving wireless communication across oceans was possible.* ***This landmark event involved a 3,440 km (2,137.5 miles) transmission,*** *overcoming the belief that Earth's curvature limited signals to much shorter distances*

transforming the service into a public corporation acting "as trustee for the national interest."[12]

The BBC assumed operations from 1 January 1927, emphasizing impartiality, education, and cultural enrichment.[13] Its guiding principle, articulated in the Charter, was that broadcasting "should at all times be conducted in the best possible manner and to the best advantage of the people."[14] Governors were appointed for their independence and integrity, while the Director-General oversaw professional administration.[15] **The early BBC also defined technical and legal concepts such as "transmission," "telephone," "broadcast matter," and "station" that became foundational to international broadcasting legislation.[16]**



Early pioneers of radio science and technology in the United States, including ***Charles Steinmetz, David Sarnoff, Irving Langmuir, and Alfred Goldsmith in*** *1921, photographed next to the antenna feed wires of the New Brunswick Marconi Station, one of the first transatlantic radio links.* ***The photo includes Albert Einstein as a visiting guest****.*

A major milestone was the inauguration of the BBC Empire Service at Daventry on 19 December 1932, broadcasting ten hours daily to six world regions, including Asia and Ceylon.[17] This service not only projected Britain's global voice but also served as a model for colonial and postcolonial broadcasting systems throughout the Commonwealth.



Peter Pendleton Eckersley *was a pioneer of British broadcasting, the first chief engineer of the British Broadcasting Company Limited from 1922 to 1927 and* ***chief engineer of the British Broadcasting Corporation until 1929.***



Postmaster General of the United Kingdom was a Cabinet ministerial position in HM Government. Aside from maintaining the postal system, ***the Telegraph Act 1868 established the Postmaster General's right to exclusively maintain electric telegraphs. This would subsequently extend to telecommunications and broadcasting.***

The Genesis of Broadcasting in Ceylon (1923–1925)



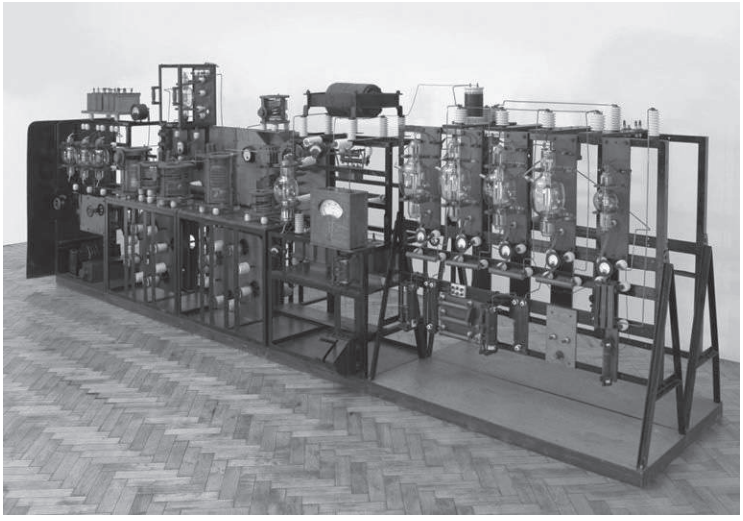
*"Lord Brentford" refers to William Joynson Hicks, **1st Viscount Brentford,** who served as the Postmaster General of the United Kingdom for a brief period in 1923*

Ceylon's entry into the world of broadcasting followed swiftly upon these global developments. **Experimental transmissions were conducted in 1923 by a group of pioneering engineers of the Colombo Telegraph Department using surplus wartime equipment and a makeshift Tramsmitter.[18]** These experiments conducted from the Central Telegraph Office in Fort, Colombo demonstrated the feasibility of wireless sound transmission across short distances and generated considerable public interest. They represented the earliest recorded instances of radio communication within the island.

By 1925, under the guidance of the **Chief Engineer of Telegraphs, Edward Harper,** and with official support from the colonial government, the Colombo Broadcasting Station commenced regular transmissions, marking the formal beginning of organized broadcasting in Ceylon.[19] **This pioneering initiative made Ceylon the first country in Asia to inaugurate a broadcasting service, preceding the establishment of broadcasting in India, Singapore, and other parts of the region.[20] The service initially**



*A major milestone was the inauguration of **BBC Empire Service at Daventry** on 19 December 1932, broadcasting ten hours daily to six world regions, **including Asia and Ceylon.** Known as 5XX, it was on Borough Hill in the Northamptonshire town and its first transmission was with the a poem called **"Daventry Calling...".***
At its peak there were more than 40 masts and towers on an antennae field extending over hundreds of acres.



Marconi 1.5kW transmitter, 1922.
The BBC's first broadcasts came from its London studio, using the 1.5kW transmitter that today sits in the Science Museum's Information Age gallery. ***Originally, three transmitters were designed, but it was the 1.5kW transmitter that was advanced enough for the job when 2LO was preparing to launch.*** *The same transmitter then remained in service for three years before it had to be replaced.*

operated from a small studio within the Central Telegraph Office, powered by a 0.5 kW transmitter operating on medium wave. Its programming consisted mainly of recorded music, live announcements, and occasional talks.

The inauguration of the Colombo Broadcasting Station symbolized not only a technical achievement but also the emergence of a new form of cultural communication in the colony. The British model of publicly regulated, non-commercial broadcasting profoundly influenced its administrative and editorial structure. The early station mirrored the BBC's values of public service, educational purpose, and linguistic inclusivity, while adapting its content to local audiences.[21]

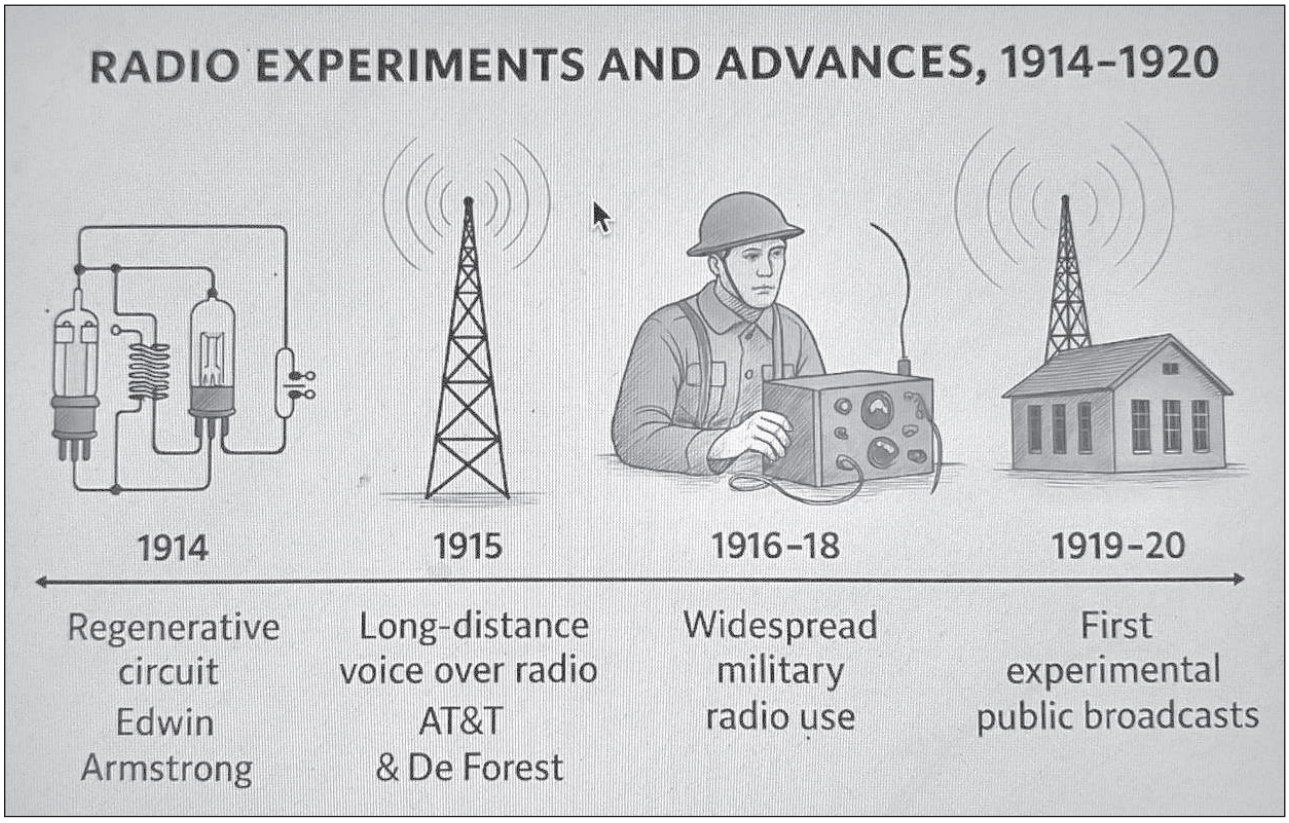
The subsequent expansion of programming in Sinhala, Tamil, and English during the late 1920s reflected both technological progress and the growing recognition of broadcasting as a tool for cultural transmission and nation-building. These formative years laid the institutional and ideological foundation for what would **later become the Colombo Broadcasting Corporation (1949) and subsequently Radio Ceylon, one of Asia's most influential broadcasting institutions during the mid-twentieth century.**

Thus, the period between 1864 and 1925 encapsulates the trajectory from Electromagnetic theory to social institution from Maxwell's equations to the establishment of Ceylon's first radio station representing a continuum of innovation, adaptation, and cultural transformation that defines the global history of broadcasting.

Footnotes:

1. James Clerk Maxwell, "A Dynamical Theory of the Electromagnetic Field," Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of London 155 (1865): 459–512.
2. Heinrich Hertz, Untersuchungen über die Ausbreitung der elektrischen Kraft (Leipzig: J.A. Barth, 1892).
3. Hugh G.J. Aitken, Syntony and Spark: The Origins of Radio (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), 364.
4. Asa Briggs, The Birth of Broadcasting (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), 53.
5. Ibid., 59.
6. Asa Briggs, The BBC: The First Fifty Years (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 17.
7. United Kingdom, Report of the Broadcasting Committee, 1935 (Cmd. 5091), 3.

8. Ibid., 5.
9. Ibid., 6.
10. Ibid., 7.
11. United Kingdom, Report of the Crawford Committee on Broadcasting (Cmd. 2594), 4.
12. Ibid., 5.
13. Briggs, The BBC: The First Fifty Years, 22.
14. United Kingdom, Report of the Broadcasting Committee, 1935, 9.
15. Ibid., 10.
16. Ibid., 12.
17. Briggs, The Birth of Broadcasting, 212.
18. Dissanayaka, Dhammika. A Century of Radio Broadcasting: Chronological Milestones and Socio-Political, Cultural Dimensions in the Evolution of Radio in (Ceylon) Sri Lanka, 1925–2025. Colombo: forthcoming, 2025.
19. Ibid., 4–5.
20. Ibid.; see also "This Is Colombo Calling," Radio Times (London), April 1925.
21. K. M. de Silva, A History of Sri Lanka (Colombo: Vijitha Yapa Publications, 2005), 376.



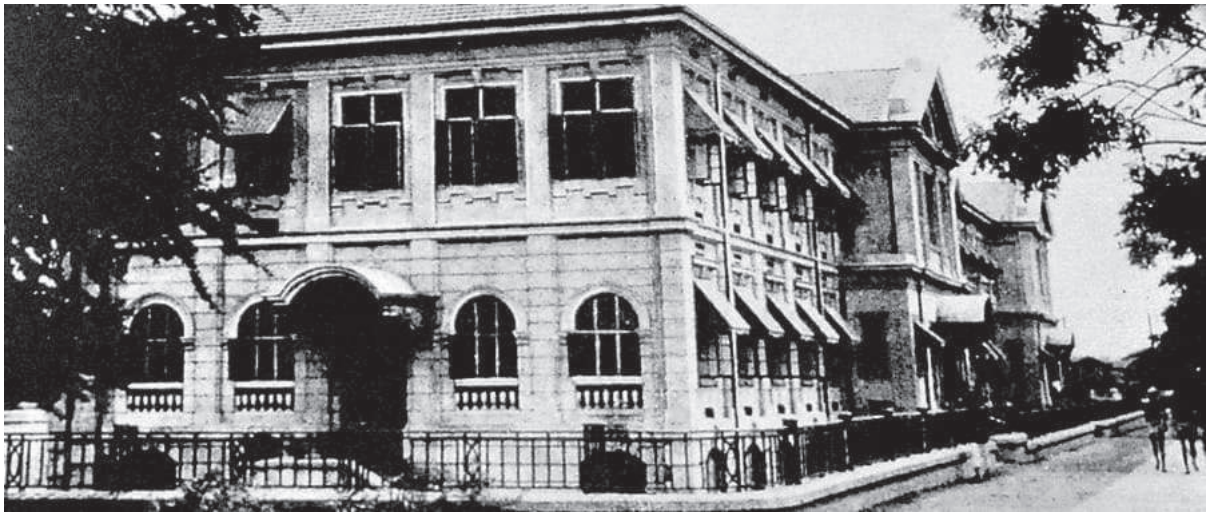
1921

21 July 1921

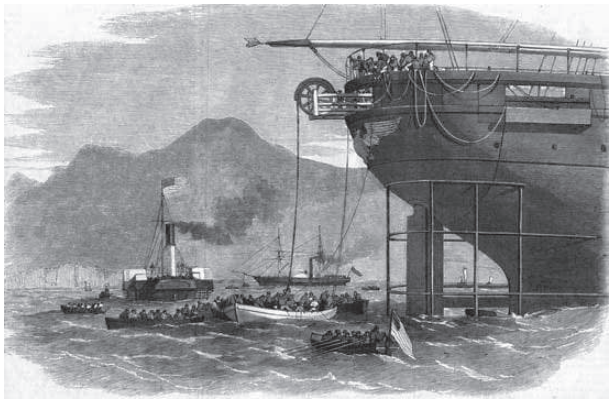
The Experimental Stage of Broadcasting in Ceylon

The genesis of radio broadcasting in Ceylon is inseparably linked with the arrival of **Edward Harper on 21 July 1921, marking a turning point in the island's technological modernization. Appointed Chief Engineer of Telegraphs and Telephones, Harper was a Member of the Institution of Electrical Engineers (M.I.E.E.) and of the Institution of Radio Engineers (M.I. Radio E.), distinctions that positioned him at the forefront of early twentieth-century wireless innovation.**[1] His appointment coincided with a period of global transition from wired to wireless communication, as governments and technical departments across the British Empire sought to explore the possibilities of radio transmission both for administrative use and for public service.

Harper's mandate extended beyond routine engineering supervision. As the colonial administration increasingly recognized the potential of wireless technology for both communication and cultural dissemination, he was entrusted with the experimental establishment of a broadcasting infrastructure in Ceylon a task unprecedented within the region.[2] **He was assisted by a core team of trained engineers and technicians: A. T. Kingston and H. S. Bryant, both Associate Members of the Institution of Electrical Engineers; and Arumugam Nadarasa, W. E. de Silva, and Benet Wijetilaka, all Inspectors in the Telegraphs and Telephones Department.**[3]



Central Telegraph Office in 1912
In 1922, Colombo's Central Telegraph Office (CTO), a significant early telecommunications hub built around 1910-11 in Colombo Fort, was actively housing Ceylon's postal and telegraph departments, serving as the nerve center for communications, including early experiments for ***Radio Ceylon,*** *which officially launched nearby in 1923, marking the building's crucial role in the island's communication history before later becoming a Sri Lanka Telecom Head Office.*



Laying the cable 1858

Key Developments:

1858: *The first international telegraph circuit between Ceylon and India began operations.*

1859: *Morse code replaced older telegraph systems for clearer communication.*

1860s -1870s: *Telegraph lines rapidly extended across Ceylon to major towns.*

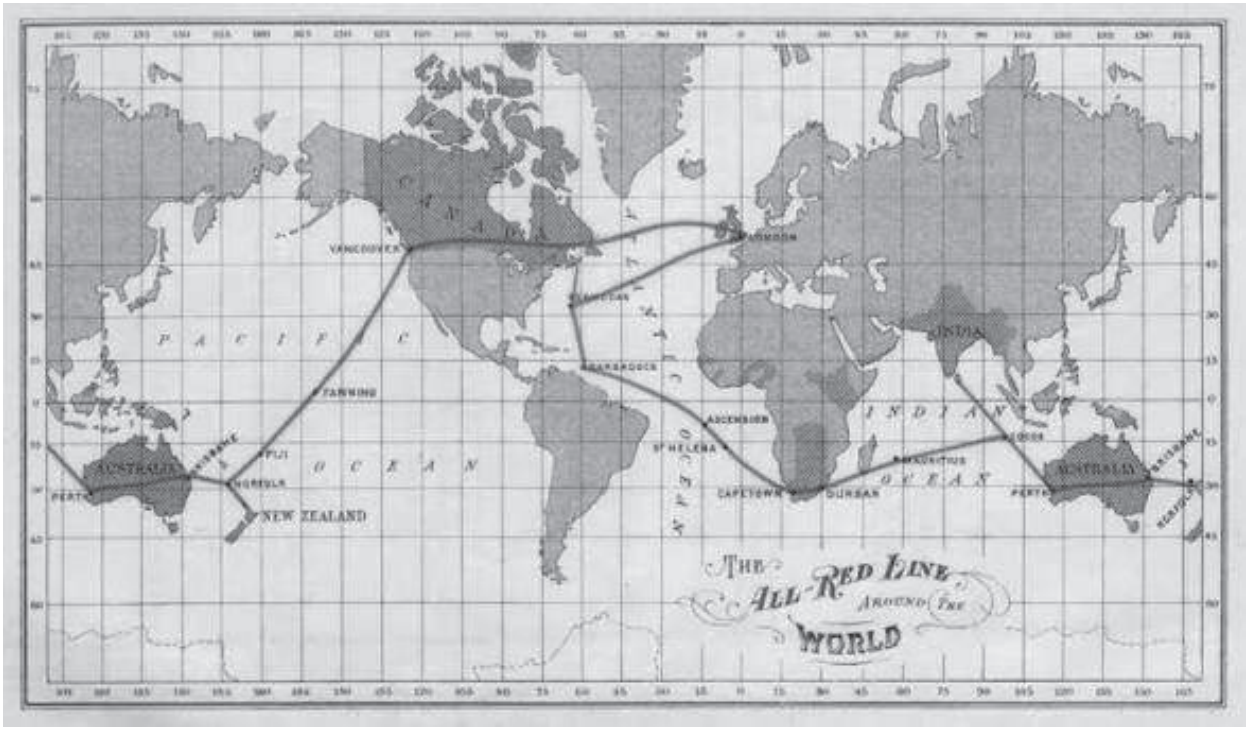
1885: *A major telegraph network connecting Colombo to Madras (Chennai) was completed, solidifying the link.*

Modern Era: *Today, high-capacity fibre optic systems like the Bharat Lanka Cable System (BLCS), built by BSNL and SLT, provide robust digital connectivity.*

Working under constrained resources, the team successfully constructed a ½-kilowatt radio transmitter using spare components from a ship-to-shore communication system previously employed by the Department and surplus equipment left by the Royal Air Force at the end of the First World War.[4] The project was undertaken at the Telegraph Workshops situated at the junction of Lotus Road and Main Street in Colombo Fort a site that would later become known as Sir Baron Jayatilaka Mawatha.[5] This pioneering initiative demonstrated the technical ingenuity and resourcefulness of Ceylonese engineers in adapting maritime communication equipment for terrestrial broadcasting purposes.



Ceylon Wireless Telegraphs Staff 1912



The first international telegraph link between India and Ceylon (Sri Lanka) was established in 1884, *connecting Colombo to India via a sea cable, with the Indian Government controlling these early links, making it the first direct communication channel between the two landmasses, significantly earlier than modern fiber optic cables.*

Key Details of the Early Link:

Year: *1884.*

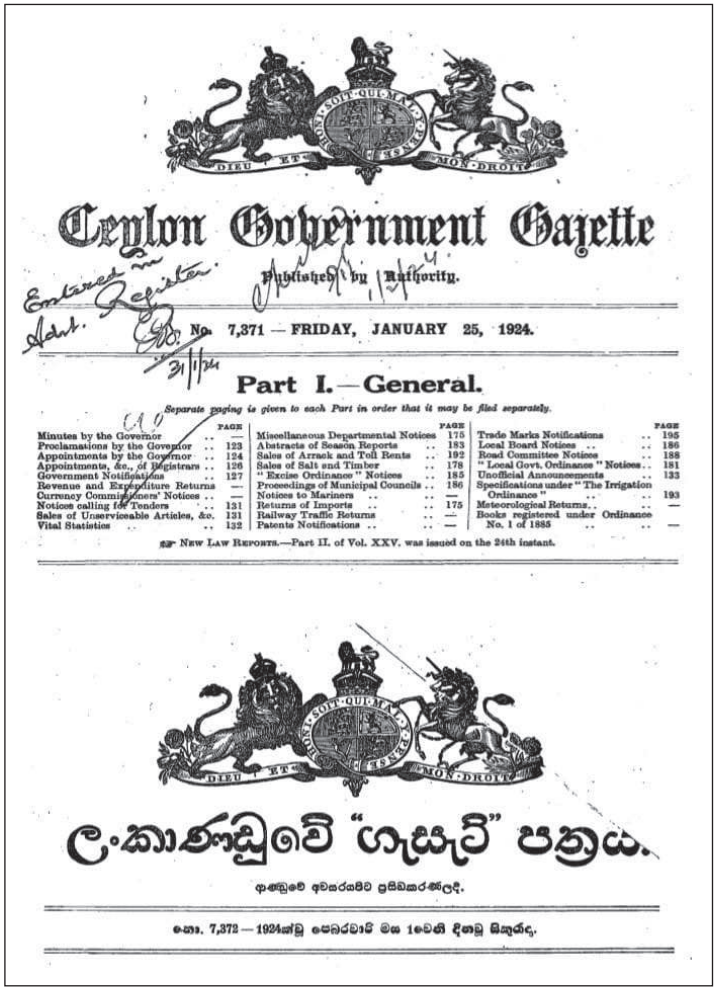
Type: *Telegraphic cable.*

Route: *Connected Colombo to India, likely via Mannar/Talaimannar.*

Significance: *Marked the beginning of international telecommunications for Ceylon.*

A number of popular accounts have since circulated romanticized versions of these events, notably the claim that the first transmitter was assembled from parts salvaged from a sunken German submarine left behind after World War I.[6] However, careful examination of official records reveals no substantiating evidence for this assertion. Given that the Government Wireless Telegraph Station had been operational in Ceylon since 1912 with an established inventory of equipment for coastal communication it is far more plausible that all necessary components were locally available, rendering submarine salvage both unnecessary and improbable.[7]

Between 1922 and mid-1924, Harper and his team conducted a series of experimental transmissions, initially intended for engineering calibration rather than entertainment. These included the testing of signal strength, frequency modulation, and audibility over varying distances across Colombo and its environs. Reports from telegraph officials and a small group of amateur radio enthusiasts indicate that these early broadcasts occasionally included phonograph music, short talks, and test tones an embryonic form of programming.[8]



Ceylon Government Gazette

Published by Authority.

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Part I.—General.

Separate paging is given to each Part in order that it may be filed separately.

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☞ New Law Reports.—Part II. of Vol. XXV. was issued on the 24th instant.

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අංක. 7,372 — 1924ක්වූ ජනවාරි මස 1වෙනි දිනවූ සිකුරාදා.

Wireless Telegraph Rules

The "Wireless Telegraph Rules of 31 January 1924" for Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) likely formalized the nascent control and licensing of wireless operations following early experiments (like those by Edward Harper around 1923), establishing fees (e.g., Rs. 25 for a first set) and potentially setting age/character requirements (like age 18+) for licenses, making the colonial government's Postmaster-General the authority for granting permissions and ensuring radio use aligned with public/military needs, a crucial step towards the official launch of Radio Ceylon in 1925.

By mid-1924, Harper was confident that the system had achieved a satisfactory level of technical and operational stability. He subsequently sought official authorization to commence regular broadcasting.[9] Approval was granted in May 1924, when the Secretary of State for the Colonies formally sanctioned the introduction of broadcasting in Ceylon. A government communiqué dated 26 May 1924 announced:

"The Secretary of State for the Colonies has approved the introduction of broadcasting in Ceylon. Broadcasting will remain under State control, though it will not necessarily be operated directly by the State. It has been decided that, for the present, an unlimited number of licences for receiving sets will be issued **under the recently enacted Wireless Telegraph Rules of 31 January 1924.** Furthermore, the Government Wireless Station in Colombo will undertake the initial scheme of broadcasting."[10]

The decision to place broadcasting under state control while permitting non-exclusive operation reflected the British colonial policy of the time, modeled on the metropolitan precedent established in London in 1922.

It ensured that broadcasting would develop as a public utility rather than a purely commercial enterprise, preserving government oversight of content and spectrum allocation.

In anticipation of the service's formal inauguration, the government proposed the establishment of a Broadcasting Advisory Board to guide the Postmaster General on programming and regulatory matters. The Board's proposed composition was notably pluralistic: **the Postmaster General as Chair, representatives from the Press, the Radio Society, the Electrical Trade, the Chamber of Commerce, and the Inspector**

General of Police.[11] The inclusion of both civil and technical stakeholders suggested an early recognition that broadcasting, even in its infancy, was not merely a technological pursuit but also a social institution requiring balanced oversight and community engagement.

These measures marked the formal transition from experimental transmission to organized broadcasting, situating Ceylon among the earliest Asian territories to adopt radio technology for public communication. Harper's experimental phase (1921–1924) thus served as the foundation for the **Colombo Broadcasting Service, inaugurated the following year in 16th December 1925. The engineering achievements of this period also laid the groundwork for Ceylon's later distinction as the first country in Asia to establish a fully operational broadcasting service, predating even India's All India Radio by several years.**

Footnotes:

1. Annual Report of the Postmaster General, Ceylon, 1921, 14.
2. D. M. Colombage, Guwan Viduli Vanshaya (Colombo: M. D. Gunasena & Company, 1989), 5.
3. C. L. P. Gunawardana, This Is Colombo Calling (Colombo: Perali Publishers, 1990), 14.
4. Edward Harper, Personal Notes on the Development of Broadcasting in Ceylon, unpublished manuscript, c. 1925, 3.
5. Ceylon Telegraph Department, Workshop Records, July 1921, Government Archives, Colombo.
6. Gunawardana, This Is Colombo Calling, 15.
7. Harper, Personal Notes, 4; see also Government Wireless Telegraph Station Logbook, 1912–1915, Government Archives, Colombo.
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9. Ibid., 22.
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11. Ibid.

21 July 1921

Development of Naval Wireless Telegraphy: Submarine Applications

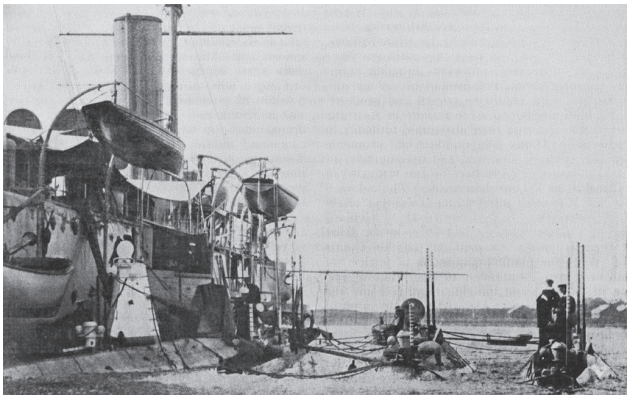
Submarines began experimenting with wireless communication in the early 20th century, with initial developments occurring around 1903 to 1905.[1] One of the earliest documented instances of wireless communication from a submarine occurred in 1904, when the British Royal Navy's HMS A1 was equipped with Marconi wireless telegraphy equipment for surface transmission.[2] This marked a significant step in naval communication, although effective underwater transmission was still not technically feasible at that time.

By 1912, the U.S. Navy submarine USS E-2 (then designated SS-25) demonstrated wireless communication capabilities while submerged at shallow depths.[3] These developments indicated the increasing strategic importance of submarine communication for naval operations in the years leading up to and during the First World War. However, reliable underwater wireless communication remained limited until much later advances in sonar and extremely low-frequency (ELF) communication technologies.[4]

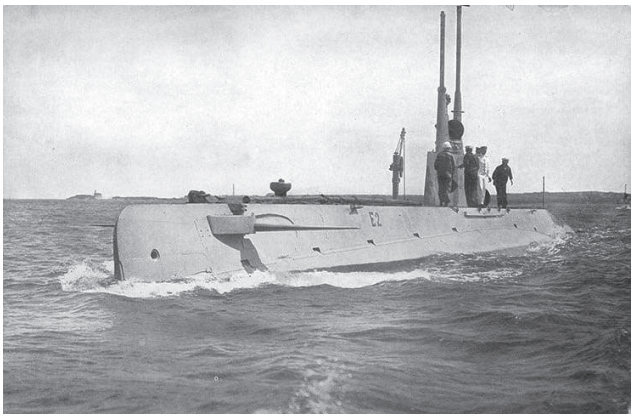
Concluding remarks

Between roughly 1903 and 1925 submarine wireless developed from laboratory and experimental trials to practical, if constrained, operational capability. The central technological constraint the strong attenuation of radio waves in seawater meant that early submarine radiotelegraphy relied on surface or near-surface transmissions using mast or periscope aerials. Wartime experience (1914–1918) validated the operational utility of wireless-equipped submarines for communications, but also revealed tactical vulnerabilities (detection by direction-finding) and logistic limits. After the war, progress in vacuum-tube technology, continuous-wave transmission, and ruggedized engineering improved submarine radio performance, but true submerged radio communication awaited much later developments in very-low-frequency systems.

In the Indian Ocean, submarines saw episodic employment during the First World War and contributed to the broader pattern of maritime disruption, but the principal instruments of commerce raiding and disruption in the region were surface vessels. The strategic picture of the Indian Ocean theatre thus reflects a mixed pattern of raiding, patrol, and limited undersea action an outcome of operational reach and logistical constraints rather than of technological incapacity alone.



HMS A1 - Royal Navy
One of the earliest documented instances of wireless communication from a submarine occurred in 1904, when the ***British Royal Navy's HMS A1 was equipped with Marconi wireless telegraphy equipment for surface transmission.*** *This marked a significant step in naval communication, although effective underwater transmission was still not technically feasible at that time.*



USS E-2
USS Sturgeon / E-2, also known as "Submarine No. 25", was an E-class submarine of the United States Navy. By 1912, the U.S. Navy submarine USS E-2 (then designated SS-25) ***demonstrated wireless communication capabilities while submerged at shallow depths.***
These developments indicated the increasing strategic importance of submarine communication for naval operations in the years leading up to and during the ***First World War.***

Footnotes:

1. H. W. Lyon, Wireless Telegraphy for Amateurs (London: Whittaker & Co., 1908), 162.
2. Richard Compton-Hall, Submarine Boats: The Beginnings of Underwater Warfare (London: Conway Maritime Press, 1983), 128–30.
3. Norman Friedman, U.S. Submarines through 1945: An Illustrated Design History (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1995), 85.
4. David Kahn, The Codebreakers: The Comprehensive History of Secret Communication from Ancient Times to the Internet (New York: Scribner, 1996), 298.

21 July 1921

Ship-to-Shore Communication System: Historical Background (1900–1920)

Between 1900 and 1920, ship-to-shore communication underwent a technological revolution that transformed maritime safety, navigation, and naval warfare. The period marks the critical shift from visual and sound-based signaling (such as flags, semaphores, and whistles) to wireless telegraphy, enabling long-range, real-time communication between vessels at sea and stations on land.

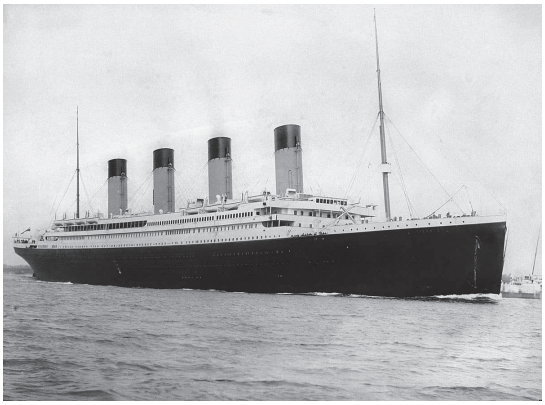
1. The Pioneering Era of Wireless Telegraphy

Marconi's Breakthroughs

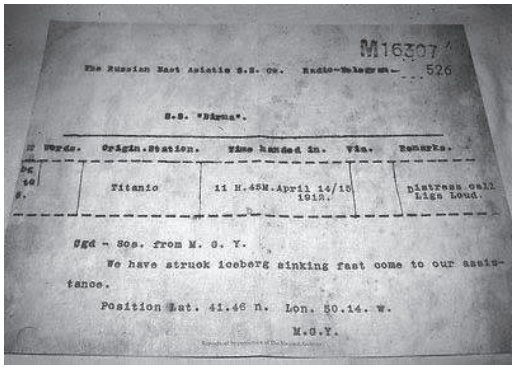
By the turn of the 20th century, Guglielmo Marconi had already demonstrated the potential of radio waves for maritime communication. In 1901, he famously transmitted a wireless signal across the Atlantic Ocean.[1] In 1900, the Marconi Company began equipping shipsy with wireless sets for communication with shore-based stations. SS Philadelphia and SS Lucania were among the first vessels to experiment with wireless systems in the early 1900s. By 1904, the first regular ship-to-shore radio service was established between vessels and coastal stations in England.[2]

2. Standardization and Expansion (1905–1910)

The first International Radiotelegraph Convention was held in Berlin in 1906, which introduced regulations and a distress signal: "CQD" (later replaced by "SOS").[3] Coastal nations began constructing permanent shore radio stations, including Poldhu (UK) and Cape Cod (USA), as well as stations in Hamburg, Saint Petersburg, Colombo, and Sydney. By 1907, the Marconi Company had established a network of ship-to-shore communication services linking the North Atlantic shipping lanes to shore.



RMS Titanic
The RMS Titanic disaster in April 1912 was a pivotal moment in the history of ship-to-shore communication. ***The ship was equipped with a Marconi wireless set and two wireless operators.*** *The* ***"SOS"*** *distress signal sent from Titanic was received by other ships and shore stations, prompting a partial rescue.* ***This tragedy led to the 1912 International Radiotelegraph Convention in London, which mandated:***
24-hour wireless watch on ships
A designated emergency frequency (500 kHz)
Improved training for radio operators


M16307
526

The Russian East Asiatic S.S. Co. Radio-Telegram.

S.S. "Slavia".

Words.	Origin. Station.	Time handed in.	Via.	Remarks.
	Titanic	11 H.45M.April 14/15 1912.		Distress call Liga Loud.

Sgd - Sos. from M. G. Y.
We have struck iceberg sinking fast come to our assistance.
Position Lat. 41.46 n. Lon. 50.14. w.
M.G.Y.

The telegraph message, *a distress call sent from the* ***RMS Titanic during the night of April 14-15, 1912.*** *One of the distress signals sent by Titanic's wireless operators,* ***Jack Phillips and Harold Bride,*** *was "CQD." The message in the image notes the ship's position and includes an urgent plea for assistance, likely sent to nearby vessels. It indicates that the Titanic had struck an iceberg and was sinking quickly.*
"CQD" *was an older distress signal used at the time, and although it was being phased out in favor of* ***"SOS,"*** *both signals were used by the Titanic that night. The Titanic became one of the first ships to use "SOS," making the disaster historically significant in the context of wireless communication and maritime safety.*
The distress messages were received by several ships, including the Carpathia, which ultimately rescued survivors

3. The Titanic Disaster and Maritime Reforms (1912)

The RMS Titanic disaster in April 1912 was a pivotal moment in the history of ship-to-shore communication. The ship was equipped with a Marconi wireless set and two wireless operators. The "SOS" distress signal sent from Titanic was received by other ships and shore stations, prompting a partial rescue.[4] This tragedy led to the 1912 International Radiotelegraph Convention in London, which mandated:

24-hour wireless watch on ships
A designated emergency frequency (500 kHz)
Improved training for radio operators

4. World War I (1914–1918): Naval Communication Evolves

During WWI, wireless communication became strategic and essential. Naval fleets relied on wireless to coordinate operations across the seas. Submarines, such as German U-boats, began using short-wave radio for coded communication with shore bases. [5] Allied and Axis powers invested heavily in wireless intercept and encryption, laying the groundwork for signals intelligence (SIGINT). Wireless telegraphy was instrumental in:

Relaying convoy information
Broadcasting coded instructions
Receiving intelligence and weather updates from naval command centers

5. Post-War Legacy and Technological Maturity (1919–1920)

After WWI, ship-to-shore communication systems were widely standardized. The International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea (SOLAS)

was convened in 1920, incorporating lessons learned from the Titanic and the war. Radio became a mandatory feature on commercial vessels, with dedicated frequencies, call signs, and trained operators.

Footnotes:

1. Guglielmo Marconi, Marconi's Wireless Telegraph Company, Ltd.: A History and Summary of the Work Accomplished, 1897–1901 (London: Marconi's Wireless Telegraph Co., 1902), 47–49.
2. Hugh G. J. Aitken, Syntony and Spark: The Origins of Radio (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976), 183–84.
3. Keith R. Benson, The Development of International Radio Regulations (London: Institution of Electrical Engineers, 1990), 62–64.
4. John Booth, Titanic Signals of Disaster: The Greatest Sea Rescue Ever Told (Chelmsford, UK: Galley Press, 1993), 15–19.
5. David Kahn, The Codebreakers: The Comprehensive History of Secret Communication from Ancient Times to the Internet (New York: Scribner, 1996), 301–03.

21 July 1921

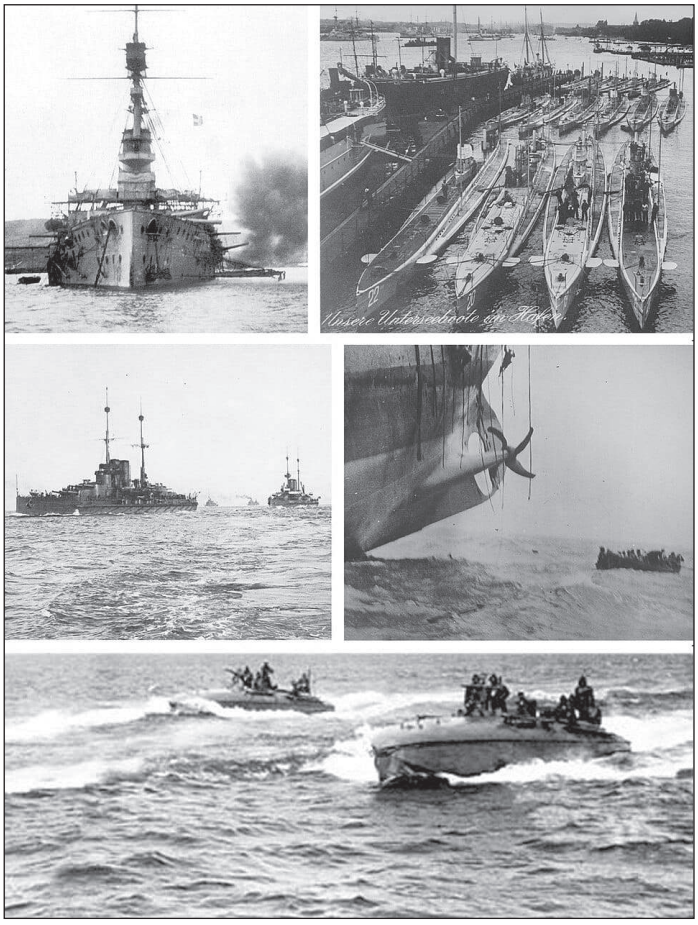
The Myth of a German Submarine Sunk near Ceylon during the First World War: Historical Reassessment

Among the popular maritime legends in Sri Lanka's early twentieth-century memory is the claim that a German submarine was sunk in Ceylonese waters during the First World War (1914–1918). This story often recounted in postwar oral narratives, school textbooks, and unverified local histories has persisted for decades without substantiating archival or naval evidence. **Careful examination of Imperial German Navy operational records, British Admiralty war diaries, and U.S. naval intelligence summaries reveals no basis for such an event.** Instead, the myth appears to have originated through a conflation of the dramatic exploits of the German cruiser SMS Emden in the Indian Ocean with the broader notoriety of U-boat warfare elsewhere.

Operational Context of German U-Boat Warfare (1914–1918)

The Kaiserliche Marine (Imperial German Navy) launched its submarine campaign primarily in the Atlantic and North Sea theatres, seeking to cut off Britain's maritime lifelines. The campaign's objectives were strategic and economic: to isolate the British Isles, sink merchant shipping, and weaken the Allied war effort through unrestricted submarine warfare.[1] Famous incidents most notably the sinking of the RMS Lusitania by U-20 on 7 May 1915 illustrate the geographic and strategic concentration of U-boat operations in European waters.[2]

Between 1914 and 1918, nearly all U-boat flotillas were based at Kiel, Wilhelmshaven, and later Flanders, from which they operated within the North Atlantic, the Mediterranean, and the North Sea. **No contemporary**



Navel Warfare of World War I
Clockwise from top left:
1. *The Cornwallis fires in Suvla Bay, Dardanelles 1915;*
2. *U-boats moored in Kiel, around 1914;*
3. *A lifeboat departs from an Allied ship hit by a German torpedo, around 1917;*
4. *Two Italian MAS in practice in the final stages of the war;*
5. *Manoeuvres of the Austro-Hungarian fleet with the Tegetthoff in the foreground*

German or Allied records indicate any U-boat detachments being dispatched to the Indian Ocean or Bay of Bengal.[3]

Logistical and Strategic Constraints
Several logistical factors precluded any German submarine operations near Ceylon:

1. Range and endurance limitations.
Early German U-boats, particularly pre-1916 types (U-1 through U-60 series), lacked the operational endurance to traverse thousands of nautical miles from Europe to the Indian Ocean without forward refuelling or maintenance bases.[4]

2. Absence of friendly bases.
Germany held no colonies in the Indian Ocean after the early loss of its East African territories and Pacific island holdings, making it impossible to sustain submarine operations in the region.[5]

3. Strategic priorities.
German naval doctrine concentrated its resources on the Atlantic and Mediterranean theatres, where shipping density and military impact were far greater. The Indian Ocean, under strong Allied control (notably the Royal Navy's East Indies Station), held comparatively low strategic value.[6]

German Naval Activity in the Indian Ocean

The Indian Ocean theatre saw notable German surface raider activity but no submarine involvement. The light cruiser SMS Emden (under Captain Karl von Müller) conducted a celebrated commerce-raiding campaign between August and November 1914, attacking Allied shipping and coastal installations across the Bay of Bengal, including near Madras, Penang, and the Cocos Islands.[7]

The Emden's audacious attacks captured global attention and likely seeded confusion in later local retellings. However, Emden was a surface warship, not a submarine. She was ultimately disabled and beached after engagement with the Australian cruiser HMAS Sydney on 9 November 1914 at the Cocos (Keeling) Islands thousands of kilometres east of Ceylon.[8]

Archival and Historical Evidence

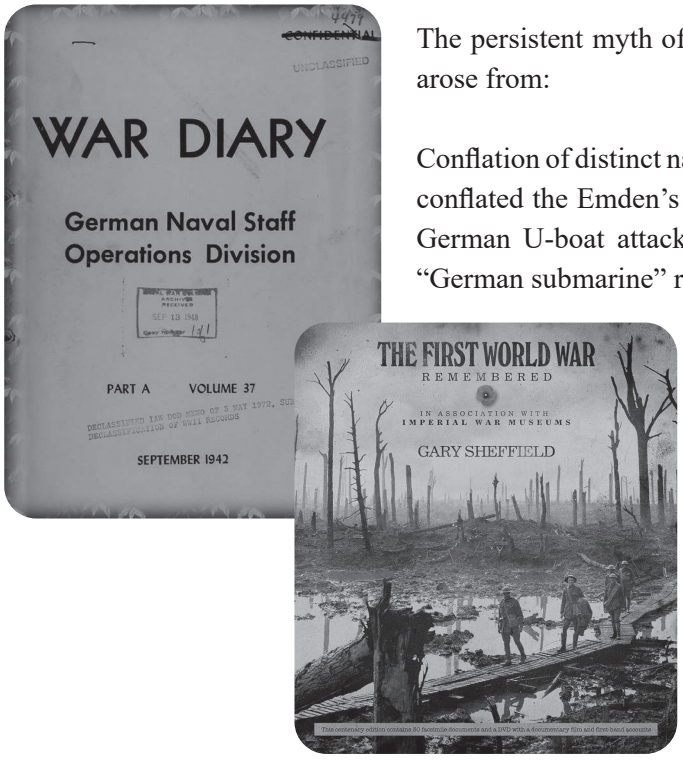
Thorough scrutiny of wartime archives and post-war naval assessments including the British Admiralty Naval Staff Monographs, the U.S. Navy Department's "Intelligence Summaries, 1914–1918", and the German Kriegsmarine's own historical logs (Handelskrieg zur See) shows no recorded submarine losses or engagements anywhere near Ceylon or the Bay of Bengal.[9]



SMS Emden ("His Majesty's Ship Emden") *was the second and final member of the Dresden class of light cruisers built for the German Kaiserliche Marine (Imperial Navy).* ***Named for the town of Emden,*** *she was laid down at the Kaiserliche Werft (Imperial Dockyard) in Danzig in 1906. The hull was launched in May 1908, and completed in July 1909. She had one sister ship, Dresden. Like the preceding Königsberg-class cruisers,* ***Emden was armed with ten 10.5 cm (4.1 in) guns and two torpedo tubes.***

The Imperial War Museum, Bundesarchiv (Germany), and U-boat Archive (Cuxhaven) corroborate this absence. The earliest German submarines to venture outside European waters did so only during the Second World War, when advanced long-range "Type IXD2" U-boats operated in the Indian Ocean from bases at Penang and Sabang in Japanese-occupied territories (1943–1945).[10]

Origins of the Ceylonese Submarine Myth



The persistent myth of a "sunken German submarine" near Ceylon likely arose from:

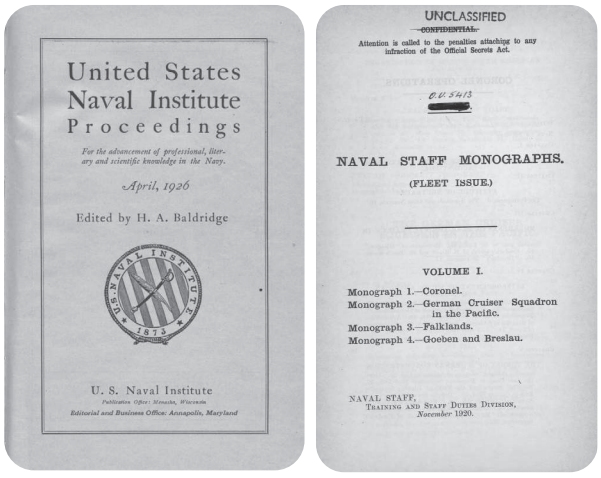
Conflation of distinct naval incidents. Local observers in 1914–15 may have conflated the Emden's Indian Ocean raids with contemporaneous news of German U-boat attacks in the Atlantic, leading to misinterpretations of "German submarine" reports in the press.

Maritime folklore and post-war storytelling. Seafaring communities often transmitted embellished accounts of wartime incidents, especially when wrecks or unidentified debris were found along coasts.

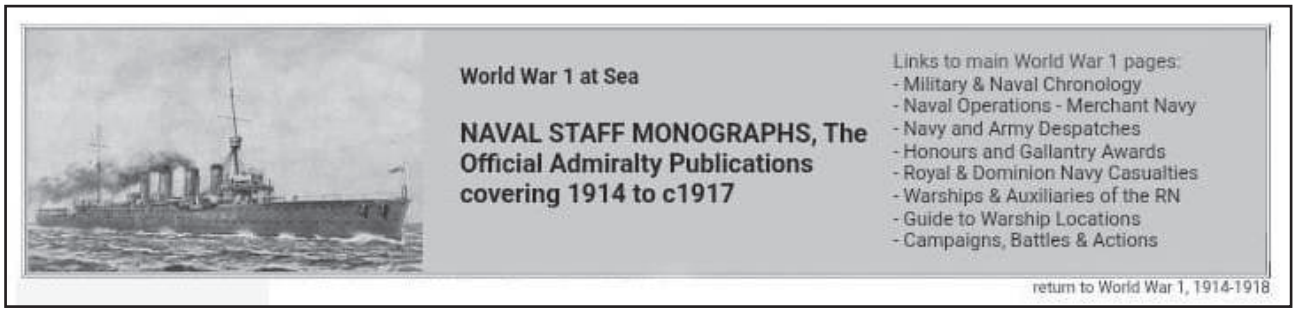
Misread or apocryphal press reports. Wartime censorship and limited telegraphic information occasionally produced inaccurate or sensational headlines about "German submarines sighted in Eastern waters," none of which were later substantiated by naval intelligence.

Conclusion

Comprehensive historical and archival research unequivocally establishes that no German submarine was sunk or even operated in the waters surrounding Ceylon during the First World War.
The myth represents a classic case of historical conflation, blending the spectacular exploits of the Emden with the notoriety of U-boat warfare elsewhere.



Far from diminishing the region's maritime significance, this clarification highlights the Indian Ocean's distinct naval character during 1914–18: a theatre dominated by surface raiders, communication control, and cable warfare, not by submarines. Correcting this record reinforces the necessity of archival rigor and critical historiography when reconstructing local wartime narratives.



British Admiralty Navel Staff Monograph 1914 - 1917

Footnotes:

1. Encyclopaedia Britannica, "World War I Naval Battles, U-Boats, Blockades," accessed July 2025.
2. Ibid.
3. Norman Friedman, U.S. Submarines through 1945: An Illustrated Design History (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1995), 85.
4. Richard Compton-Hall, Submarine Boats: The Beginnings of Underwater Warfare (London: Conway Maritime Press, 1983), 132–35.
5. Paul G. Halpern, A Naval History of World War I (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1994), 164.
6. Ibid., 165–66.
7. "SMS Emden," Wikipedia, accessed July 2025.
8. Ibid.
9. United Kingdom Admiralty, Naval Staff Monographs (War History Branch), vols. 1–24 (London: Admiralty, 1920–1927).
10. Jürgen Rohwer, Chronology of the War at Sea, 1939–1945: The Naval History of World War Two (London: Chatham Publishing, 2005), 241–42.

21 July 1921

Mr. Edward Harper:
Electrical Engineer (M.I.E.E.) and Institution of Radio Engineers (M.I.Radio E.)

Chief Engineer, Ceylon Telegraph Department (1921–1931)
Founder of Colombo Broadcasting Service (1925)

Edward Harper, born in 1873 in the United Kingdom, was a British electrical engineer whose arrival in Colombo on 21 July 1921 marked a pivotal moment in the technological and cultural history of broadcasting in Ceylon.[1] **Appointed Chief Engineer of the Ceylon Telegraph Department,** Harper brought to the island a rare combination of technical expertise and visionary foresight for the rapidly developing field of wireless telegraphy and radio transmission.[2]

Almost immediately upon his appointment, Harper began experimenting with radio technology, recognizing its potential beyond telegraphic communication. In 1923, working collaboratively with both Ceylonese and

British radio enthusiasts, he established the Ceylon Wireless Club.[3] From a modest room within the Central Telegraph Office, the group conducted a series of experimental broadcasts, transmitting gramophone music using a rudimentary transmitter constructed by departmental engineers. Notably, **this transmitter was reportedly assembled from components from a ship-to-shore communication system previously employed by the department and surplus equipment left by the Royal Air Force at the end of the First World War.[4]**



Mr. Edward Harper
Chief Engineer
Ceylon Posts andTelegraph Department 1921 - 1931

These experimental transmissions were among the earliest in Asia occurring only three years after the advent of regular radio broadcasting in Europe and they signified the beginning of organized radio communication in Ceylon.[5] Harper's practical experiments soon evolved into structured broadcasting efforts, and on 16 December 1925, the Colombo Radio Station **(Colombo Broadcasting Service)** was formally inaugurated under the call sign **"Colombo Calling."** Widely regarded as the oldest regular broadcasting service in South Asia, Colombo Radio served as both a technical and cultural milestone for the region.[6]

Under Harper's stewardship, the early broadcasting service expanded steadily throughout the late 1920s. He laid the foundational engineering, programming, and institutional structures that would later underpin the evolution of Radio Ceylon and, in due course, the Ceylon Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) and the Sri Lanka Broadcasting Corporation (SLBC).[7]

Harper's professional distinction extended beyond Ceylon. **He was a Member of the Institution of Electrical Engineers (M.I.E.E.) and the Institution of Radio Engineers (M.I.Radio E.), affiliations that reflected his recognition within the global engineering community.** His tenure in Ceylon, lasting until 1931, was marked by both innovation and institution building qualities that earned him the enduring title of **"Father of Broadcasting in Ceylon."[8]**

Through his dual commitment to technological advancement and public communication, Harper transformed an island colony's telegraph department into the cradle of one of Asia's most enduring broadcasting traditions. His work provided not merely the mechanical infrastructure but also the conceptual and organizational foundations for modern broadcasting in Sri Lanka. **Harper's legacy continues to resonate a century later as a testament to the synthesis of science, administration, and vision that defined the birth of broadcasting in South Asia.**



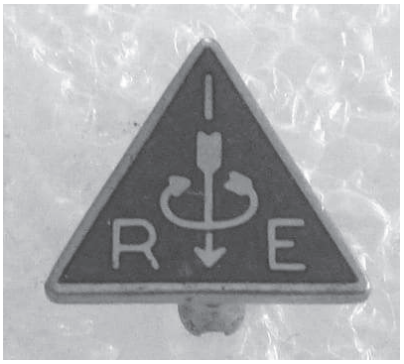
Institute of Radio Engineers
In 1915, the Institute of Radio Engineers held a joint meeting in San Francisco with the American Institute of Electrical Engineers ***The Institute of Radio Engineers (IRE)*** *was a professional organization which existed from 1912 until December 31, 1962. On January 1, 1963, it merged with the American Institute of Electrical Engineers (AIEE) to form the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers (IEEE).*



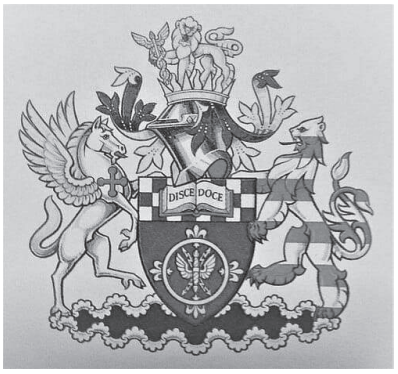
Radio Engineers, 1915.
Second banquet meeting of the Institute of Radio Engineers, 1915. ***Nikola Tesla*** *is standing at back, seventh from the right.*

Footnotes:

1. Edward Harper (engineer), Wikipedia, accessed August 2025.
2. Edward Harper (engineer), Wikipedia; "Edward Harper, Chief Engineer, Telegraphs," InfoLanka, accessed August 2025.
3. Edward Harper (engineer), Wikipedia; "History of Broadcasting in Sri Lanka," Academia.edu, accessed August 2025; "Ruling the Airwaves: Recounting Sri Lanka's Long Romance with Radio," Roar.media, accessed August 2025.
4. Ibid.
5. Edward Harper (engineer), Wikipedia; "History of Broadcasting in Sri Lanka," Academia.edu.
6. Edward Harper (engineer), Wikipedia; "Edward Harper, Chief Engineer, Telegraphs," InfoLanka; "Ruling the Airwaves: Recounting Sri Lanka's Long Romance with Radio," Roar.media.
7. "Ruling the Airwaves: Recounting Sri Lanka's Long Romance with Radio," Roar.media; "History of Broadcasting in Sri Lanka," Academia.edu.
8. "CHOGM 2013: Edward Harper… lived in Colombo from 1921–1931," Vernon Corea Tribute Blog, accessed August 2025; "Edward Harper, Chief Engineer, Telegraphs," InfoLanka.



Institute of Radio Engineers Member Lapel Pin



The Old Crest of IEE, UK
The IEE was founded in 1871 as the Society of Telegraph Engineers, changed its name in 1880 to the Society of Telegraph Engineers and Electricians and changed to the Institution of Electrical Engineers in 1888. ***It was Incorporated by a Royal Charter in 1921.***

21 July 1921

The Claim Concerning German Submarine Parts in Early Ceylonese Broadcasting: Critical Analysis of Distortion

The assertion appearing in the Administration Report of the first Postmaster General Mr. Abdon Ignatius Perera (1947 to 1951) for 1949 that the earliest radio transmitter in Ceylon was built "with the help of parts recovered from the radio apparatus of a captured German submarine"[1] constitutes one of the most persistent yet least substantiated narratives in the historiography of Ceylon broadcasting. The statement, presented without technical details, documentary citations, or reference to departmental correspondence, stands in tension with verifiable archival records of the Post and Telecommunications Department and contradicts the known developmental sequence of early wireless installations in Ceylon.

From an evidentiary standpoint, if such a claim were historically accurate, the reference should properly have appeared in the Administration Reports for 1924 or 1925 the years directly associated with the construction, operationalization, and subsequent replacement of the earliest broadcasting transmitter.[2] The transmitter used for the experimental broadcast of December 1923 and the inauguration of scheduled broadcasting in early 1925 was a ½-kilowatt unit constructed in the Telegraph Workshops. Surviving correspondence of the Chief Telecommunications Engineer indicates that its components were sourced primarily from reserve equipment of marine ship-to-shore radio apparatus already held within departmental inventories, supplemented by other departmental stores.[3] Nowhere in these internal memoranda, indents, or technical summaries is there mention of salvaged submarine equipment.

Moreover, the Secretary of State for the Colonies, in granting formal approval in May 1924 for the introduction of broadcasting, explicitly stated that such services were to be operated by the Government Wireless Station.[4] This directive confirms two essential points:

(1) that the Ceylon Post and Telecommunications Department already possessed adequate radio equipment and operational expertise; and

(2) that no extraordinary procurement such as sourcing apparatus from a captured German submarine was considered necessary, recommended, or noted by the Colonial Office.

Additional historical evidence further weakens the submarine narrative. The Government Wireless Station, referenced in the Colonial Secretary's communication, had been opened to the public in July 1912, transmitting its first official message to Bombay shortly thereafter.[5]



Mr. Abdon Ignatius Perera JP, CBE

Abdon Ignatius Perera JP, CBE *(30 July 1888 - 5 December 1955), the first native Post Master General of Ceylon.*

He was an old boy of St. Benedict's College, (1894 -1903), a Civil servant, and held the position of ***Post Master General from 1947 to 1951.***

Its establishment more than a decade prior to the introduction of broadcasting demonstrates that the Department already maintained sophisticated wireless facilities, including trained engineering personnel and stocks of standard wireless components. In this context, the notion that Mr. Edward Harper, Chief Engineer of the Telegraph Department, needed to seek out salvaged parts from a sunken or captured German submarine lacks both technical plausibility and administrative justification.

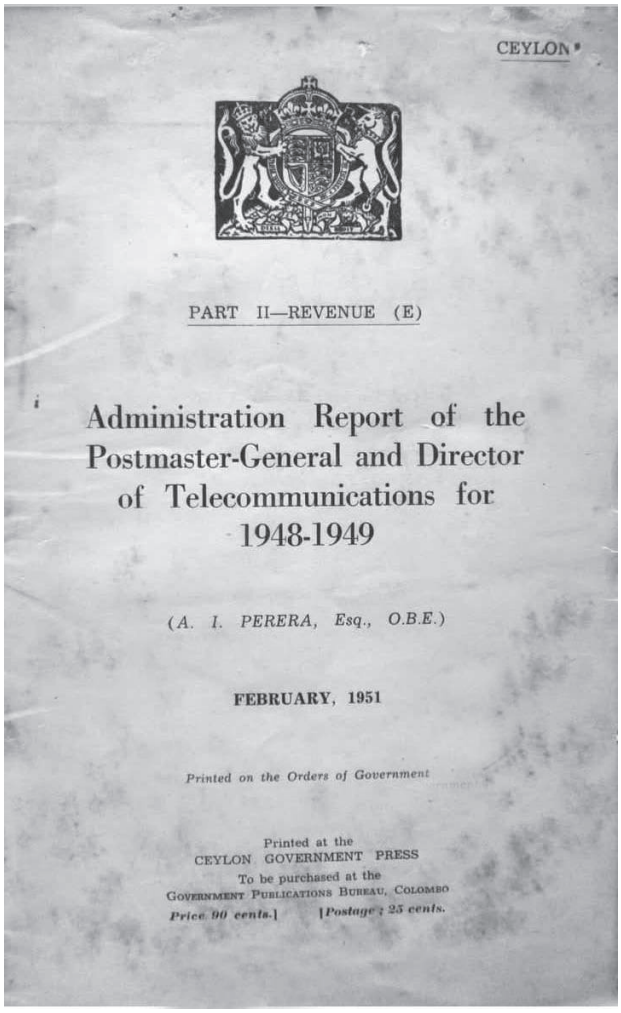
It is also significant that no Admiralty records, Marine Department correspondence, or Ceylon Government documents from the First World War or immediate post-war years reference the recovery, custody, or transfer of German submarine equipment to colonial departments in Ceylon. Had such a transfer occurred, it would likely have been a matter of bureaucratic record, given the strict wartime and post-war protocols governing enemy materiel.

Finally, early newspaper reports, minutes of the Ceylon Wireless Club (1923–1924), and recollections of pioneering officials consistently attest that the first experimental transmissions were achieved using

standard departmental resources, improvisation within the Telegraph Workshops, and equipment repurposed from existing marine communication stocks.[6]

In oral and written reminiscences of senior officers some of whom were directly involved in the technical operations of the period no reference appears to German submarine equipment. These primary testimonies further reinforce the conclusion that the 1949 statement represents a retrospective embellishment rather than a factual account.

Taken together, the cumulative evidence demonstrates that the "German submarine parts" claim rests on anecdote rather than archival fact. The technical, administrative, and documentary record clearly supports the conclusion that the origins of broadcasting in Ceylon were rooted entirely in the capacities, inventories, and ingenuity of the Post and Telecommunications Department itself.


CEYLON

PART II—REVENUE (E)

Administration Report of the Postmaster-General and Director of Telecommunications for 1948-1949

(A. I. PERERA, Esq., O.B.E.)

FEBRUARY, 1951

Printed on the Orders of Government

Printed at the
CEYLON GOVERNMENT PRESS
To be purchased at the
GOVERNMENT PUBLICATIONS BUREAU, COLOMBO
Price 90 cents.] [Postage: 25 cents.

Administration Report of the Postmaster General and Director of Telecommunications for 1948 - 1949

Footnotes:

1. Administration Report of the Postmaster General for the Year 1949 (Colombo: Government Press, 1950), 3.
2. Ibid.; see also Administration Report of the Postmaster General for the Year 1924 (Colombo: Government Press, 1925).
3. Chief Telecommunications Engineer's Office, Correspondence Files, 1923–1925, Ceylon Telegraph Department Archives (unpublished departmental records).
4. Colonial Office to the Governor of Ceylon, May 1924, CO 54/—, The National Archives (Kew).
5. Ceylon Government Gazette, July 1912, notifications on the inauguration of the Government Wireless Station.
6. Minutes of the Ceylon Wireless Club, 1923–1924; Edward Harper, personal papers; interviews and recollections of senior Telegraph Department officers (various archival and privately held sources).

1922

14 November 1922

The Background and Beginnings of BBC Radio, 1922

1. Wireless Communication and the Post–First World War Context

The origins of BBC Radio must be situated within the broader **technological, political, and social transformations** that followed the First World War. By the early twentieth century, wireless telegraphy had already become an indispensable **tool for maritime safety, imperial administration, and military communication.** In Britain, the development of wireless technology was closely associated with the Marconi Company, whose experimental and commercial activities dominated the field from the late nineteenth century onward.[1]

During the First World War (1914–1918), all wireless transmission in Britain was brought under strict state control. Civilian experimentation was prohibited, and wireless resources were devoted **exclusively to military and naval purposes.[2]**



Entrance to Marconi building, birth place of radio, New Street, Chelmsford, Essex, England

Chelmsford is considered the "Birthplace of Radio" because Guglielmo Marconi opened the world's first wireless factory on Hall Street in 1899. The city hosted the first official UK sound broadcast in 1920 from the New Street Works, and the first regular entertainment broadcasts (2MT) in 1922 from nearby Writtle, setting the stage for the BBC.

Key Historical Highlights

1899: *Marconi opens the world's first wireless factory at Hall Street, later moving to a purpose-built factory on New Street in 1912.*
1920: *The first official, publicised UK radio broadcast was transmitted from the New Street Works, featuring soprano Dame Nellie Melba.*
1922: *Regular, licensed radio entertainment broadcasts began from a hut in nearby Writtle (2MT), with engineer Captain Peter Eckersley leading the, often informal, shows.*

Significance:

These developments revolutionized communication and entertainment, directly leading to the formation of the BBC.

Legacy in Chelmsford

Marconi Plaza:
A statue and memorial to Guglielmo Marconi exist in the city.
Chelmsford Museum:
Houses exhibitions detailing the city's role in pioneering radio technology, including the 2022 Forecast22 exhibition marking the centenary of the first broadcasts.
Signage:
Road signs around the city proudly designate Chelmsford as the "Birthplace of Radio" Marconi's work in Chelmsford propelled the town from an agricultural hub into a pioneering center of industrial technology and radio engineering

2. Early Experimental Broadcasting and Public Demand

Between 1919 and 1922, a series of experimental broadcasts demonstrated the potential of wireless communication for mass entertainment and information. One of the most significant of these was the transmission of a **live concert by Dame Nellie Melba from the Marconi Company's Chelmsford station on 15 June 1920.** This broadcast was received not only across Britain but also in several parts of continental Europe, providing compelling evidence that wireless telephony could reach a mass audience.[3]

These early experiments generated widespread public enthusiasm. Amateur listeners assembled home-made receiving sets, while newspapers reported on the novelty of hearing music and speech transmitted invisibly through the air. However, the rapid growth of experimental broadcasting also raised regulatory concerns. The British government, acting through the **General Post Office (GPO), which held statutory authority over wireless communication,** feared technical interference, lack of programme standards, and unregulated commercial exploitation of the medium.[4]

3. Government Policy and the Creation of a Broadcasting Monopoly

In response to these challenges, the British government rejected the American model of multiple competing commercial broadcasters. Instead, it favoured a centralized and tightly regulated system that would balance industrial interests with public control. Following negotiations between the GPO and leading wireless manufacturers, a consensus emerged that broadcasting should be conducted by a single organization operating under government supervision.[5]

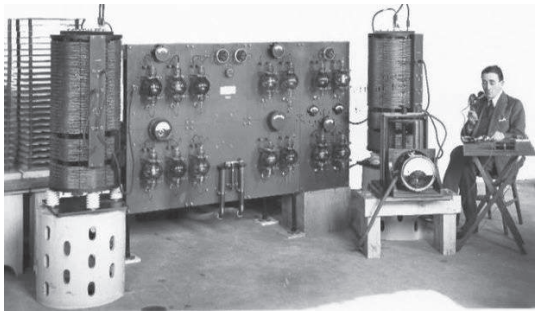


This is a blue plaque commemorating Guglielmo Marconi and the site of Britain's first official radio broadcast.

Location:
The plaque is mounted on a building in Chelmsford, Essex, England, which was the site of the first radio broadcast.
Historic Broadcast:
Britain's first official radio broadcast was transmitted from this location.
Date and Performer:
The broadcast occurred on June 15, 1920, and featured Dame Nellie Melba.



Former Marconi Wireless Telegraph Works factory building in Chelmsford, England.
Built in 1912, it is considered the world's first purpose-built radio factory.
The building is located on Hall Street in Chelmsford, which is known as the "birthplace of radio".
The radio equipment for the RMS Titanic was manufactured at the original Marconi facility in Chelmsford.
The site has since been redeveloped into residential apartments, with some original features like exposed brickwork retained.



This image captures a radio announcer transmitting a news bulletin in 1920 from the Marconi Works in Chelmsford, Great Britain.

This event was part of the first true speech broadcasts in Britain, which began on January 15, 1920.

The broadcasts, including speech and gramophone music, originated from the Marconi Chelmsford works.

The large equipment shown in the image is the first broadcast transmitter operated in Great Britain.

The original photograph was published in 1935 in "The Story Of 25 Eventful Years In Pictures".



This is the historic Marconi broadcasting hut, known as "Two Emma Toc" (call sign 2MT), on display at the Sandford Mill Museum in Chelmsford, UK.

It was a converted World War I army hut used by Marconi engineers for experimental radio development from 1919 to 1960.

The hut served as the location for the first regular, licensed British radio entertainment broadcasts, which began on February 14, 1922.

These broadcasts were led by Peter Eckersley, who later became the BBC's first Chief Engineer.

The hut is a significant artifact, contributing to Chelmsford's title as the "Birthplace of Radio".

As a result, the British Broadcasting Company Ltd. was incorporated on 18 October 1922. The Company was established as a private enterprise but was owned collectively by **major wireless manufacturing firms, including the Marconi Company, Metropolitan-Vickers, the General Electric Company (GEC), Western Electric, and the Radio Communication Company.**[6] The GPO granted the Company an exclusive licence to broadcast, while revenue was generated indirectly through the sale of radio receiving sets and listener licence fees administered by the Post Office.

4. The First Official Broadcast: November 1922

The British Broadcasting Company commenced regular broadcasting on 14 November 1922 from station 2LO, located at Marconi House in the Strand, London. The opening announcement "This is 2LO, Marconi House, London, calling" has since become emblematic of the birth of British public broadcasting.[7]

Early broadcasts were modest in both duration and technical reach. Transmissions were typically confined to **evening hours and consisted of music, brief talks, weather forecasts, and news summaries.** Importantly, the Company was initially prohibited from producing its own news; instead, it was required to compile bulletins from newspaper sources after publication, reflecting ongoing press concerns about competition.[8]

5. Early Programming Ideals and Social Impact

Despite its experimental character, broadcasting rapidly became embedded in British social life. Radio listening fostered new domestic routines and created shared auditory experiences that transcended regional and class boundaries. The BBC's early commitment to cultural respectability manifested in classical music, educational talks, and religious programming distinguished it from purely commercial entertainment ventures.[9]



Dame Nellie Melba (born Helen Porter Mitchell), an acclaimed Australian operatic soprano.

She was a highly influential figure in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, known for her extraordinary voice.

Melba was one of the first internationally recognized singers to participate in direct radio broadcasts in the 1920s.

She made her operatic debut in Brussels in 1887 and quickly became one of the world's most famous sopranos, performing in major cities including Paris, London, and New York.

At the peak of her success, she was considered perhaps the most famous woman in the world.

She was appointed a Dame Commander of the Order of the British Empire for her service and established a singing school in Melbourne.

The famous dessert Peach Melba and Melba toast were named in her honor.



Marconi House in London,

Which was a significant location in early British broadcasting history.

The building was originally constructed as the Gaiety Restaurant between 1904 and 1906.

The Marconi Companies occupied it as their main offices from 1912 to 1933.

It housed the first BBC London studio and transmitter, which began operations in 1922.

The world's first live recital by a professional musician (Dame Nellie Melba) was broadcast from here in 1920.

A pivotal influence on the character of the new medium was **John Charles Walsham Reith, who was appointed General Manager of the British Broadcasting Company in December 1922.** Reith articulated a moral and cultural vision of broadcasting that rejected advertising-driven programming and emphasized national service, education, and social cohesion.[10] Although his famous formulation **"to inform, to educate, and to entertain"** was articulated more fully in later years, its philosophical foundations were firmly established during this formative period.



General Post Office, City of London.

King Edward Building in the City of London, a historic structure that was once the headquarters of the General Post Office.

The building served as London's main Post Office and sorting office for most of the 20th century.

It was designed by Sir Henry Tanner and opened in 1910.

After the Post Office moved out, the building was sold and now houses offices for Bank of America Merrill Lynch.

The building is located on King Edward Street, which runs from Newgate Street to Little Britain.

6. Historical Significance of 1922

The establishment of BBC Radio in 1922 marked a decisive moment in global media history. It represented the institutionalization of public service broadcasting, grounded in state regulation, cultural responsibility, and national purpose. **This British model would exert profound influence throughout the British Empire, shaping broadcasting systems in India, Australia, Africa, and later Ceylon, where similar assumptions about public responsibility and centralized control informed early radio development.[11]**

Footnotes:

1 Asa Briggs, The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom, Vol. I: The Birth of Broadcasting (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961), 3–15.

2. Susan J. Douglas, Inventing American Broadcasting, 1899–1922 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), 287–289.

3. Briggs, The Birth of Broadcasting, 29–31.

4. Paddy Scannell and David Cardiff, A Social History of British Broadcasting, 1922–1939 (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991), 1–4.

5. Briggs, The Birth of Broadcasting, 37–40.

6. Briggs, 41–42.

7. Scannell and Cardiff, Social History, 6.

8. Briggs, The Birth of Broadcasting, 55–57.

9. Scannell and Cardiff, Social History, 9–14.

10. John C. W. Reith, Broadcast Over Britain (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1924), 17–25.

11. Asa Briggs, The BBC: The First Fifty Years (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 12–18.

24 November 1922

Background to the Inauguration of Broadcasting in Ceylon, Estatlishment of the Ceylon Amateur Radio Society.

The advent of wireless communication technology and the global enthusiasm surrounding its potential soon extended to Ceylon, culminating in the formation of the **Ceylon Wireless Club on 24 November 1922.**[1] Notably, this development coincided with the establishment of the British Broadcasting Company in the United Kingdom in October 1922, underscoring Ceylon's early engagement with modern broadcasting innovations.[2]

Subsequent to its inception, the name of the society underwent several changes, reflecting its evolving identity and expanding scope. In July 1923, the Club was renamed the Ceylon Amateur Radio Society and was later known as the Radio Club of Ceylon and South India.[3]



Mr. Lachlan Macrae
Chairman
The Ceylon Amateur Radio Society 1922,
He held the position of Director of Education in Ceylon at that time.
Following his retirement from Ceylon Government Service, he joined the BBC and was appointed Station Director of Glasgow BBC Broadcasting, Edinburgh, Scotland.

The founding members of this pioneering organization represented a diversity of professional backgrounds, united by a shared interest in radio communication. They included:

1. **Mr. Lachlan Macrae (Chairman)** – Director of Education at the time. Following his retirement from the Ceylon Government Service, he joined the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) and was appointed Station Director of Glasgow Broadcasting, after a short assignment in Edinburgh.[4]
2. **Mr. J. S. Dinwiddie** – A prominent figure in the mercantile sector.[5]
3. **Mr. R. F. Dias** – Later conferred the title Doctor of Laws (LL.D.), contributing significantly to the legal and academic spheres.[6]
4. **Mr. G. H. Jolliffe** – A plantation executive.[7]
5. **Mr. C. A. Hutson** – Another distinguished individual from the mercantile sector.[8]
6. **Mr. M. S. Rockwood** – Served as the Secretary of the Club.[9]
7. **Mr. A. E. Felasinger** – A contributor to early radio development in the region.[10]
8. **Mr. M. M. P. Gunewardena** – Inspector of Telegraphs, whose technical expertise was instrumental to the Club's activities.[11]

This foundational group played a critical role in laying the groundwork for organized broadcasting activities in Ceylon, fostering a culture of scientific inquiry and experimentation that would later culminate in the establishment of formal broadcasting services on the island.[12]

Footnotes:

1. "History of Broadcasting in Sri Lanka," Academia.edu, accessed August 2025.
2. Asa Briggs, The Birth of Broadcasting (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), 140–42.
3. "History of Broadcasting in Sri Lanka," Academia.edu.
4. Ceylon Daily News, "Death of Mr. Lachlan Macrae," 15 May 1943.
5. Ibid.
6. Times of Ceylon, "Dr. R. F. Dias Receives Honorary LL.D.," 3 August 1948.
7. "History of Broadcasting in Sri Lanka," Academia.edu.
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid.
11. Ibid.
12. Ibid.



SUPPLEMENT

TO THE

NEW ZEALAND GAZETTE

OF

THURSDAY. AUGUST 3, 1922.

Published by Authority.

WELLINGTON, TUESDAY, AUGUST 8, 1922.

Amendment to the Regulations under the Post and Telegraph Department Act, 1918.

JELLICOE, Governor-General.

ORDER IN COUNCIL.

At the Government House at Wellington, this 7th day of August, 1922.

Present:

HIS EXCELLENCY THE GOVERNOR-GENERAL IN COUNCIL.

IN pursuance and exercise of the power and authority conferred on him by the Post and Telegraph Department Act, 1918 (hereinafter termed "the said Act"), His Excellency the Governor-General of the Dominion of New Zealand, acting by and with the advice and consent of the Executive Council of the said Dominion, doth hereby make the following amendments to the regulations made on the twenty-first day of January, one thousand nine hundred and nineteen, for the election of the elective member of the Post and Telegraph Promotion Board, and to the regulations made on the first day of July, one thousand nine hundred and nineteen, for the classification and regulation of the Post and Telegraph Department and the amendments thereof made from time to time under the provisions of the said Act; and doth direct that this Order in Council shall have effect from the date of publication in the *New Zealand Gazette*.

SCHEDULE.

THE regulations made for the election of the elective member of the Post and Telegraph Promotion Board are hereby altered as follows:—

Regulation 2 is hereby revoked, and the following regulation substituted therefor:—

"2. The elective member of the Board shall be elected by ballot to be taken on the third Wednesday in February, 1925, and on the same day in every third year thereafter. Such member shall hold office until his successor comes into office."

Regulation 5 is hereby revoked, and the following regulation substituted therefor:—

"5. The Chief Clerk of the Secretary's Office, General Post Office, or the person for the time being performing the duties of such Chief Clerk, shall be the Returning Officer for the election. There shall be two scrutineers—namely, the Assistant Postmaster, Wellington, and the Superintendent of the Telegraph Office, Wellington, or the person or persons performing the duties of either or both of those offices."

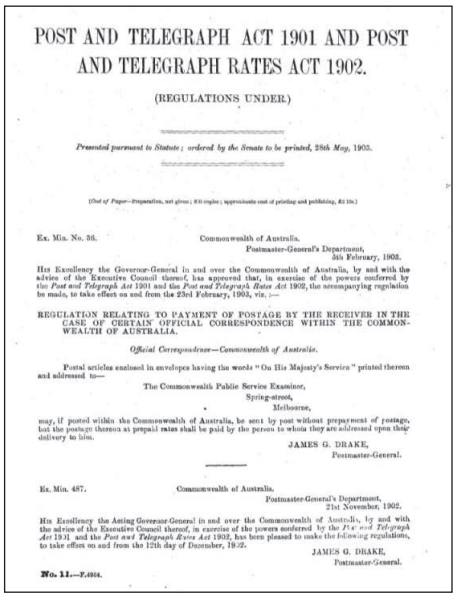
Regulation 8 is hereby revoked, and the following regulation substituted therefor:—

"8. Should there be more than one nomination a poll shall be taken on the third Wednesday in February."

Regulation 17 is hereby revoked, and the following regulation substituted therefor:—

"17. The Returning Officer shall, within seven days after receiving such direction, appoint a day for holding the election, and publish notice thereof in the Post and Telegraph Depart-

Commonwealth of Australia Post and Telegraph ACT 1901 and Post and Telegraph rates ACT 1902.



POST AND TELEGRAPH ACT 1901 AND POST AND TELEGRAPH RATES ACT 1902.

(REGULATIONS UNDER)

Presented pursuant to Statute; ordered by the Senate to be printed, 28th May, 1903.

(Cost of Paper—Preparation, not given; 300 copies; approximate cost of printing and publishing, £2 10s.)

Ex. Min. No. 36. Commonwealth of Australia.
Postmaster-General's Department,
5th February, 1903.

His Excellency the Governor-General in and over the Commonwealth of Australia, by and with the advice of the Executive Council thereof, has approved that, in exercise of the powers conferred by the *Post and Telegraph Act* 1901 and the *Post and Telegraph Rates Act* 1902, the accompanying regulation be made, to take effect on and from the 23rd February, 1903, viz.:—

REGULATION RELATING TO PAYMENT OF POSTAGE BY THE RECEIVER IN THE CASE OF CERTAIN OFFICIAL CORRESPONDENCE WITHIN THE COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA.

Official Correspondence—Commonwealth of Australia.

Postal articles enclosed in envelopes having the words "On His Majesty's Service" printed thereon and addressed to—

The Commonwealth Public Service Examiner,
Spring-street,
Melbourne,

may, if posted within the Commonwealth of Australia, be sent by post without prepayment of postage, but the postage thereon as prepaid rates shall be paid by the person to whom they are addressed upon their delivery to him.

JAMES G. DRAKE,
Postmaster-General.

Ex. Min. 487. Commonwealth of Australia.
Postmaster-General's Department,
21st November, 1902.

His Excellency the Acting Governor-General in and over the Commonwealth of Australia, by and with the advice of the Executive Council thereof, in exercise of the powers conferred by the *Post and Telegraph Act* 1901, and the *Post and Telegraph Rates Act* 1902, has been pleased to make the following regulations, to take effect on and from the 12th day of December, 1902.

JAMES G. DRAKE,
Postmaster-General.

No. 11.—7.1902.

Amendment to the Regulations under the Post and Telegraph Department Act, Commonwealth of New Zealand 1918. On THURSDAY. AUGUST 3, 1922.

December 1922

Deliberations by the Government

In December 1922, in response to growing public interest and advocacy led by the Ceylon Wireless Club, the colonial administration of Ceylon initiated formal deliberations concerning the introduction of radio broadcasting on the island.[1] The rising enthusiasm for this emerging medium prompted the Government to take concrete steps toward its institutional development.

To assess the viability and governance of broadcasting services, the Government appointed a committee tasked with examining and reporting on the following key considerations:

1. Whether broadcasting should be permitted in Ceylon,
2. Whether the operation of broadcasting should fall under direct State control, and
3. Whether a dedicated Board should be established to oversee broadcasting activities.[2]

Following a careful review of the committee's findings, the Government resolved that broadcasting would be a State-operated function.[3] Accordingly, a Broadcasting Board was to be constituted, chaired ex officio by the Postmaster General. The Board's membership included representatives from the Press, the Ceylon Wireless Club, the Electrical Trade, the Chamber of Commerce, and the Police Department.[4]

Furthermore, the decision was made to entrust the responsibility for broadcasting operations to the Post and Telegraph Department, aligning with contemporary international models.[5] This administrative structure closely mirrored those adopted by France, Germany, the Irish Free State, Denmark, South Africa, and Queensland (Australia), where radio broadcasting had developed under government supervision.[6]

This policy decision marked a significant moment in the early institutionalization of broadcasting in Ceylon, setting a precedent for centralized governance and State responsibility in the evolution of public communication services.[7]

Footnotes:

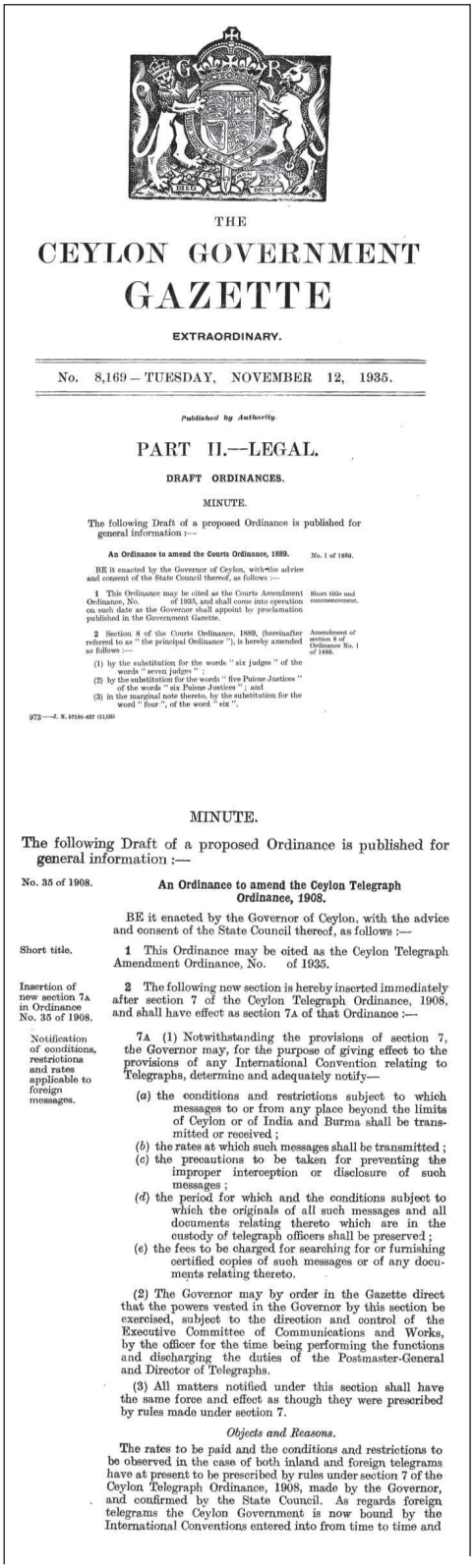
1. "History of Broadcasting in Sri Lanka," Academia.edu, accessed August 2025.
2. Ibid.
3. Government of Ceylon, Report of the Post and Telegraph Department for the Year 1922 (Colombo: Government Printer, 1923), 4–5.
4. Ibid.
5. Asa Briggs, The Birth of Broadcasting (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), 176–78.
6. Ibid.
7. "History of Broadcasting in Sri Lanka," Academia.edu.

1923

February 1923

The Appointment and Contributions of Mr. Maurice Salvador Sreshta

On 21 February 1923, Mr. Maurice Salvador Sreshta was appointed as the 12th Postmaster General of Ceylon, a role that signified a defining moment in the institutional evolution of the island's postal and telecommunications infrastructure.[1] His tenure, which continued until 1928, was marked by a series of far-reaching administrative and policy reforms, particularly concerning the establishment and advancement of radio broadcasting in Ceylon.[2]



THE

CEYLON GOVERNMENT

GAZETTE

EXTRAORDINARY.

No. 8,169 — TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 12, 1935.

Published by Authority.

PART II.—LEGAL.

DRAFT ORDINANCES.

MINUTE.

The following Draft of a proposed Ordinance is published for general information :—

An Ordinance to amend the Courts Ordinance, 1889. No. 1 of 1889.

BE it enacted by the Governor of Ceylon, with the advice and consent of the State Council thereof, as follows :—

1 This Ordinance may be cited as the Courts Amendment Ordinance, No. of 1935, and shall come into operation on such date as the Governor shall appoint by proclamation published in the Government Gazette. Short title and commencement.

2 Section 8 of the Courts Ordinance, 1889, (hereinafter referred to as " the principal Ordinance "), is hereby amended as follows :— Amendment of section 8 of Ordinance No. 1 of 1889.

(1) by the substitution for the words " six judges " of the words " seven judges " ;

(2) by the substitution for the words " five Puisne Justices " of the words " six Puisne Justices " ; and

(3) in the marginal note thereto, by the substitution for the word " four ", of the word " six ".

973—J. S. 07186-627 (11/35)

MINUTE.

The following Draft of a proposed Ordinance is published for general information :—

No. 35 of 1908. **An Ordinance to amend the Ceylon Telegraph Ordinance, 1908.**

BE it enacted by the Governor of Ceylon, with the advice and consent of the State Council thereof, as follows :—

Short title. 1 This Ordinance may be cited as the Ceylon Telegraph Amendment Ordinance, No. of 1935.

Insertion of new section 7A in Ordinance No. 35 of 1908. 2 The following new section is hereby inserted immediately after section 7 of the Ceylon Telegraph Ordinance, 1908, and shall have effect as section 7A of that Ordinance :—

Notification of conditions, restrictions and rates applicable to foreign messages. 7A. (1) Notwithstanding the provisions of section 7, the Governor may, for the purpose of giving effect to the provisions of any International Convention relating to Telegraphs, determine and adequately notify—

(a) the conditions and restrictions subject to which messages to or from any place beyond the limits of Ceylon or of India and Burma shall be transmitted or received ;

(b) the rates at which such messages shall be transmitted ;

(c) the precautions to be taken for preventing the improper interception or disclosure of such messages ;

(d) the period for which and the conditions subject to which the originals of all such messages and all documents relating thereto which are in the custody of telegraph officers shall be preserved ;

(e) the fees to be charged for searching for or furnishing certified copies of such messages or of any documents relating thereto.

(2) The Governor may by order in the Gazette direct that the powers vested in the Governor by this section be exercised, subject to the direction and control of the Executive Committee of Communications and Works, by the officer for the time being performing the functions and discharging the duties of the Postmaster-General and Director of Telegraphs.

(3) All matters notified under this section shall have the same force and effect as though they were prescribed by rules made under section 7.

Objects and Reasons.

The rates to be paid and the conditions and restrictions to be observed in the case of both inland and foreign telegrams have at present to be prescribed by rules under section 7 of the Ceylon Telegraph Ordinance, 1908, made by the Governor, and confirmed by the State Council. As regards foreign telegrams the Ceylon Government is now bound by the International Conventions entered into from time to time and

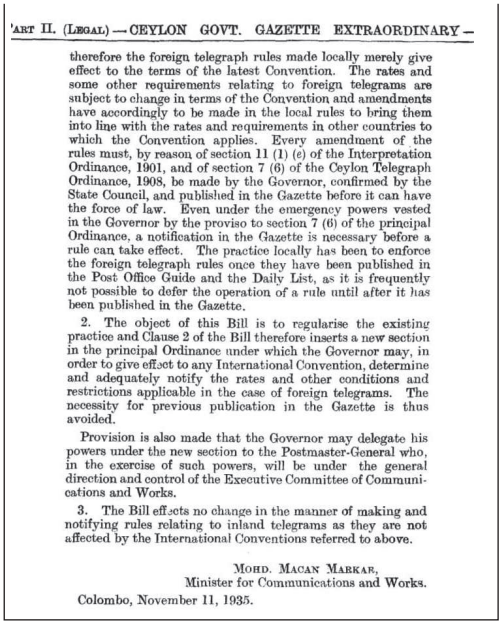
Among his most enduring contributions was the formulation of the initial policy framework for national broadcasting an essential milestone in the modernization of Ceylon's communication systems.

Originally born as Maurice Salvador Pinto, he arrived in Ceylon on 24 February 1897 and subsequently changed his surname to Sreshta, a Nepali term meaning "the best."[3] This change symbolized both personal aspiration and professional reinvention. Mr. Sreshta's distinguished career in the Ceylon Civil Service was characterized by a diverse range of judicial and administrative appointments across the island. His official roles included:

Assistant to the Government Agent, Eastern Province (1898)
Additional Police Magistrate, Tangalle (1900)
Police Magistrate, Panadura (1900), Avisawella (1901), and Galle (1905)
Commissioner of Requests, Colombo (1907)
District Judge, Jaffna (1911), Negombo (1917), and Kurunegala (1920)
Registrar General (prior to 1923)

His elevation to the position of Postmaster General marked not only the culmination of a distinguished civil service career but also a historic appointment, as he became the first non-European to occupy this office under British colonial administration.[4] During his term, Mr. Sreshta undertook a series of transformative initiatives, including the reorganization of the postal system, the establishment of the first rural telephone exchange, and the motorization of the mail delivery service each significantly enhancing the efficiency, accessibility, and reliability of the country's communication networks.[5]

Following his retirement in 1928, Mr. Sreshta was widely recognized for his role in advancing institutional modernization and administrative reform within the postal and telecommunication sectors. His leadership was instrumental in laying the groundwork for the early development of state-regulated broadcasting, thereby facilitating Ceylon's transition into a new era of mass communication and technological progress.[6]



'ART II. (LEGAL) — CEYLON GOVT. GAZETTE EXTRAORDINARY —

therefore the foreign telegraph rules made locally merely give effect to the terms of the latest Convention. The rates and some other requirements relating to foreign telegrams are subject to change in terms of the Convention and amendments have accordingly to be made in the local rules to bring them into line with the rates and requirements in other countries to which the Convention applies. Every amendment of the rules must, by reason of section 11 (1) (*e*) of the Interpretation Ordinance, 1901, and of section 7 (6) of the Ceylon Telegraph Ordinance, 1908, be made by the Governor, confirmed by the State Council, and published in the Gazette before it can have the force of law. Even under the emergency powers vested in the Governor by the proviso to section 7 (6) of the principal Ordinance, a notification in the Gazette is necessary before a rule can take effect. The practice locally has been to enforce the foreign telegraph rules once they have been published in the Post Office Guide and the Daily List, as it is frequently not possible to defer the operation of a rule until after it has been published in the Gazette.

2. The object of this Bill is to regularise the existing practice and Clause 2 of the Bill therefore inserts a new section in the principal Ordinance under which the Governor may, in order to give effect to any International Convention, determine and adequately notify the rates and other conditions and restrictions applicable in the case of foreign telegrams. The necessity for previous publication in the Gazette is thus avoided.

Provision is also made that the Governor may delegate his powers under the new section to the Postmaster-General who, in the exercise of such powers, will be under the general direction and control of the Executive Committee of Communications and Works.

3. The Bill effects no change in the manner of making and notifying rules relating to inland telegrams as they are not affected by the International Conventions referred to above.

MOHD. MACAN MARKAR,
Minister for Communications and Works.

Colombo, November 11, 1935.

Ceylon Telegraph Ordinance, 1908 (No. 35 of 1908) Amendment on Tuesday November 12 1935 Gazette No 8169

Footnotes

1. Administration Report of the Director of Posts and Telegraphs for the Year 1923 (Colombo: Government Printer, 1924), 3–4.
2. D. M. Colombage, Guwan Viduli Vanshaya (Colombo: M. D. Gunasena & Company, 1989), 08.
3. "Appointments in the Civil Service," The Ceylon Daily News, February 25, 1897, 4
4. K. K. S. Perera, "First Non-European Postmaster General," The Island, June 18, 2017
5. Administration Report of the Director of Posts and Telegraphs for the Year 1925 (Colombo: Government Printer, 1926), 12.
6. W. T. Keble, Ceylon: Bequest of an Empire (London: Oxford University Press, 1940), 223–224.

21 February 1923

Mr. Maurice Salvador Sreshta, Postmaster General of Ceylon (1923–1928)

Maurice Salvador Sreshta, born Maurice Salvador Pinto, arrived in Ceylon in February 1897.[1] Embracing a new professional identity, he adopted the surname "Sreshta," a Nepali term meaning "the best," symbolizing both personal ambition and his recommitment to public service.[2] His early years in the Ceylon Civil Service were marked by a trajectory of judicial and administrative appointments: beginning as Assistant to the Government Agent in the Eastern Province (1898), he served successively as Additional Police Magistrate in Tangalle (1900) and Police Magistrate in Panadura (1900), Avisawella (1901), and Galle (1905).[3] He subsequently held the posts of Commissioner of Requests in Colombo (1907), and District Judge at Jaffna (1911), Negombo (1917), and Kurunegala (1920), before being appointed Registrar General.[4]

On 21 February 1923, Sreshta became the first non-European to assume the position of Postmaster General of Ceylon, a role he held until 1928.[5] During his tenure, he reorganized the postal system, inaugurated the first rural telephone exchange, and introduced motorized mail delivery across the island.[6] Significantly, he also crafted the initial policy framework for national broadcasting, setting the stage for the establishment of the Colombo Broadcasting Station in 1925 and the island's entry into modern mass communications.[7]

Footnotes

1. Ceylon Government Gazette, February 26, 1897, 221.
2. R. L. Brohier, Changing Face of Colombo (Colombo: Lake House Investments, 1984), 112.
3. Administration Reports of Ceylon for 1900, vol. 1 (Colombo: Government Printer, 1901), 47–49.
4. Administration Reports of Ceylon for 1920, vol. 1 (Colombo: Government Printer, 1921), 53.
5. Administration Reports of the Postmaster General, 1923 (Colombo: Government Printer, 1924), 1.
6. Ibid., 4–5.
7. H. A. J. Hulugalle, The Colombo Port and the British Era (Colombo: Government Press, 1953), 198

February 1923

The Formulation of Wireless Regulations under the Telegraph Ordinance of 1908: A Pivotal Moment in Ceylon's Early Radio History

The early 1920s marked a transformative period in the evolution of communication infrastructure in Ceylon, particularly with the introduction and regulation of wireless (radio) technology. As the global influence of radio broadcasting began to expand rapidly, colonial administrations across the British Empire recognized the need to establish legal frameworks to manage the import, use, and dissemination of wireless equipment. Ceylon was no exception.[2]

In February 1923, responding to the growing interest in wireless communication and its potential implications for security, commerce, and public information, the Government of Ceylon appointed a dedicated committee to formulate appropriate regulations. This committee was established under the existing Telegraph Ordinance of 1908, which had been amended to accommodate advancements in communication technology.[3]

The committee was chaired ex officio by the Postmaster General, who at the time played a central role in the oversight of all telecommunications infrastructure on the island. The committee's membership further included two distinguished figures: the Honourable Mr. M. T. Akbar and the Honourable Colonel E. J. Hayward, both of whom brought legal and administrative expertise to the drafting process.

The primary objective of the committee was to draft a set of comprehensive Rules and Regulations governing the licensing regime for the importation, use, and sale of wireless apparatus in Ceylon. These regulations were to serve as the foundational legal framework through which wireless communication would be controlled and monitored on the island. Importantly, this initiative underscored the government's recognition of radio not merely as a technical innovation, but as a significant medium with wide-ranging social, political, and cultural implications.[4]

Upon completion, the proposed regulatory framework was submitted to the colonial administration for review. Following due consideration and approval, the finalized Rules and Regulations were officially published in the Ceylon Government Gazette on 15 June 1923.[1] This publication marked a crucial moment in the formal institutionalisation of radio communication in Ceylon, laying the groundwork for future developments in broadcasting policy and public communication.

The efforts undertaken in 1923 thus represent a foundational milestone in Ceylon's broadcasting history. They reflect not only administrative foresight but also the broader colonial imperative to manage and regulate emerging technologies within an imperial context. The legal scaffolding put in place through the Telegraph Ordinance and its accompanying regulations would continue to influence the development of broadcasting and telecommunications in Ceylon for decades to follow.

Footnotes

1. Ceylon Government Gazette, June 15, 1923.
2. Kumari Jayawardena, The Rise of Broadcasting in South Asia (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1982), 45–47.
3. Rohan Fernando, Telecommunication Development in Colonial Ceylon (Colombo: University of Colombo Press, 1995), 112–115.
4. Sunil Perera, Radio and Empire: The History of Broadcasting in Sri Lanka (Colombo: Sarasavi Publishers, 2008), 23–26.

08 October 1923

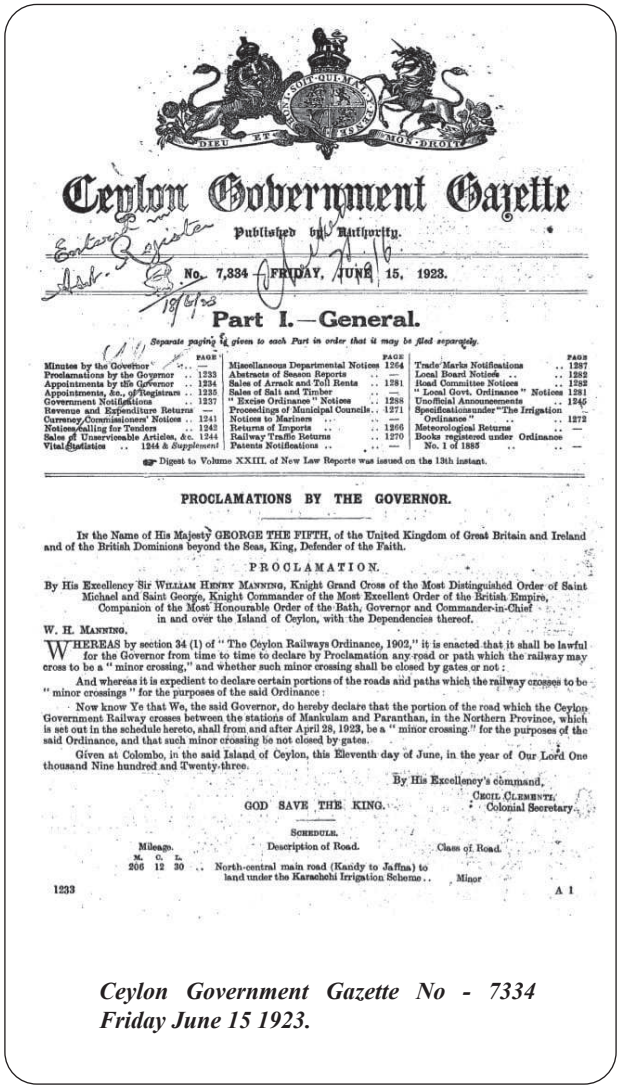
University College of Colombo and the Regulatory Use of Wireless Equipment for Academic Purposes: Correspondence from November 1923

On 8 November 1923, Professor Robert Marrs, Principal of the University College, Colombo, formally addressed a letter to the Postmaster General of Ceylon requesting clarification concerning the legal permissibility of utilizing wireless telegraphy equipment for instructional purposes within the College's Physics Department.[1] This inquiry followed the recent publication of the amended Telegraph Ordinance of 1908, as promulgated in the Ceylon Government Gazette dated 15 June 1923.[2]

Professor Marrs indicated that a modest wireless apparatus had already been installed in the Physics Department for scientific instruction.



Robert Marrs, M.A. (Oxon.), *was the first academic Principal of Ceylon University College (later University of Colombo), serving from 1921 until 1939, establishing a strong academic foundation and paving the way for its future university status under his successor, Sir Ivor Jennings. He was a significant figure in Sri Lankan higher education, marking a shift from administrative heads to academic leadership.*



Ceylon Government Gazette

Published by Authority.

No. 7,334 FRIDAY, JUNE 15, 1923.

Part I.—General.

Separate paging is given to each Part in order that it may be filed separately.

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Appointments by the Governor ..	1234	Sales of Arrack and Toll Rents ..	1281	Road Committee Notices ..	1282
Appointments, &c., of Registrars ..	1235	Sales of Salt and Timber	—	"Local Govt. Ordinance" Notices	1281
Government Notifications ..	1237	"Excise Ordinance" Notices ..	1288	Unofficial Announcements ..	1245
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Currency Commissioners' Notices ..	1241	Notices to Mariners	—	Meteorological Returns ..	—
Notices calling for Tenders ..	1242	Returns of Imports	1266	Books registered under Ordinance No. 1 of 1885	—
Sales of Unserviceable Articles, &c.	1244	Railway Traffic Returns ..	1270		
Vital Statistics ..	1244 & Supplement	Patents Notifications	—		

☞ Digest to Volume XXIII. of New Law Reports was issued on the 13th instant.

PROCLAMATIONS BY THE GOVERNOR.

In the Name of His Majesty GEORGE THE FIFTH, of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland and of the British Dominions beyond the Seas, King, Defender of the Faith.

PROCLAMATION.

By His Excellency Sir WILLIAM HENRY MANNING, Knight Grand Cross of the Most Distinguished Order of Saint Michael and Saint George, Knight Commander of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire, Companion of the Most Honourable Order of the Bath, Governor and Commander-in-Chief in and over the Island of Ceylon, with the Dependencies thereof.

W. H. MANNING.

WHEREAS by section 34 (1) of "The Ceylon Railways Ordinance, 1902," it is enacted that it shall be lawful for the Governor from time to time to declare by Proclamation any road or path which the railway may cross to be a "minor crossing," and whether such minor crossing shall be closed by gates or not:

And whereas it is expedient to declare certain portions of the roads and paths which the railway crosses to be "minor crossings" for the purposes of the said Ordinance:

Now know Ye that We, the said Governor, do hereby declare that the portion of the road which the Ceylon Government Railway crosses between the stations of Mankulam and Paranthan, in the Northern Province, which is set out in the schedule hereto, shall from and after April 28, 1923, be a "minor crossing" for the purposes of the said Ordinance, and that such minor crossing be not closed by gates.

Given at Colombo, in the said Island of Ceylon, this Eleventh day of June, in the year of Our Lord One thousand Nine hundred and Twenty-three.

By His Excellency's command,

CECIL CLEMENTI,
Colonial Secretary.

GOD SAVE THE KING.

SCHEDULE.

Mileage. M. C. L.	Description of Road.	Class of Road.
206 12 30 ..	North-central main road (Kandy to Jaffna) to land under the Karachchi Irrigation Scheme ..	Minor

1233 A 1

Ceylon Government Gazette No - 7334 Friday June 15 1923.

He sought confirmation as to whether the use of such equipment for academic activities was subject to any legal or administrative restrictions under the revised ordinance.[3]

In his correspondence, Professor Marrs explicitly referenced paragraph (2) of Section 4 of Ordinance No. 15 of 1914 (as amended), proposing that the issue might be resolved by formally recognising the Principal of the University College when required as an authorised person appointed by the Governor to install, establish, maintain, or operate telegraphy apparatus on the College premises for educational purposes.

Moreover, Professor Marrs suggested that it would be prudent for the Government to consider instituting a distinct set of regulations governing the use of wireless instruments within academic institutions. Such regulations, he proposed, should specify the terms and conditions under which licences might be granted, including considerations regarding cost, applicability, and the unique nature of educational usage.[4]

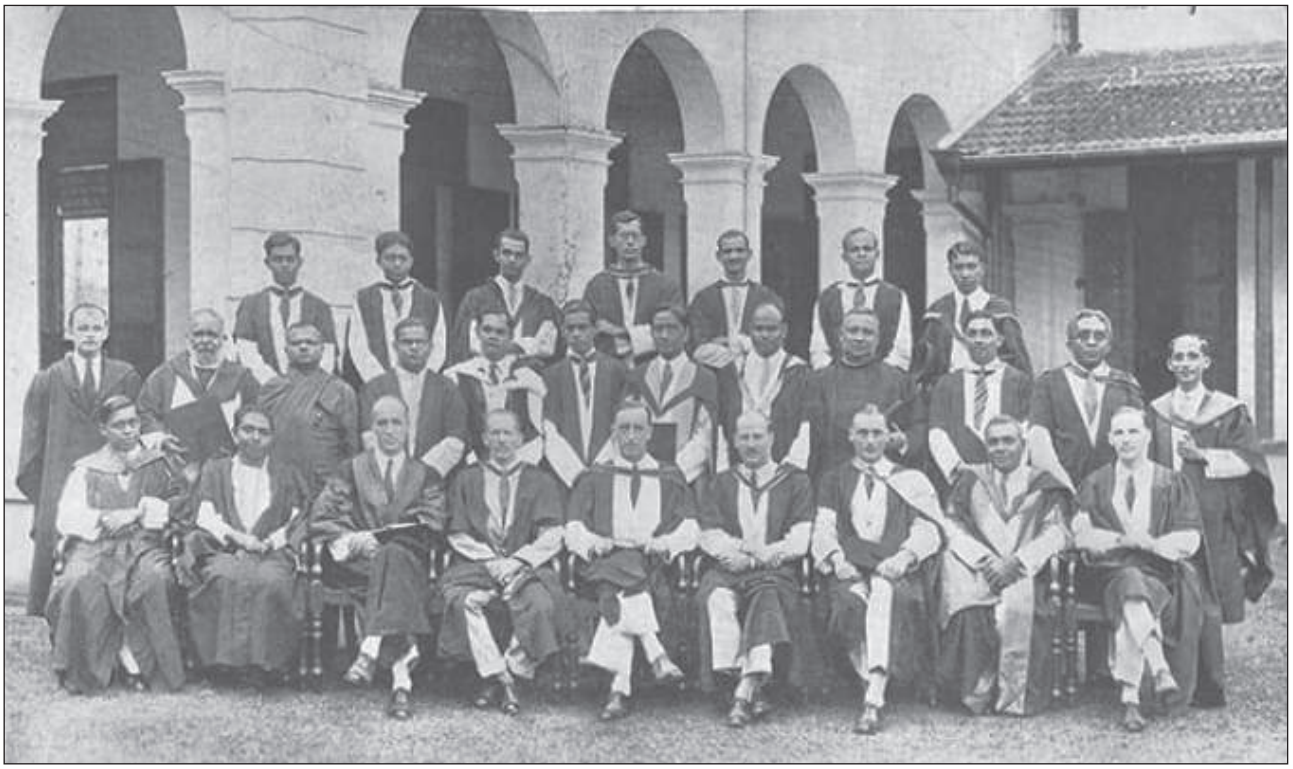
The official correspondence from Professor Marrs is preserved in the Postmaster General's file No. D. 91S/60, Volume 2, page 279 (Reference No. 19131/94006/02), dated 8 November 1923 (University College Reference No. 109/1).

This letter constitutes an early and significant example of the intersection between technological regulation and higher education policy in colonial Ceylon. It exemplifies both the proactive engagement of academic leadership with governmental authorities and the emerging recognition of radio communication as an instrument of scientific advancement and pedagogical innovation.[5]

This episode further illuminates the broader discourse of the 1920s, during which wireless technology began to extend beyond commercial and governmental domains into public knowledge, research, and instruction thus necessitating new legal frameworks and institutional negotiations.

Footnotes

1. University College, Colombo, Letter from Professor R. Marrs to the Postmaster General of Ceylon, 8 November 1923, Postmaster General's file No. D. 91S/60, Vol. 2, p. 279 (Ref. No. 19131/94006/02).
2. Ceylon Government Gazette, 15 June 1923.
3. Ibid.
4. Rohan Fernando, Telecommunication Development in Colonial Ceylon (Colombo: University of Colombo Press, 1995), 120–122.
5. Kumari Jayawardena, The Rise of Bro adcasting in South Asia (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1982), 53–55



Ceylon University College Staff in the early 1930s,

Back Raw:-
P. Kirithisinghe, C. W. Amerasinghe, H. A. Passe, L. D. Smith, S. Baliga, A. W. Mailvaganam, W. Fernando.
Second Raw:-
R. S. Enright, Rev. F. Kingsbury, Rev. R. Sidhartha, J. C. De E. P. C. Ludowyk, B. L. T. de Silva, P. C. Sarbadhikari, S. Nadaraser, Rev. P. L. Jansz, E. I. Fonseka, J. L. C. Rodrigo, B. B. Das Gupta.
Seated:-
F. H. V. Gulasekharam, G. P. Mallasekera, N. G Ball, W. N. Rae, R. Marrs (Principal), S. A. Pakeman, J. W. Hinton, J. P. C. Chandrasena, D. R. R. Burt

15 November 1923

Governmental Response to the Use of Wireless Apparatus in Academic Institutions: The Colonial Secretary and Postmaster General on the University College Request

Following the inquiry submitted by Professor R. Marrs, Principal of the University College, Colombo, regarding the use of wireless telegraphy equipment for instructional purposes within the institution's Physics Department, the matter was formally referred by the Honourable Colonial Secretary to the Postmaster General for legal clarification.[1] This referral, dated 15 November 1923, is documented in the Colonial Secretary's Office file No. D.98/60, Volume 2, page 283, and separately recorded under file reference No. 26 70/23.

In a memorandum signed by Colonial Secretary C. Clemanti (Ref. E, 381), the issue was formally posed as to whether the University College's use of wireless apparatus fell within the ambit of the draft rules then under consideration, which had been prepared pursuant to the amended Telegraph Ordinance.[1]

In his official response dated 15 November 1923 (Ref. E, 396; File No. 19131/94006/02), Postmaster General Mr. M. S. Sreshta clarified the applicable legal position. He observed that Section 4 of Ordinance No. 15 of 1914, previously cited by the Principal, had been repealed by the Telegraph (Amendment) Ordinance No. 10 of 1923.[2] [3] This amendment introduced a new provision for the issuance of licences consistent with regulations promulgated under the updated ordinance.



First Council of the Ceylon University College.

Crucially, the Postmaster General affirmed that there would be no impediment to the continued use of wireless apparatus already installed at the University College, provided its use remained strictly educational. The committee responsible for drafting the new regulatory framework had reviewed the Principal's correspondence and concluded that the existing regulations were sufficiently comprehensive to encompass instructional applications. Accordingly, there was no requirement to formulate a separate set of rules specifically tailored to academic use, and licences could be issued under the prevailing framework.[4]



University college dons in the mid-1930s

The Postmaster General recommended that the Principal of the University College submit a formal application for a licence once the new rules were officially gazetted. He further indicated that stamp duty on licences issued to government departments and educational institutions might be waived. Additionally, he suggested that departmental authorisation might be deemed adequate in certain cases.

This official exchange between the University College, the Colonial Secretary's Office, and the Postmaster General's Department illustrates the administrative agility with which colonial authorities responded to the educational imperatives of technological change. It further demonstrates a pragmatic regulatory approach that facilitated the integration of emerging technologies, such as wireless telegraphy, into the sphere of public instruction while preserving the necessary legal oversight consistent with governmental interests.[5]

Footnotes

1. Colonial Secretary's Office, Memorandum from C. Clemanti to the Postmaster General, 15 November 1923, File No. D.98/60, Vol. 2, p. 283 (Ref. No. 26 70/23).
2. Postmaster General, M. S. Sreshta, Memorandum to Colonial Secretary, 15 November 1923, File No. 19131/94006/02 (Ref. E, 396).
3. Telegraph (Amendment) Ordinance No. 10 of 1923, Government of Ceylon.
4. Rohan Fernando, Telecommunication Development in Colonial Ceylon (Colombo: University of Colombo Press, 1995), 125–127.
5. Kumari Jayawardena, The Rise of Broadcasting in South Asia (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1982), 57–58.

03 December 1923

Further Official Clarification on Wireless Apparatus Use in the University College: Final Administrative Correspondence and Legal Enactment

The continuing correspondence between the University College, Colombo, and colonial administrative authorities concerning the use of wireless apparatus for instructional purposes culminated in a formal communication dated 3 December 1923.[1] This letter, recorded in File No. D 98/60, Volume 2, page 285 (Reference No. 81/26970), was addressed to the Principal of the University College.

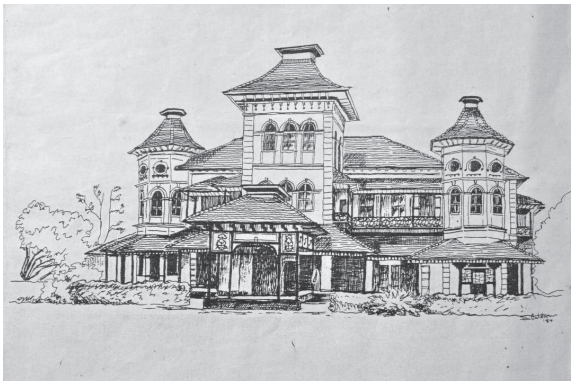
Signed by E. H. Lucette on behalf of the Colonial Secretary, the letter directly responded to the Principal's earlier communication dated 9 November 1923. It reiterated the Government's position, as previously articulated by the Postmaster General, that the formulation of separate or special regulations governing wireless apparatus use for academic purposes was unnecessary.[2] Instead, such usage was to be encompassed within the general regulatory framework established by the amended Telegraph Ordinance of 1908.

The correspondence formally advised the Principal to submit an official application for a licence following the publication of the relevant rules. Additionally, it confirmed that the Postmaster General had been authorised to waive the payment of stamp duty on such licences in respect of all government departments, thereby alleviating administrative burdens on publicly funded educational institutions.

This letter reflects a pragmatic and facilitative approach adopted by the colonial administration to integrate emerging communication technologies within educational settings while preserving necessary legal oversight.



College House
The College House holds a proud legacy, first serving as the University College (1921) and later becoming part of the University of Ceylon (1942). *Its stunning architecture and historical significance make it one of the most beautiful and iconic buildings in Sri Lanka's higher education journey.*



The University College *was formally declared open on January 24, 1921 under the direction of Mr E Evans the acting Director of Education. At the beginning of the second academic year, 1921-22,* ***Mr Robert Marrs assumed office as Principal of the University College.*** *The student roll during the first year was 166 which gradually increased to 540 by 1935.*

Subsequently, the legislative foundation for these regulatory measures was consolidated through the publication of Ceylon Government Gazette No. 7555, dated 12 November 1926.[3] This notice declared rules enacted by the Governor in Executive Council pursuant to Section 7 of the Ceylon Telegraph Ordinance, 1908 to be in effect as of 15 November 1926. The proclamation was issued under the authority of E. B. Alexander, Acting Colonial Secretary, on behalf of His Excellency the Governor.

These developments exemplify the gradual institutionalisation of radio technology within Ceylon's educational and administrative domains. They represent a significant milestone in the island's communications history, wherein academic institutions such as the University College were formally recognised and legally empowered to engage with advanced technological instruments for pedagogical and scientific purposes.[4] [5]

Footnotes

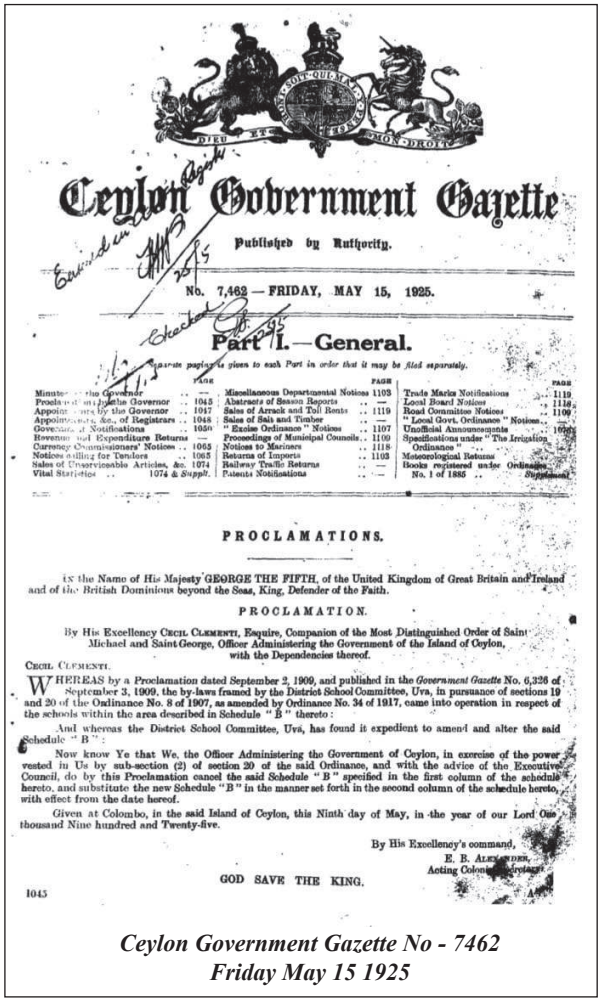
1. Colonial Secretary's Office, Letter from E. H. Lucette to the Principal, University College, Colombo, 3 December 1923, File No. D 98/60, Vol. 2, p. 285 (Ref. No. 81/26970).
2. Postmaster General, M. S. Sreshta, Memorandum to Colonial Secretary, 15 November 1923, File No. 19131/94006/02 (Ref. E, 396).
3. Ceylon Government Gazette, No. 7555, 12 November 1926.
4. Rohan Fernando, Telecommunication Development in Colonial Ceylon (Colombo: University of Colombo Press, 1995), 130–132.
5. Kumari Jayawardena, The Rise of Broadcasting in South Asia (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1982), 60–61.

1924

01 February 1924

Regulatory Reform in Wireless Telegraphy: Revocation and Replacement of Rules

On 1 February 1924, a significant development in the legal and administrative framework governing wireless telegraphy in Ceylon was formalised through The Ceylon Government Gazette, No. 7372. The colonial administration, acting under the authority of the amended Telegraph Ordinance, announced the revocation of previously issued regulations pertaining to wireless communication.[1] **Specifically, the rules that had initially been published by notification dated 11 January 1924 and subsequently amended through notifications of 15 April and 18 June 1925 as recorded in Gazette Nos. 7456 of 17 April 1925 and 7470 of 26 June 1925, respectively were officially repealed.**[2] This legislative measure marked a decisive transition towards a more systematic and enforceable licensing regime designed to regulate both the importation and the domestic use of wireless telegraph apparatus.



Ceylon Government Gazette

Published by Authority.

No. 7,462 — FRIDAY, MAY 15, 1925.

Part I.—General.

PROCLAMATIONS.

IN the Name of His Majesty GEORGE THE FIFTH, of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland and of the British Dominions beyond the Seas, King, Defender of the Faith.

PROCLAMATION.

By His Excellency CECIL CLEMENTI, Esquire, Companion of the Most Distinguished Order of Saint Michael and Saint George, Officer Administering the Government of the Island of Ceylon, with the Dependencies thereof.

CECIL CLEMENTI.

WHEREAS by a Proclamation dated September 2, 1909, and published in the *Government Gazette* No. 6,326 of September 3, 1909, the by-laws framed by the District School Committee, Uva, in pursuance of sections 19 and 20 of the Ordinance No. 8 of 1907, as amended by Ordinance No. 34 of 1917, came into operation in respect of the schools within the area described in Schedule "B" thereto:

And whereas the District School Committee, Uva, has found it expedient to amend and alter the said Schedule "B":

Now know Ye that We, the Officer Administering the Government of Ceylon, in exercise of the power vested in Us by sub-section (2) of section 20 of the said Ordinance, and with the advice of the Executive Council, do by this Proclamation cancel the said Schedule "B" specified in the first column of the schedule hereto, and substitute the new Schedule "B" in the manner set forth in the second column of the schedule hereto, with effect from the date hereof.

Given at Colombo, in the said Island of Ceylon, this Ninth day of May, in the year of our Lord One thousand Nine hundred and Twenty-five.

By His Excellency's command,

E. B. ALEXANDER,
Acting Colonial Secretary.

GOD SAVE THE KING.

1045

Ceylon Government Gazette No - 7462
Friday May 15 1925

Provisions Governing the Installation and Use of Wireless Telegraph Apparatus.

The revised regulations introduced by the Government of Ceylon delineated explicit restrictions and procedures regarding the possession, installation, and operation of wireless telegraphy equipment. The principal clause stated:

"No person shall import for private use, install, establish, maintain, possess, or operate any wireless station or apparatus within any location in Ceylon, aboard any British ship registered in Ceylon, or aboard any aircraft within Ceylon, unless a licence has been obtained from the Postmaster General."[3]

This clause effectively centralized control over all wireless communication activities within the jurisdiction of the Post and Telegraph Department. An exception, however, was granted in cases where wireless apparatus formed part of an individual's personal effects upon entry into the country. In such circumstances, the Customs Department was empowered to issue an import licence (Form G) upon the importer's submission of a formal declaration (Form F).[4]

Licensing for Experimental Use and Broadcast Reception

The new framework also introduced a structured application process for individuals or institutions wishing to use wireless telegraphy for experimental or reception purposes. Applicants were required to obtain Form A1 available at designated post offices—and to affix a stamp of the prescribed value in accordance with Rule 3(2).[5] The Postmaster General, however, retained discretionary authority to issue licences exempt from stamp duty to officers of the Post and Telegraph Department engaged in official wireless duties.[6] This clause demonstrated a clear intent to encourage official technical experimentation and development within the department, while maintaining stringent controls over private and civilian use.

Form and Conditions of Licences

All licences were to be issued in either Form B or Form B1, and were deemed legally binding documents subject to the specific terms and conditions stipulated therein.[7] This ensured administrative uniformity and

accountability across all spheres of wireless communication private, experimental, and governmental. The introduction of standardized forms and procedures represented an important step in consolidating colonial oversight of emerging communication technologies.

Significance of the Reform

This 1924 regulatory reform marked a crucial stage in the institutional evolution of wireless communication in Ceylon. By aligning domestic practice with British imperial standards and global telecommunication conventions, the government effectively laid the foundation for the structured and legally sanctioned development of radio communication on the island. The emphasis on controlled access, licensing authority, and procedural uniformity underscored the growing recognition of wireless technology's strategic, economic, and communicative potential. These regulations, in turn, provided the legal scaffolding for the experimental broadcasts of 1923–1925 that would eventually lead to the establishment of the Colombo Radio Station in December 1925.

Footnotes:

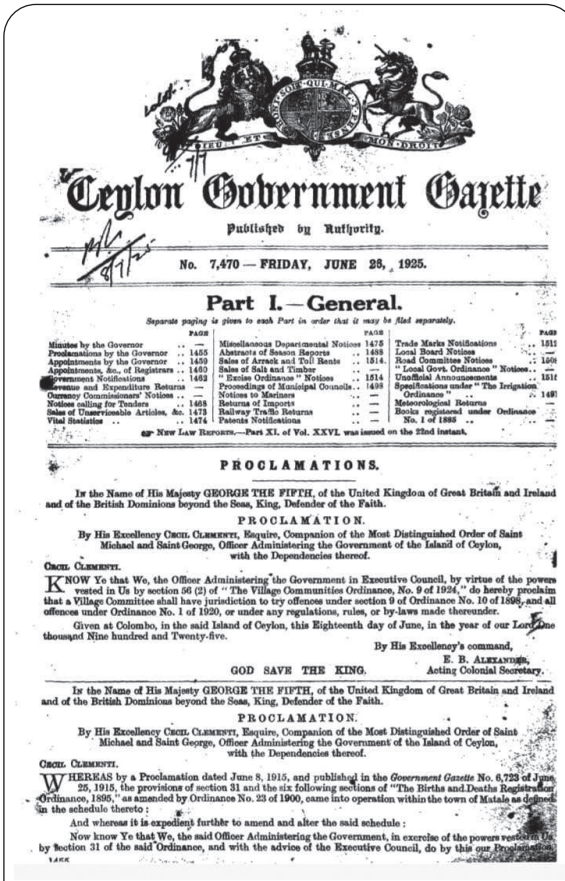
1. The Ceylon Government Gazette, no. 7372 (Colombo: Government Printer, 1 February 1924).
2. The Ceylon Government Gazette, nos. 7456 (17 April 1925) and 7470 (26 June 1925).
3. Ibid., no. 7372 (1 February 1924).
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid.

01 February 1924

Regulatory Reform in Wireless Telegraphy: Revocation and Replacement of Rules

On 1 February 1924, important reforms to the regulatory framework governing wireless telegraphy in Ceylon were promulgated through Ceylon Government Gazette No. 7372.[1] The colonial administration formally repealed earlier provisions relating to wireless communication, including those first issued by notification on 11 January 1924 and subsequently amended on 15 April and 18 June 1925, as published in Gazette Nos. 7456 of 17 April 1925 and 7470 of 26 June 1925, respectively. [2]

This revocation represented a transition towards a more standardised and enforceable licensing system for wireless operations.



Ceylon Government Gazette

Published by Authority.

No. 7,470 — FRIDAY, JUNE 26, 1925.

Part I. — General.

Separate paging is given to each Part in order that it may be filed separately.

PROCLAMATIONS.

In the Name of His Majesty GEORGE THE FIFTH, of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland and of the British Dominions beyond the Seas, King, Defender of the Faith.

PROCLAMATION.

By His Excellency CECIL CLEMENTI, Esquire, Companion of the Most Distinguished Order of Saint Michael and Saint George, Officer Administering the Government of the Island of Ceylon, with the Dependencies thereof.

CECIL CLEMENTI.

KNOW Ye that We, the Officer Administering the Government in Executive Council, by virtue of the powers vested in Us by section 56 (2) of "The Village Communities Ordinance, No. 9 of 1924," do hereby proclaim that a Village Committee shall have jurisdiction to try offences under section 9 of Ordinance No. 10 of 1896, and all offences under Ordinance No. 1 of 1920, or under any regulations, rules, or by-laws made thereunder.

Given at Colombo, in the said Island of Ceylon, this Eighteenth day of June, in the year of our Lord One thousand Nine hundred and Twenty-five.

By His Excellency's command,

E. B. ALEXANDER,
Acting Colonial Secretary.

GOD SAVE THE KING.

In the Name of His Majesty GEORGE THE FIFTH, of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland and of the British Dominions beyond the Seas, King, Defender of the Faith.

PROCLAMATION.

By His Excellency CECIL CLEMENTI, Esquire, Companion of the Most Distinguished Order of Saint Michael and Saint George, Officer Administering the Government of the Island of Ceylon, with the Dependencies thereof.

CECIL CLEMENTI.

WHEREAS by a Proclamation dated June 8, 1915, and published in the *Government Gazette* No. 6,723 of June 25, 1915, the provisions of section 31 and the six following sections of "The Births and Deaths Registration Ordinance, 1895," as amended by Ordinance No. 23 of 1900, came into operation within the town of Matale as defined in the schedule thereto:

And whereas it is expedient further to amend and alter the said schedule:

Now know Ye that We, the said Officer Administering the Government, in exercise of the powers vested in Us by section 31 of the said Ordinance, and with the advice of the Executive Council, do by this our Proclamation

Ceylon Government Gazette No - 7470
Friday June 25 1925

Provisions Governing the Installation and Use of Wireless Telegraph Apparatus

The revised regulations, enacted under the amended Telegraph Ordinance, established explicit restrictions and procedural requirements concerning the possession and operation of wireless telegraph apparatus. The principal clause stated:

"No person shall import for private use, install, establish, maintain, possess, or operate any wireless station or apparatus within any location in Ceylon, aboard any British ship registered in Ceylon, or aboard any aircraft within Ceylon, unless a licence has been obtained from the Postmaster General." [3]

An important exception was granted in cases where wireless apparatus formed part of a traveller's personal baggage upon entry into Ceylon. In such instances, Customs authorities were authorised to issue an import licence (Form G), provided the importer submitted a formal declaration in Form F. [4]

Licensing for Experimental Use and Broadcast Reception

The regulations further required that any person intending to employ wireless telegraphy for experimental purposes or for the reception of broadcast transmissions must submit a formal application using Form A1, obtainable from principal post offices. Each application was to be accompanied by a revenue stamp of the value prescribed in Rule 3(2). However, the Postmaster General retained the discretionary authority to issue licences without stamp duty to officers of the Post and Telegraph Department whose official duties involved wireless operations. [5]

Form and Conditions of Licences

Licences issued under this regulatory framework were to be in either Form B or Form B1. These licences were legally binding instruments and subject to the explicit conditions contained therein. This provision ensured regulatory oversight, operational uniformity, and accountability across private, experimental, and governmental wireless activities.[6]

This legislative reform reflected a maturing of Ceylon's policy on wireless telegraphy, aligning it with contemporary global regulatory trends. By formalising import protocols, operational controls, and centralising licensing authority within the office of the Postmaster General, the government created the institutional framework for the structured and regulated expansion of wireless communication on the island.

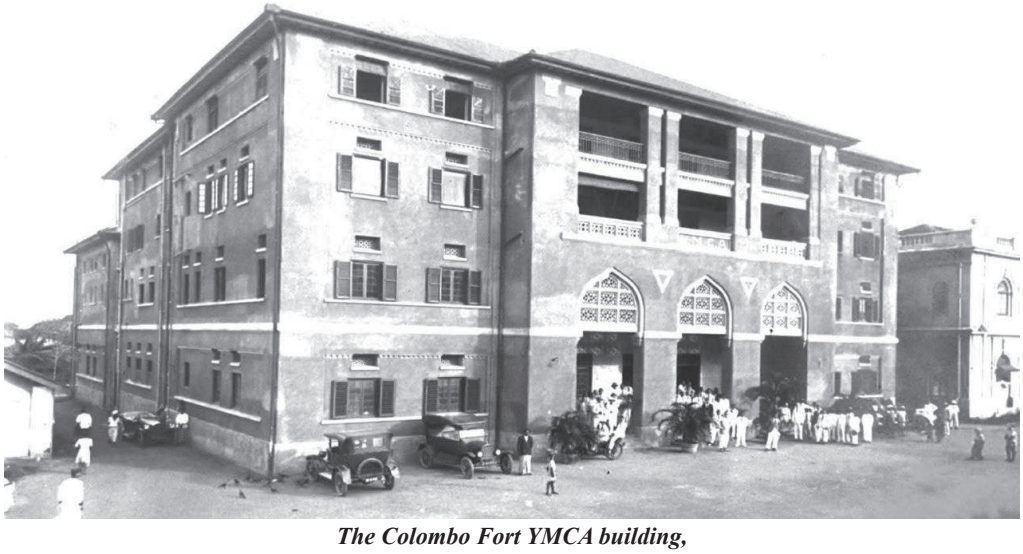
Footnotes:

1. Ceylon Government Gazette, no. 7372, 1 February 1924.
2. Ceylon GovernmentJ Gazette, no. 7456, 17 April 1925; Ceylon Government Gazette, no. 7470, 26 June 1925.
3. Ceylon Government Gazette, no. 7372, 1 February 1924.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.

22 February 1924

Ceylon's First Wireless Broadcasting Experiment: From Y.M.C.A. Bollding In Colombo Fort

On 22 February 1924, Ceylon conducted its first public experimental wireless broadcast, marking a significant milestone in the island's communications history. The occasion was the inauguration of the new Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) building in Colombo Fort, during which "the proceedings of the Opening Ceremony were broadcast."[1]



The Colombo Fort YMCA building,
A landmark in Ceylon, was officially opened on February 22, 1924, marking a significant moment for the organization's growth in promoting physical, intellectual, and social welfare, and was considered a state-of-the-art facility for its time.



His Grace, the Most Rev. Antoine Coudert OMI
Archbishop, Archdiocese of Colombo

*In 1924, the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Colombo was Antoine Coudert, O.M.I., **who served from 1905 until 1929,** making him the leader during that period; meanwhile, the Anglican Bishop of Colombo was also active, with a bishop serving from 1903 to 1924, followed by another in 1924, highlighting distinct Catholic and Anglican leadership in Colombo at the time.*



Key details about the opening of the Y M C A building

Date:
February 22, 1924.

Significance:
The opening of this building at its current location in Colombo Fort was a major milestone, offering spacious premises for its activities.

Description:
It was hailed as the most modern and well-designed building in the region (Burma, India, and Ceylon).

This event demonstrated, for the first time, the feasibility of transmitting live speech and music to the public through wireless technology on the island.

The transmissions originated from the Central Telegraph Office, where a temporary transmitter had been installed under the supervision of Edward Harper, Chief Engineer of the Ceylon Telegraph Department. Harper, who had arrived in Ceylon in 1921, had already been involved in earlier wireless experiments, notably the transmission of gramophone music using "a transmitter built by Ceylon Telegraph engineers."[2] **(There is no credible archival evidence to confirm later anecdotal claims that this transmitter incorporated components from a captured German submarine.)**

The YMCA broadcast, which featured the ceremonial proceedings and Western classical music, not only underscored the technical capabilities of the Telegraph Department but also demonstrated the cultural potential of the medium.[3]



After the Archbishop of Colombo's keynote address, a microphone was placed in front of a gramophone and several pieces of music were played for a short time and broadcast to a limited radius. This event has been marked as a significant mileston in the history of Sri Lankan broadcasting.

Following the success of these experimental transmissions, developments progressed rapidly. By June 1924 barely four months later regular broadcasting was inaugurated by Governor Sir William Henry Manning.[4] Harper would later describe the nascent broadcasting service as "his baby," a phrase that captures both his personal investment and his pioneering role in the establishment of radio broadcasting in Ceylon.[5]

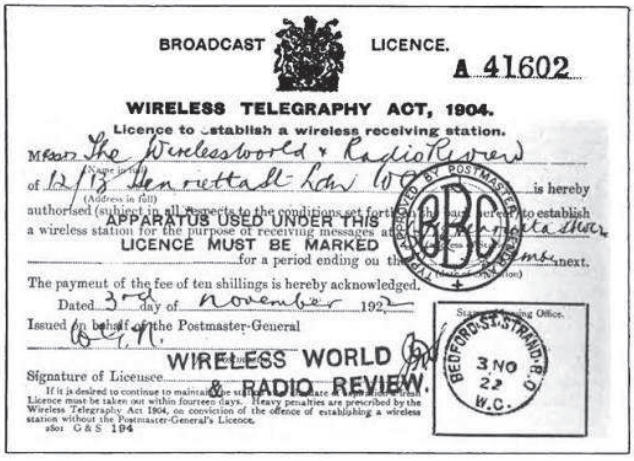
Footnotes:

1. "Wireless in Ceylon: Opening of the New YMCA Building," The Times of Ceylon, February 23, 1924.
2. Edward Harper, "Broadcasting in Ceylon Early Experiments," Ceylon Telegraph Department Annual Report, 1924.
3. C. L. P. Gunawardana, This is Colombo Calling (Colombo: Perali Publishers, 1990), 16.
4. "Inauguration of Regular Wireless Broadcasting," The Times of Ceylon, June 16, 1924.
5. Harper, "Broadcasting in Ceylon—Early Experiments."

April 1924

Issuance of the First Wireless Broadcasting Licences in Ceylon

In April 1924, Ceylon formally initiated the issuance of wireless broadcasting licences, representing a critical milestone in the institutional development of radio communication on the island.**The first licence as a radio listener was awarded to Mr. L. E. Heel, marking the beginning of regulated private participation in wireless reception.**[1]



BROADCAST LICENCE.

A 41602

WIRELESS TELEGRAPHY ACT, 1904.

Licence to establish a wireless receiving station.

Messrs The Wirelesstoworld & Radio Review

of 12/13 Henriettall Lon WC is hereby

authorised (subject in all respects to the conditions set forth in the Schedule hereto) to establish a wireless station for the purpose of receiving messages at

APPARATUS USED UNDER THIS LICENCE MUST BE MARKED

for a period ending on the 3rd next.

The payment of the fee of ten shillings is hereby acknowledged.

Dated 3rd day of November 192

Issued on behalf of the Postmaster-General

WIRELESS WORLD & RADIO REVIEW

Signature of Licensee

If it is desired to continue to maintain the station after the expiration of this Licence must be taken out within fourteen days. Heavy penalties are prescribed by the Wireless Telegraphy Act 1904, on conviction of the offence of establishing a wireless station without the Postmaster-General's Licence.

3 NO 22 W.C.

BEDFORD ST. STRAND

G&S 194

1922 - 23

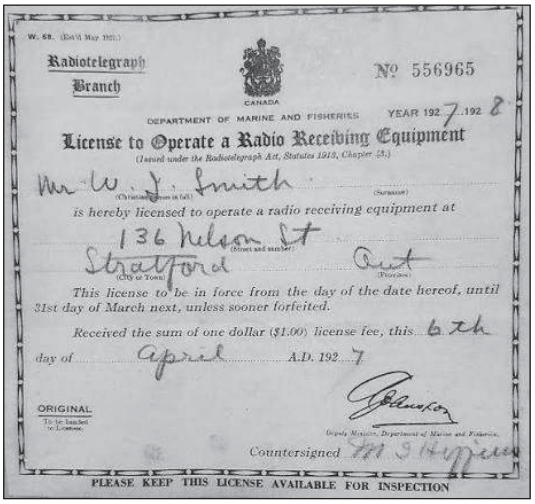
This image is a copy of a British "Broadcast Licence" issued in 1922 to "The Wireless World & Radio Review" .

It authorized the establishment of a wireless receiving station under the Wireless Telegraphy Act, 1904.

Issued to: *Messrs The Wireless World & Radio Review, 12/13 Henrietta Street, London.*

Purpose: *To establish a wireless receiving station for the purpose of receiving messages.*

Date of Issue: November 3, 1922.



Radiotelegraph Branch

CANADA

No 556965

DEPARTMENT OF MARINE AND FISHERIES YEAR 1927

License to Operate a Radio Receiving Equipment

(Issued under the Radiotelegraph Act, Statutes 1913, Chapter 33.)

Mr W. J. Smith

is hereby licensed to operate a radio receiving equipment at

136 Nelson St

Stratford Ont

This license to be in force from the day of the date hereof, until 31st day of March next, unless sooner forfeited.

Received the sum of one dollar ($1.00) license fee, this 6th day of April A.D. 1927

ORIGINAL

Countersigned

PLEASE KEEP THIS LICENSE AVAILABLE FOR INSPECTION

1927 - 28

This is a vintage Canadian "License to Operate a Radio Receiving Equipment"

Issued by the Department of Marine and Fisheries in 1927.

The license was issued to Mr. W. J. Smith.

It permitted the operation of a radio receiving equipment at 136 Nelson St., Stratford, Ontario.

The fee for the license was one dollar ($1.00).

Such licenses were required in the early years of AM radio in Canada just to listen to broadcasts.

Subsequently, in 1925, Royal College Colombo obtained a licence for its Radio Club, exemplifying the expanding engagement with radio technology among educational institutions and reflecting broader societal interest in this emerging medium.[2]

Analytical Note:

The commencement of wireless broadcasting licence issuance in 1924 signified the colonial administration's recognition of radio as an influential technological and social force necessitating formal regulation**. By granting licences to individuals such as Mr. L. E. Heel and institutions like Royal College, the authorities laid a foundational legal and administrative framework for controlled wireless communication**. This development not only facilitated the growth of radio as a tool for public information and entertainment but also fostered early institutional adoption within Ceylonese educational contexts. Such institutional involvement was instrumental in disseminating technical knowledge and promoting the medium's integration into everyday life. Furthermore, the licensing regime prefigured the later expansion of broadcasting services and regulatory oversight that would shape the trajectory of radio in Ceylon well into the mid-20th century.

Footnote:

1. Ceylon Government Gazette, No. XXXX, April 1924, Colonial Secretary's Office Records, National Archives of Sri Lanka (hereafter NASL);
2. D. M. Colombage, Guwan Viduli Vanshaya (Colombo: M. D. Gunasena & Company, 1989), 34.

April 1924

Radio Licence Fee Fixed at Rs. 10

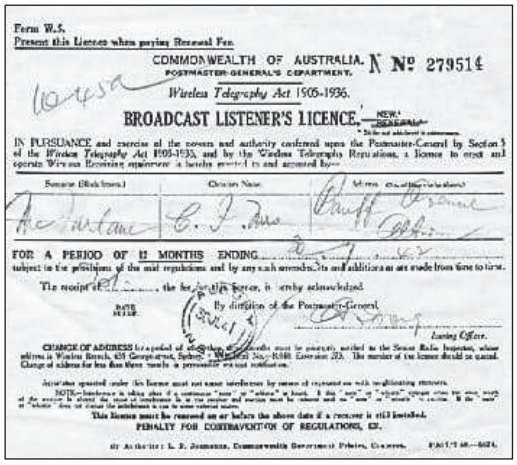
In April 1924, the colonial administration of Ceylon established the stamp duty for a radio licence at Rs.10, thereby standardising the cost of lawful wireless reception on the island. Under the initial regulatory framework, a single licence authorised the operation of multiple radio receivers within a household or institutional premises. In accordance with the Colonial Secretary's letter No. D.81/26970, dated 3 December 1923, addressed to the Principal of University College, Colombo, radio licences were issued free of stamp duty to a select group of high-ranking officials. These included His Excellency the Governor, the Postmaster General who concurrently held the position of Director of Broadcasting the Chief Engineer of Telegraphs and Telephones, and the Divisional Engineer for Radio.[1]

Analytical Note:

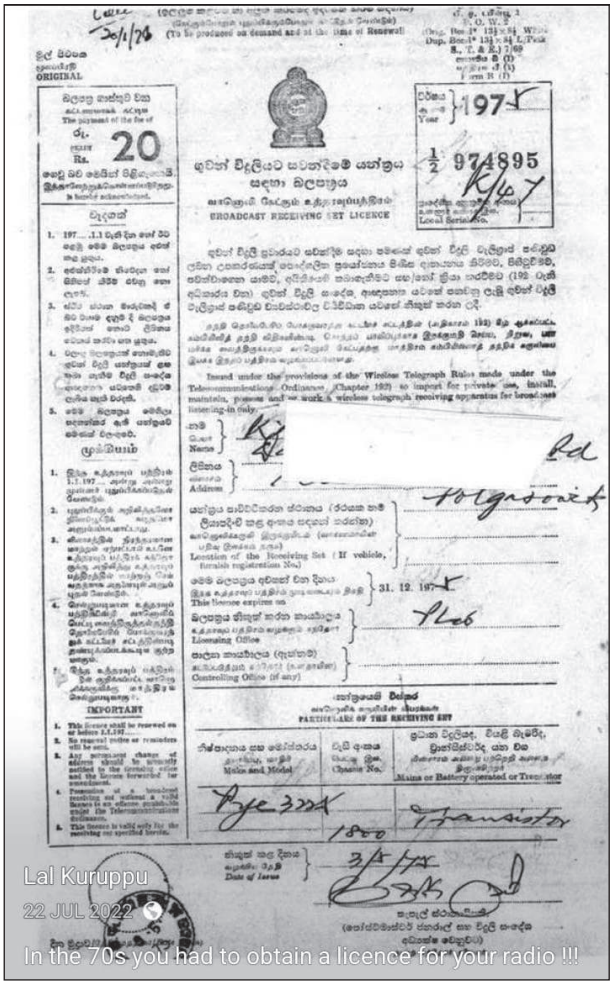
The decision to fix the radio licence fee at Rs. 10 in 1924 was emblematic of the colonial state's approach to regulating access to new communication technologies. The rate was high enough to position radio as a regulated privilege rather than a freely accessible public utility, thereby ensuring a measure of control over its dissemination and audience. The exemption of key colonial officials from the stamp duty reflected both the administrative centrality of broadcasting within the colonial communications network and the hierarchical nature of access. By enabling certain officials to receive radio content without cost, the administration underscored the strategic value of wireless communication for governance, coordination, and the projection of imperial authority. This dual framework regulation



1938 - 39
This is a vintage Australian "Department of Transport Radio Division Private Receiving Station Licence" *from 1938-39.*
In the era before television, a license was required to operate a radio receiver.
Document Type: *Private Receiving Station Licence.*
Issuer: Department of Transport, Radio Division (Australia).
Period: 1938-39.
Fee Paid: *Two dollars and fifty cents.*
Licensee: *A. Martin (handwritten).*



This document is a Commonwealth of Australia Broadcast Listener's Licence issued under the Wireless Telegraphy Act 1905-1936.
Type: *Broadcast Listener's Licence (Form W.5).*
Issuer: *Postmaster-General's Department, Commonwealth of Australia.*
Purpose: *Authorized the licensee to erect and operate wireless receiving equipment.*
Historical Context: *Radio licences were required in Australia from the early 1920s and were later extended to television. The Whitlam Government abolished all radio and television licences in 1974.*



1975 - 76, Sri Lanka
Broadcasting Receiving Set License *issued on behalf of the Postmaster General and Director General of Telecommunications on 3rd May 1975 for the years 1975 and 76, at* ***a charge of twenty rupees in Sri Lanka.***

through fees and selective exemptions was consistent with broader British imperial broadcasting policy, which sought to balance public access with administrative oversight and imperial interests.

Footnote:

1. Ceylon Government Gazette, April 1924, Colonial Secretary's Office Records, National Archives of Sri Lanka (hereafter NASL); Colonial Secretary to Principal, University College, Colombo,3 December 1923, Letter No. D.81/26970, File No. D 98/60, vol. 2, p. 285, NASL.

April 1924

Comparative contemporary licence rates in other parts of the British Empire 1923–24

- **United Kingdom** (Great Britain). The first standard wireless receiving licence in Britain had been introduced under the Wireless Telegraphy legislation in late 1923 at 10 shillings per year (an annual licence). This 10-shilling rate was the initial national standard for receiving licences in Britain in 1923–24.[1]

- **Australia** . Early Australian practice (late 1923–1924) combined a listener licence payable to the Postmaster's Department (commonly 10 shillings for the formal "listener" licence) with separatesubscriptions or sealed-set arrangements sold by commercial broadcasters (subscriptions could be substantially higher). The sealed-set scheme (which linked a set to a single broadcaster) was unpopular and largely abandoned by mid-1924, but the postal listener licence of c. 10 shillings was the standard governmental charge.[2]

- **New Zealand** . The New Zealand state introduced an early annual fee for radio receivers in the early 1920s; figures recorded for the immediate post-1923 period show small shilling-level charges (for example, five shillings in 1923, with later adjustments).[3]

- **Canada** . In Canada, private receiving-station licences were introduced in the early 1920s; the fee in the early years was approximately US$1 per receiving set per year (a deliberately low nominal fee intended to regulate receivers). By later decades that fee had risen, but the contemporary 1920s Canadian licence was modest in nominal terms.[4]

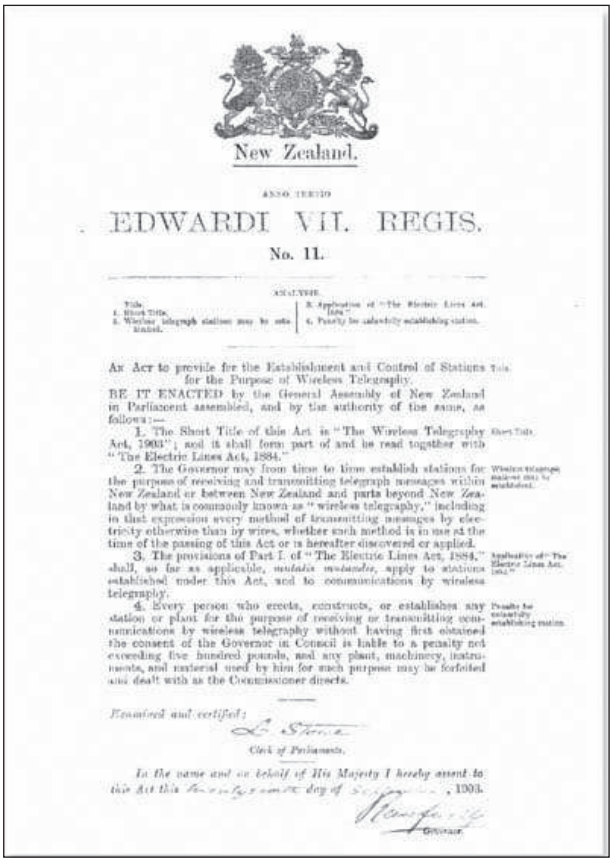
Monetary comparison and caveats

To make a direct money-value comparison possible, note that in the interwar period the Indian/Ceylon rupee traded at roughly ≈ 3.1–3.2 rupees per U.S. dollar in the mid-1920s and expressed in contemporary sterling terms 1 rupee was roughly equivalent to 1 shilling 6 pence (1s.6d.) in the mid-1920s (this parity fluctuated in the interwar years). Using the 1s.6d. rule-of-thumb, Rs. 10 ≈ 15 shillings (i.e. 0.75 pound sterling) in 1924 prices. Under that conversion the Ceylon licence (Rs. 10 ≈ 15s.) was higher than thecontemporary UK licence (10s.) and substantially higher than the small-shilling New Zealand charge (c. 5s. in 1923); it was broadly comparable to the combined costs faced by some Australian listeners when subscriptions and postal licence fees are taken together (the Australian model sometimes combined a listener licence of c. 10s. with station subscription charges). Canadian nominal fees (≈ US$1 per set) were modest by comparison in sterling terms. These conversions are approximate and sensitive to the precise monthly exchange rates and purchasing-power differentials of the period; they should be read as indicative rather than exact.[5]

Interpretation: Ceylon's policy in imperial context

Viewed comparatively, Ceylon's Rs. 10 licence in April 1924 placed receiving licences in Ceylon at a relatively high monetary level compared with the statutory receiving licence in Britain and in several other dominions/colonies. Several implications follow:

1. Access and social reach. A higher nominal fee would have restricted lawful listening to the



New Zealand.

ANNO TERTIO

EDWARDI VII. REGIS.

No. 11.

An Act to provide for the Establishment and Control of Stations for the Purpose of Wireless Telegraphy.

BE IT ENACTED by the General Assembly of New Zealand in Parliament assembled, and by the authority of the same, as follows:—

1. The Short Title of this Act is "The Wireless Telegraphy Act, 1903"; and it shall form part of and be read together with "The Electric Lines Act, 1884."

2. The Governor may from time to time establish stations for the purpose of receiving and transmitting telegraph messages within New Zealand or between New Zealand and parts beyond New Zealand by what is commonly known as "wireless telegraphy," including in that expression every method of transmitting messages by electricity otherwise than by wires, whether such method is in use at the time of the passing of this Act or is hereafter discovered or applied.

3. The provisions of Part I. of "The Electric Lines Act, 1884," shall, so far as applicable, *mutatis mutandis*, apply to stations established under this Act, and to communications by wireless telegraphy.

4. Every person who erects, constructs, or establishes any station or plant for the purpose of receiving or transmitting communications by wireless telegraphy without having first obtained the consent of the Governor in Council is liable to a penalty not exceeding five hundred pounds, and any plant, machinery, instruments, and material used by him for such purpose may be forfeited and dealt with as the Commissioner directs.

Examined and certified:

Clerk of Parliaments.

In the name and on behalf of His Majesty I hereby assent to this Act this [illegible] *day of* [illegible], 1903.

Governor.

The image displays the full text of the New Zealand Wireless Telegraphy Act,
1903, which was the world's first national radiocommunications legislation.
Official Title:
The Wireless Telegraphy Act, 1903.
Purpose: *To provide for the establishment and control of wireless telegraphy stations in New Zealand.*
Key Provision: *The Governor could establish stations for transmitting messages within and beyond New Zealand using wireless telegraphy.*
Penalty: *Unauthorized erection of a station was punishable by a fine not exceeding five hundred pounds and forfeiture of equipment.*

wealthier urban and institutional classes (households able to bear the cost or schools such as Royal College, which later obtained a licence), thereby slowing mass diffusion of the medium in its earliest phase.

2. Revenue and state priorities. The higher fee suggests that licensing was conceived not merely as a regulatory instrument but also as an explicit revenue stream for colonial communications administration. This mirrors debates in other polities (e.g., sealed-set vs. licence/subscription models in Australia) about how broadcasting should be funded.

3. Administrative hierarchy and exemptions. The selective exemption of senior colonial officials from stamp duty signals the administrative and strategic character of early wireless policy: the colonial state privileged certain official users (for governance, coordination and intelligence), while imposing a financial barrier on the general public. This pattern aligns with imperial administrative practice that treated new communications technologies as instruments of governance as well as mass culture.

Footnotes:

1. "A history of the licence fee," The Guardian, overview of UK licence introduction (10 shillings, Nov. 1923).
2. "Broadcast Receiver Licence — historical notes," Museum Victoria / Australian broadcasting history; discussion of sealed-set scheme and the postal listener licence (c. 10 shillings) in 1923–24.
3. "The early years, 1921 to 1932," Te Ara: Encyclopedia of New Zealand, on early New Zealand radio licence amounts (five shillings in 1923; later changes).
4. "Back When You Had to Pay: Radio Receiving Licences in Canada," SwLing blog (overview of early Canadian receiving licence at approximately US$1 per set in the 1920s).
5. MeasuringWorth / historical exchange data and archival currency tables for the 1920s (used to produce the rupee/sterling approximation cited above).



The Flag of the Governor of Ceylon used from 1875 to 1948.

The Governor was the representative of the British Crown in Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) during the British colonial period.

The image shows the flag of the Governor of Ceylon used from approximately 1875 to 1948. The Governor was the representative of the British Crown in Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) during the period of British rule.

The design is a British Union Jack defaced in the center with the badge of Ceylon.

The badge features a dagoba (stupa), an elephant, and a border of coffee branches.

This flag was in use until Ceylon gained independence as a dominion in 1948.

After independence, the position of Governor was replaced by a Governor-General.

24 May 1924

Colonial Secretary's Formal Approval of Broadcasting Recommendations

On 24 May 1924, the Colonial Secretary of Ceylon formally endorsed the recommendations presented by the Committee appointed to supervise the prospective introduction of radio broadcasting on the island. The Committee's mandate encompassed both the formulation of operational guidelines for broadcasting and the establishment of regulatory measures governing the possession and use of radio apparatus, in accordance with the provisions of the Telecommunications Ordinance of Ceylon.[1]

Footnote:

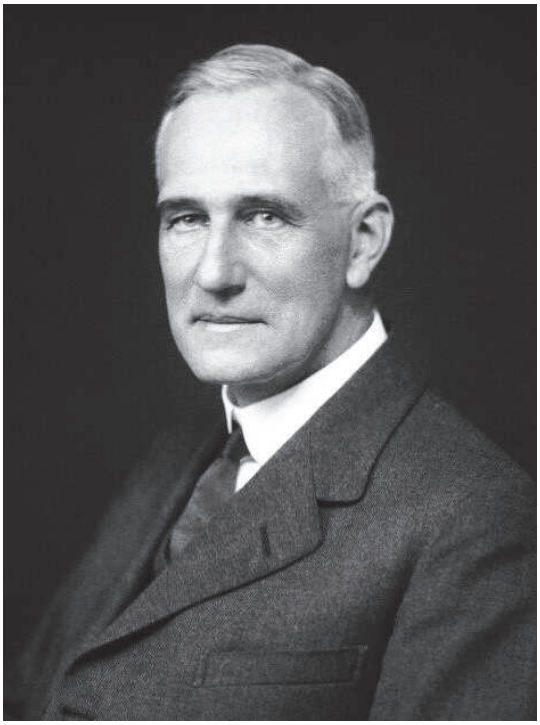
1. Ceylon Government Gazette, 24 May 1924, Colonial Secretary's Office Records, National Archives of Sri Lanka (hereafter NASL).



The colonial and governmental flag of British Ceylon (present-day Sri Lanka) used between 1875 and 1948.
Ceylon was a British Crown colony from 1815 until it gained independence in 1948.

The flag features the Union Jack in the canton (upper left corner). The fly (right side) displays the colonial seal with an elephant and a stupa.

The island was transferred to British control in 1795-96 during the French Revolutionary Wars.



Sir Cecil Clementi (1875-1947), a British colonial administrator.
In 1924, Sir Cecil Clementi was serving as the Colonial Secretary of Ceylon, having taken office around 1922, succeeding Reginald Edward Stubbs, and was a key official within the British administration before D.S. Senanayake's era, overseeing significant legislative and administrative developments during the transition towards self-governance.
Key Details:
Name:
Sir Cecil Clementi.
Role:
Colonial Secretary of Ceylon (British Ceylon).
Context:
He was part of the Executive Council, under Governor William Manning, during a period of evolving constitutional changes in the 1920s, with documents from late 1924 still referencing him in this capacity.
Significance:
Cementi's tenure marked a period where the administration dealt with emerging nationalist sentiments and constitutional reforms, such as those discussed in the Ceylon (Legislative Council) Order in Council, 1923.

27 June 1924

First Live Broadcast of a Governor's Speech in Ceylon

On 27 June 1924, a landmark event in the history of broadcasting in Ceylon occurred when the Colombo Broadcasting Service transmitted, for the first time, a live speech delivered by **His Excellency Brigadier General Sir William Henry Manning, G.C.M.G., C.B., K.B.E., Governor of Ceylon.** The occasion arose from the Governor's scheduled address to a meeting of the Engineering Association of Ceylon, chaired by Mr. Cole Brown, Chief Railway Construction Engineer.1 Upon learning of the event, Mr. Edward Harper, Vice-President of the Association and a central figure in the island's early broadcasting experiments, arranged for the live relay of the speech, which commenced at approximately 2:30 p.m. Following the Governor's address, at around 3:30 p.m., the broadcast continued with a musical interlude, achieved by positioning a microphone before a mechanically operated gramophone reproducing recorded selections.[2]

Footnote:

1. "Historic First Live Broadcast in Ceylon," Times of Ceylon, 28 June 1924; Edward Harper, "The Early Days of Broadcasting in Ceylon," unpublished typescript, Edward Harper Papers, National Archives of Sri Lanka (hereafter NASL).
2. C. L. P. Gunawardana, This is Colombo Calling (Colombo: Perali Publishers, 1990), 16.



Brigadier-General Sir William Henry Manning (1863-1932), a British Indian Army officer and colonial administrator.

He held the perpetual honorary rank of Brigadier-General.
Manning served as Governor of Jamaica and, subsequently, ***as the 22nd Governor of British Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) from 1918 to 1925.***
He was also Commissioner of British Somaliland and Governor of Nyasaland (now Malawi).
He received top honors including Knight Commander of the Order of the British Empire (KBE), *Companion of the Order of the Bath (CB), and Knight Grand Cross of the Order of St Michael and St George (GCMG).*

June 1924

Licensing and Airtime Benchmarks in the Early Phase of Ceylon Broadcasting

By mid-1924, official returns indicated that fifty-three radio listener licences had been issued under the provisions of the Telecommunications Ordinance, and that the cumulative airtime dedicated to broadcasting had reached an estimated 415 hours since the inauguration of the Colombo Broadcasting Service earlier that year.[1] These figures, modest by later standards, represent the formative infrastructure of a medium still in its experimental stage on the island.

The relatively low number of licences, when compared to population figures and the pace of adoption in metropolitan Britain, points to the exclusivity of early radio reception in Ceylon. The cost of the licence set at Rs. 10 in April 1924 combined with the technical requirements for operating receiving apparatus, effectively restricted lawful listening to wealthier households, select businesses, and educational or professional institutions. Similarly, the total of 415 broadcast hours over a period of roughly five months reflects the part-time nature of early operations. In this period, programmes were typically transmitted twice weekly, subject to the availability of gramophone records and technical resources, rather than through a continuous daily schedule.

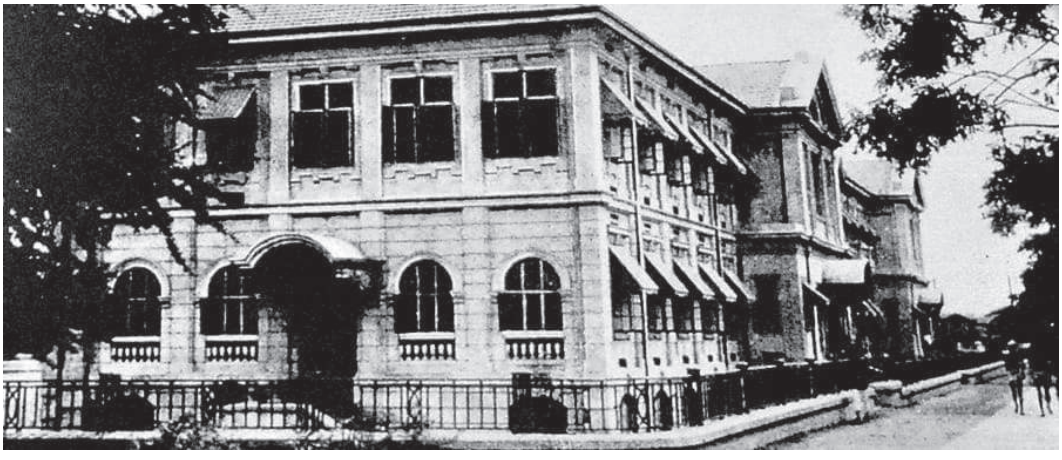
From a policy perspective, these early metrics reveal the administration's cautious approach: licensing served not only to regulate and monetise access, but also to control the size and composition of the listening public. The limited volume of programming while partly due to logistical and resource constraints may also have been shaped by this regulatory stance, ensuring that the spread of broadcasting could be closely monitored during its initial public phase. Over the following years, both the number of licences and the volume of airtime expanded rapidly, indicating that 1924 was a foundation-laying year rather than a reflection of the medium's potential reach.

Footnote:

1. Ceylon Government Gazette, June–July 1924, Colonial Secretary's Office Records, National Archives of Sri Lanka (hereafter NASL); Edward Harper, "The Early Days of Broadcasting in Ceylon," unpublished typescript, Edward Harper Papers, NASL.

03 July 1924

Broadcasting Begins from a Studio for the First Time: From Central Telephone and Telegraph Office in Colombo.



Central Telegraph Office Colombo in 1912

On 3 July 1924, radio transmissions in Ceylon commenced from an improvised studio facility situated within a small room of the Central Telephone Exchange in Colombo.[1] This marked a critical infrastructural advancement in the island's nascent broadcasting operations, transitioning from purely ad hoc and experimental transmissions to a more organized studio-based format.

Announcing duties during these early broadcasts were carried out by technical officers on duty, while the arrangement and scheduling of programmes fell under the purview of the clerical staff attached to the Chief Telegraph and Telephone Engineer's Office.[2] Programme schedules were prearranged and made public through notices in local newspapers, thereby allowing the small but growing community of licensed listeners to anticipate and tune into broadcasts at specified times.[3]



The Colombo Central Telegraph Office (CTO) building, completed around 1910-1911 in Colombo Fort, *was the hub for Ceylon's telegraph and telephone services, housing the precursor to Sri Lanka Telecom and serving as* ***the origin point for Radio Ceylon's first broadcasts in 1924.***

The programme for 3 July 1924, as published in the Times of Ceylon, included:
11:30 a.m. – Music
12:00 noon – Time Signal[4]

By September of that year, the service had expanded its offerings. A published schedule from this period listed:
09:30 a.m. – Mail News
12:00 noon – Time Signal
09:00 to 09:30 p.m. – Music[5]

The inauguration of studio-based transmissions placed Ceylon at the forefront of colonial broadcasting innovation. It became the first British colony and indeed the first country in South Asia to operate a government-controlled broadcasting station capable of delivering programmes of consistent technical quality.[6] This achievement predated India's initial broadcasting station in Bombay (1927), the commencement of experimental transmissions from New Delhi (November 1935), and the opening of the Madras station (1938).[7]

Footnotes:

1. "Wireless Broadcasting: New Studio Opened," Times of Ceylon, July 4, 1924, 5.
2. Edward Harper, The Story of Broadcasting in Ceylon (Colombo: Ceylon Observer Press, 1925), 12–14.
3. C. L. P. Gunawardana, This is Colombo Calling (Colombo: Perali Publishers, 1990), 20.
4. "Wireless Programme," Times of Ceylon, July 3, 1924, 6.
5. "Wireless Programme," Ceylon Daily News, September 15, 1924, 4.
6. Harper, Story of Broadcasting in Ceylon, 17.
7. L. S. Krishnan, History of Broadcasting in India (New Delhi: Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, 1988), 22–25.

03 July 1924

The Beginning of Another Phase in Ceylon's Broadcasting History

On 3 July 1924, the Colombo Broadcasting Service entered a new operational phase with the commencement of a regular daily musical programme. Broadcast from 11:00 a.m. to 12:00 noon, this initiative primarily featured selections played on gramophone records, representing a significant transition from sporadic experimental transmissions to scheduled daily programming.[1]

The event was notable for several reasons.
First, it marked the institutionalisation of a fixed broadcast time, signalling the gradual adoption of a structured programme schedule.
Secondly, it provided listeners with a consistent source of musical entertainment at a time when radio listening in Ceylon was still a novelty.
Thirdly, the use of gramophone records ensured a steady supply of content, overcoming earlier challenges of limited live programming.
Contemporary reports in the Times of Ceylon observed that "listeners may now tune in with confidence each morning at eleven for a full hour of musical selections carefully chosen for variety and quality."[2]

In retrospect, this modest one-hour music programme foreshadowed the evolution of the Colombo Broadcasting Service into a more sophisticated and content-diverse station. It laid the foundation for integrating fixed broadcast segments such as time signals, weather reports, and news bulletins that would, over the following years, become the backbone of Ceylon's radio service. The consistency of the daily music slot also contributed to cultivating listener loyalty and promoting radio as a regular feature of domestic life in the colony.

Footnotes:

1. Edward Harper, The Story of Broadcasting in Ceylon (Colombo: Times of Ceylon Ltd., 1925), 17–18.
2. "Daily Music Broadcasts Begin," Times of Ceylon, July 4, 1924, 5.

July 1924

Twice-Weekly Public Broadcasts

By July 1924, radio programmes intended for public listening in Ceylon were being transmitted twice weekly, typically on Thursdays and Sundays, subject to the availability of suitable programme material, trained talent, and necessary funding.[1] Programme schedules were published in the local press in advance to inform listeners.[2] In the absence of extensive institutional resources, the Colombo broadcasting service depended heavily upon voluntary contributions, especially for musical performances. The principal fare consisted of gramophone-recorded music, market and share transaction reports, road condition bulletins, and meteorological updates.[3]

A prominent and distinctive feature from the inception of Ceylonese broadcasting was the inclusion of the time signal, relayed from the Chatham Street Clock Tower in Colombo.[4] Following the example of the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), transmissions customarily began with the time signal, thereby providing a familiar point of reference for listeners.[5] Once the service was firmly established, the time signal was broadcast daily at 12:00 noon and again at 9:00 p.m. Notably, there was no signature tune to herald the commencement of broadcasts; instead, the chimes of tubular bells were employed to assist listeners in tuning their radio sets.[6]

During the Second World War, an innovation was introduced for the 11:30 a.m. transmission: the inclusion of a Sinhala vannam melody. This feature achieved remarkable popularity among foreign military personnel stationed in Ceylon. The melody, recorded on Columbia gramophone record No. GE 15030 and performed by Jasmine Peiris, Charlotte



Clock Tower

Chatham Street, Colombo

The tower was constructed as a clock tower in 1856-57 and completed on the 25 February 1857. The tower was designed by Emily Elizabeth Ward, the wife of Governor Sir Henry George Ward (1797 – 1860).

The construction was undertaken by the Public Works Department, under the supervision of Mr John Flemming Churchill (Director General of Public Works). The 29-metre-high (95 ft) tower was the tallest structure in Colombo at that time.

The original clock was commissioned for £1,200 in 1814 by the then Governor Sir Robert Brownrigg (1759 – 1833) but was kept in a warehouse, due to economic reasons, until 1857 when it was finally installed.

The lighthouse was deactivated after its light became obscured by nearby buildings and was decommissioned on 12 July 1952. The modern Galle Buck Lighthouse was erected on Marine Drive as its replacement.



This photograph from around the 1880s shows Queen Street in Colombo, Sri Lanka (then Ceylon), leading to the Old Colombo Lighthouse, which now functions as a clock tower.

Wettasinghe, and Wilfred J. Peiris, became so familiar that members of the armed forces were frequently heard whistling along with the broadcast.[7]

Analytical Note:

This adaptation reflected both the localisation of imperial broadcasting formats and the capacity of radio to integrate indigenous cultural expressions into the daily soundscape of a wartime garrison society.

Footnotes:

1. Government of Ceylon, Annual Administration Report of the Postmaster General, 1924 (Colombo: Government Printer, 1925), 12.
2. The Times of Ceylon, July 1924, 5.
3. D. M. Colombage, Guwan Viduli Vanshaya (Colombo: M.D. Gunasena & Company, 1989), 44.
4. W. W. Wood, A History of the Telegraph Department of Ceylon (Colombo: Ceylon Telegraph Department, 1930), 223.
5. C. L. P. Gunawardana, This is Colombo Calling (Colombo: Perali Publishers, 1990), 16.
6. Government of Ceylon, Annual Administration Report of the Postmaster General, 1924, 13.
7. D. M. Colombage, Guwan Viduli Vanshaya (Colombo: M.D. Gunasena & Company, 1989), 45.



*The image shows the **Old Colombo Lighthouse, also known as the Colombo Fort Clock Tower,** located at the junction of Chatham Street and Janadhipathi Mawatha in Colombo, Sri Lanka.*

July 1924

Specimen Broadcast Receiving Licence Form

In July 1924, the Ceylon Government introduced a standardised Broadcast Receiving Licence (Form B1) under Rule 2(1) of the prevailing wireless telegraphy regulations.[1] This licence legally authorised individuals to import, erect, maintain, possess, and operate wireless telegraph receiving apparatus for the exclusive purpose of listening to public broadcast transmissions.

The Broadcast Receiving Licence form contained fields for the licensee's full name and address, and specified the validity period of one year, terminating on a designated date. **A payment of Rs. 10/- was acknowledged as**

stamp duty.[2] Renewal was required within fourteen days of expiry, and the operation of an unlicensed wireless station constituted a punishable offence under the Ceylon Telegraph Ordinance.[3]
The conditions governing the licence were comprehensive, reflecting both technical standards and state control mechanisms:

1. Approved Equipment All receiving apparatus had to be of a type approved by the PostmasterGeneral.
2. Restricted Use Use was limited exclusively to receiving public broadcasting services.
3. Interference Prohibited Apparatus was not to cause interference with other stations; regenerative (reaction) circuits were prohibited from energising neighbouring aerials.
4. Inspection Access Equipment and licence were to be made available for inspection by authorised Postal Department officers at all reasonable times.
5. Change of Address Licensees had to notify the Postmaster General within two weeks of any change of address.
6. Use at Licensed Location Only Relocation without prior written approval was prohibited.
7. Responsibility for Interference Licensees bore full cost responsibility for modifications necessary to eliminate interference with telegraphic installations.
8. Confidentiality and Restrictions on Dissemination Disclosure or publication of messages, except those addressed to the licensee, was prohibited, with the sole exception of content from the British Official News Service.
9. Compliance with Regulations Licensees were bound by Gazette regulations and the rules of the International Radio Telegraphic Convention.
10. Emergency Powers In times of public emergency, the Postmaster General or his delegate could seize control of the apparatus on behalf of the Governor.
11. Compensation for Requisition Reasonable compensation for damage was provided under Clause 10, determined by a sole arbitrator appointed by the Governor.
12. Revocation of Licence The Postmaster General retained absolute discretionary power to revoke the licence without reason, with no compensation payable.[4]

Analytical Note:

The Broadcast Receiving Licence of July 1924 stands as a seminal document in the administrative history of broadcasting in Ceylon. Its conditions reveal not only the technical and operational expectations of early radio reception but also the colonial government's emphasis on regulatory oversight, content control, and national security concerns during the formative years of public wireless communication.

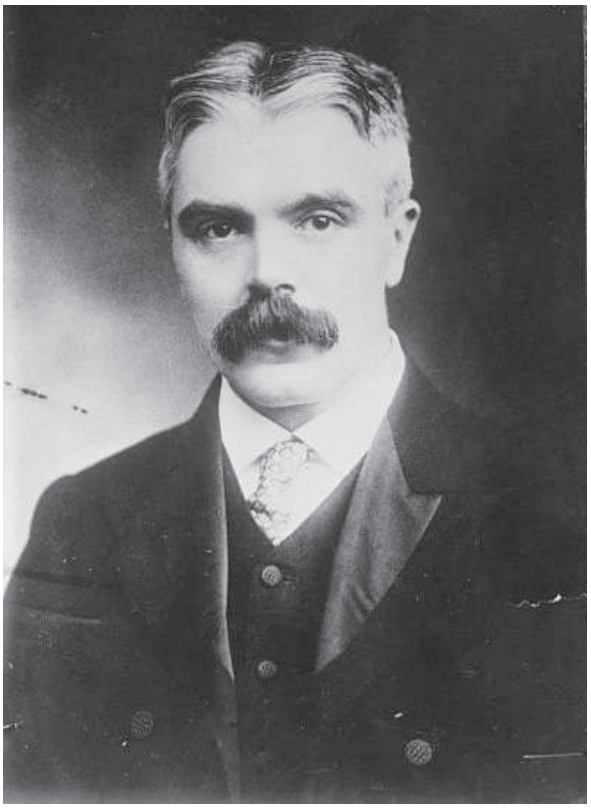
Footnotes:

1. Ceylon Government Gazette, No. 7372, February 1, 1924.
2. C. L. P. Gunawardana, This is Colombo Calling (Colombo: Perali Publishers, 1990), 17.
3. The Ceylon Telegraph Ordinance, Ordinance No. 7 of 1912, as amended.
4. Ceylon Government Gazette, No. 7555, November 12, 1926.

August 1924

Introduction of the 'Six Pips' Time Signal

In August 1924, the Colombo Broadcasting Service adopted the "six pips" a sequence of six electronically generated audio tones to mark the precise time of day.[1] This system, modelled on the British Broadcasting Corporation's (BBC) time signal introduced in the same year by **Astronomer Royal Sir Frank Watson Dyson and BBC Director General John Reith,** became a standard auditory cue for indicating the exact hour and was subsequently adopted by numerous radio broadcasters worldwide.[2] The "six pips" tradition remains in use over a century later as a universal marker of exact time.



Sir Frank Watson Dyson, KBE, FRS, FRSE
(8 January 1868 – 25 May 1939) was an English astronomer and the ninth Astronomer Royal.
He is remembered today largely for introducing the Greenwich time signal ("six pips") to BBC radio, and for the role he played in proving Einstein's theory of general relativity.

In Ceylon, the "six pips" were employed in cases when, due to unavoidable circumstances, the regular time signals scheduled for broadcast at 12:00 noon and 9:00 p.m. could not be transmitted. Prior to its adoption, the ticking of the clock representing each passing second was broadcast directly to signify the time.[3]

The time signal, typically relayed from the Chatham Street Clock Tower, was verified and calibrated by the Colombo Observatory. When the signal was not transmitted as scheduled, the Observatory initiated an inquiry to determine the cause, ensuring the accuracy and operational reliability of the clock tower.

Synchronisation of timekeeping devices was rigorously maintained across several key government institutions, including the Central Telegraph Office (C.T.O.), the Survey Department (then located in Colombo Fort), the Colombo Observatory, the Broadcasting Station at Torrington Square, and the Shipto-Shore Radio Receiving Station (CLO), with all installations set to display precisely the same time.[4]

The responsibility for maintaining the integrity and accuracy of these timekeeping mechanisms rested with the District Inspector of Telegraphs at the C.T.O. Notably, the Ship-to-Shore Radio Receiving Station maintained a dedicated clock set to Greenwich Mean Time (GMT), underscoring the significance of international time synchronisation in maritime and telecommunications operations.[5]

The BBC's "six pips"

are iconic time signals, originally generated from the Royal Observatory in Greenwich using electrical contacts on mechanical clocks, ***including Big Ben's mechanism, starting in 1924,*** *to provide accurate time for the public and businesses, evolving from five short pips and a longer final one to help set clocks, a tradition continuing today on BBC Radio despite digital delays.*

The pips, officially the Greenwich Time Signal (GTS), were crucial for synchronizing time, *especially with daylight saving, and are now produced from an atomic clock at Broadcasting House, though the famous Big Ben chimes themselves are distinct but historically linked.*

History & Connection to Big Ben Early Broadcasts (1922-1924):

The BBC first broadcast Big Ben's chimes at New Year 1924, which led to calls for more frequent, precise time signals.

The First Pips (1924): *The Royal Observatory fitted electrical contacts to its master clocks (including those related to Big Ben) to send signals to the BBC, creating the "six pips" (five short, one long) for the last five seconds before the hour.*

Purpose:

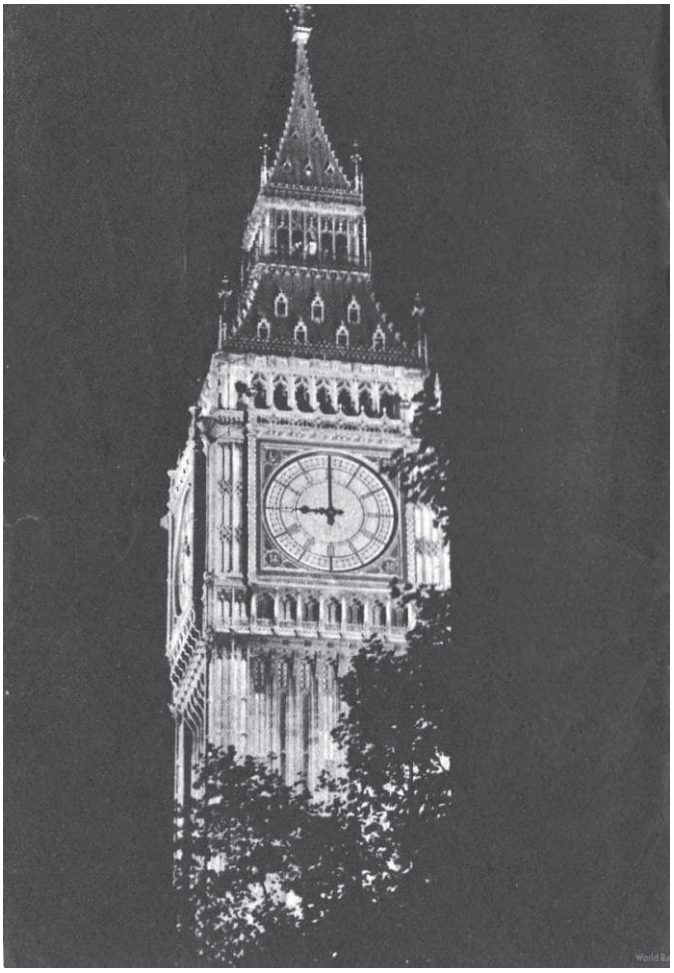
The signals helped people set their clocks accurately, especially as daylight saving was introduced.

Official Name:

They are officially the Greenwich Time Signal (GTS), though they are universally known as the pips.

How They Work The Sequence:

Five short, 1 kHz tones (pips) are broadcast at one-second intervals, followed by a longer final pip marking the exact hour.



BIG BEN - The Great Bell of the Great Clock of Westminster

Evolution:

A seventh pip was added for leap seconds, and the final pip was elongated in the 1970s for calibration.

Modern Generation:

While they originated at Greenwich, the pips are now generated from an atomic clock in the basement of Broadcasting House, with the Greenwich time service ending in 1990.

Big Ben vs.The Pips

Big Ben*:*

The famous bell in the Elizabeth Tower, known for its hourly chimes, which the BBC broadcast.

The Pips:

The precise, electronic time signals (the six tones) that provide the seconds before the hour, a distinct but related service.

Why They Matter:

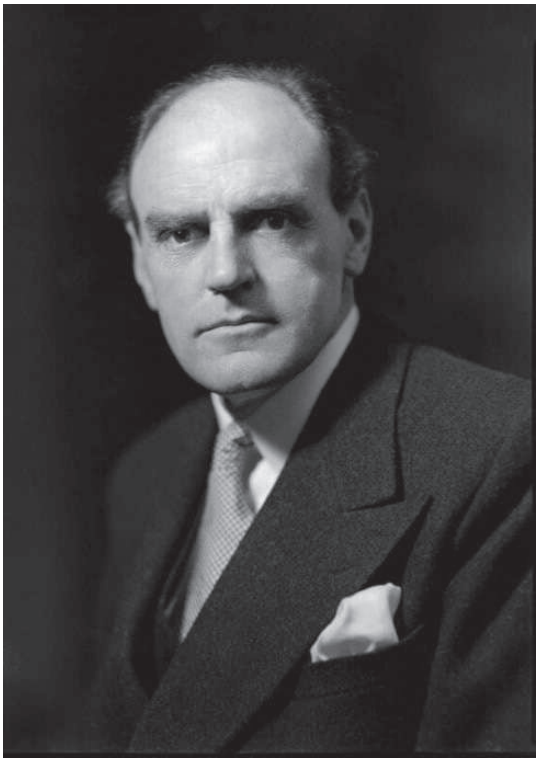
The pips became a fundamental part of British life, a reliable "heartbeat" of the day, and a mark of accuracy for generations.

Analytical Note:

This development illustrates the early sophistication and precision with which broadcasting and timekeeping were managed in colonial Ceylon, in close alignment with contemporary global technological standards.

Footnotes:

1. "Wireless Time Signals," Times of Ceylon, August 14, 1924, 5.
2. C. L. P. Gunawardana, This is Colombo Calling (Colombo: Perali Publishers, 1990), 17.
3. Ceylon Government Archives, File No. 45/1924, "Wireless Telegraphy: Time Signal Procedures," Colombo Telegraph Department Records.
4. "Observatory Ensures Clock Accuracy," Ceylon Daily News, August 20, 1924, 4.
5. Annual Report of the Post and Telegraph Department (Colombo: Government Press, 1924), 33.



John Charles Walsham Reith,

1st Baron Reith (20 July 1889 – 16 June 1971) was a Scottish broadcasting executive who established the tradition of independent public service broadcasting in the United Kingdom.

In 1922, he was employed by the BBC, then the British Broadcasting Company Ltd., as its general manager; in 1923 he became its managing director, and in 1927 he was employed as the Director-General of the British Broadcasting Corporation created under a royal charter.

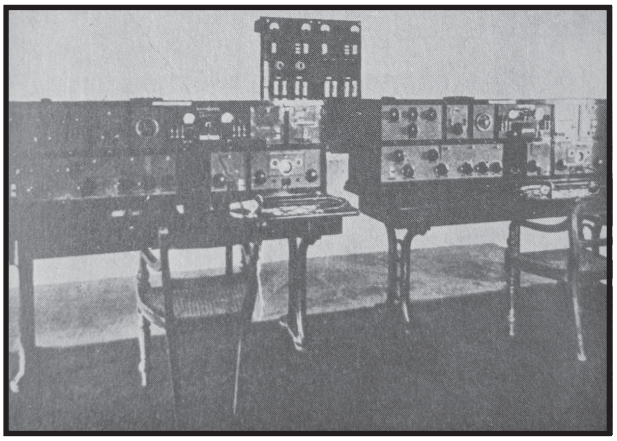
His concept of broadcasting as a way of educating the masses marked for a long time the BBC and similar organisations around the world. ***An engineer by profession, and standing at 6 feet 6 inches (1.98 m) tall, he was a larger-than-life figure who was a pioneer in his field.***

07 September 1924

An Exceptionally Clear and Notably High-Standard Broadcast

On 7 September 1924, the Colombo Broadcasting Service aired a musical programme from 10:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m.[1] The Times of Ceylon, reporting the following day, praised the transmission as "exceptionally clear" and of a "notably high standard," underscoring both the technical competence and the increasing refinement of broadcasting in the island.[2]

The clarity of the broadcast in 1924 is noteworthy when contextualised within the technological limitations of the period. Early Ceylonese broadcasting relied on comparatively rudimentary transmitters adapted from telegraphy equipment and studio facilities that lacked the sophisticated acoustic treatments of later decades.[3] That the programme could achieve such reception quality indicates not only improvements in transmitter calibration and antenna alignment but also a growing familiarity among engineers with the acoustic requirements of musical broadcasting.



Broadcasting Begins from a Studio for the First Time

On 3 July 1924, radio transmissions in Ceylon commenced from an improvised studio facility situated within a small room of the Central Telephone Exchange in Colombo.

This marked a critical infrastructural advancement in the island's nascent broadcasting operations, transitioning from purely ad hoc and experimental transmissions to a more organized studio-based format.

"From July 1st 1924, broadcasting commenced on improvised apparatus. The efforts of the Engineering Branch, working with this improvised equipment, have been successful and have met with public demand. Broadcasting concerts have been arranged and have been much appreciated.

For the complete success of such concerts, a specially equipped studio was considered necessary, and arrangements were made to procure a suitable facility. Programmes were transmitted twice weekly on Sundays and Thursdays."

Administrative Report 1924,
Maurice Salvador Sreshta,
Postmaster General of Ceylon.

Moreover, the broadcast's success reflected an emerging local culture of radio as both a public service and a cultural medium. Musical programming was central to the early appeal of broadcasting worldwide, serving as a primary means of demonstrating the medium's entertainment value and technical potential.[4] In the case of Ceylon, it also functioned as a vehicle for showcasing a cosmopolitan mix of repertoire, appealing to English-speaking audiences while laying the groundwork for future localisation of content.

Analytical Note:

The favourable press reception suggests that by late 1924, the Colombo Broadcasting Service had moved beyond mere experimental transmissions toward more sustained, quality-assured programming. This marked a significant step in the island's transition from provisional demonstrations of radio technology to the institutionalisation of broadcasting as a regular public utility.



Footnotes:

1. "Wireless Programme," Times of Ceylon, September 8, 1924, 5.
2. Nandana Karunanayake, Sixty Six Years of Radio Broadcasting in Sri Lanka (Moratuwa: The Centre for Media and Policy Studies, 1990), 44.
3. Ceylon Government Archives, File No. 32/1924, "Telegraph and Wireless Engineering Reports," Colombo Telegraph Department Records.
4. Nandana Karunanayake, Sixty Six Years of Radio Broadcasting in Sri Lanka (Moratuwa: The Centre for Media and Policy Studies, 1990), 44.

December 1924

Extract from the Administrative Report of the Postmaster General

Among the most authoritative and systematically compiled sources documenting the activities of government departments under British colonial administration were the annual Administrative Reports issued by departmental heads. In the Administrative Report for the Year 1924, Maurice Salvador (Pinto) Sreshta, C.C.S., Postmaster General of Ceylon, explicitly identified the commencement of radio broadcasting as the most significant development in the field of telecommunication during that year.

In his official report, Sreshta noted:

"The outstanding event in telephony was the inauguration of broadcasting from the C.T.O."[1]

The term telephony in this context referred broadly to the transmission of voice or sound over distance through electrical and electronic means, and thus encompassed wireless broadcasting.

Further elaborating on the historical significance of this development, Sreshta observed:

"It is perhaps not realised that broadcasting as a means of public entertainment was commenced in the United Kingdom so recently as May 1922, when the Marconi Company obtained permission to open a station in London. From July 1st [1924], broadcasting commenced on improvised apparatus. The efforts of the Engineering Branch, working with this improvised equipment, have been successful and have met with public demand. Broadcasting concerts have been arranged and have been much appreciated. For the complete success of such concerts, a specially equipped studio was considered necessary, and arrangements were made to procure a suitable facility. Programmes were transmitted twice weekly on Sundays and Thursdays."[2]

By the close of 1924, the total number of registered broadcast receiving licence holders in Ceylon stood at 53, indicating a modest but steadily growing public interest in this new medium of mass communication.[3] Although limited in reach, resources, and technical sophistication, this early initiative marked a foundational moment in the evolution of broadcasting in the island.

Footnotes:

1. Ceylon, Report of the Postmaster General for the Year 1924 (Colombo: Government Printer, 1925), 5.
2. C. L. P. Gunawardana, This is Colombo Calling (Colombo: Perali Publishers, 1990), 17.
3. Ibid.

December 1924

The Development of Broadcasting in Ceylon in 1924

Analytical Analysis:

The year 1924 represents a transitional and formative phase in the history of broadcasting in Ceylon. The July commencement of twice-weekly transmissions using improvised apparatus at the Central Telegraph Office (C.T.O.) demonstrated a willingness by colonial telecommunications authorities to experiment with public wireless broadcasting despite minimal infrastructure and financial constraints. The programme format gramophone music, time signals, and occasional live performances mirrored early British models, reflecting the influence of the Marconi Company's and the BBC's initial schedules.

Postmaster General Maurice Salvador Sreshta's remarks reveal three important dimensions of 1924 broadcasting development:

1. Institutional Adoption – Broadcasting shifted from being a purely experimental curiosity to a formally recognised government service under the Postmaster General's purview.
2. Public Reception – Reports of "much appreciated" concerts suggest that even with limited reach, there was an immediate and favourable listener response, paving the way for further expansion.
3. Technological Aspirations – The identified need for a purpose-built studio underscores the colonial administration's recognition that sustained broadcasting would require specialised infrastructure rather than ad hoc arrangements.

In sum, 1924 laid both the technological groundwork and institutional legitimacy for the later emergence of a fully fledged broadcasting service in Ceylon, bridging the gap between experimental wireless transmissions and an organised programme schedule.

1925

01 January 1925

Establishment of the "Hospital Radio Fund"

On 1 January 1925, the Ceylon Amateur Radio Society inaugurated the Hospital Radio Fund with the express objective of procuring and supplying radio receiving apparatus to hospitals in Colombo. This initiative aimed to extend the benefits of radio broadcasting still a novel technological and cultural phenomenon in the colony to patients and medical Footnotes staff within institutional healthcare settings.[1]

The scheme represented an early instance of socially oriented broadcasting policy in Ceylon, prefiguring later developments in public service broadcasting that sought to democratise access to information and entertainment.[2]

Analytical Note:

The establishment of the Hospital Radio Fund in early 1925 demonstrates that, even during the formative years of broadcasting in Ceylon, there was an awareness of radio's potential beyond domestic or elite recreational listening.[3] By targeting hospitals a non-commercial, socially significant sector the Ceylon Amateur Radio Society effectively framed broadcasting as a tool for communal welfare and moralebuilding. This approach paralleled contemporary philanthropic broadcasting initiatives in Britain and other parts of the Empire, where wireless technology was increasingly promoted as a civilising and humanitarian force.[4]

Footnotes:

1. "Hospital Radio Fund," Times of Ceylon, January 2, 1925, 5.
2. D. M. Colambage, Guvan Viduli Vanshaya, (Colombo: M. D. Gunasena & Company, 1990), 79.
3. Ibid.
4. Hugh Chignell, Public Issue Radio: Talks, News and Current Affairs in the Twentieth Century (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 22–24.

15 June 1925

1925 Financial Provision for Broadcasting Equipment: Rs.9,000 was Allocated From The Annual Ratimates.

In 1925, the colonial administration of Ceylon allocated Rs. 9,000 in the annual estimates for the acquisition of new broadcasting equipment for the Colombo Broadcasting Service.[1] **This provision reflected both governmental recognition of radio's emerging importance as a public communication medium and the necessity for improved technical infrastructure.**

The equipment was selected and purchased in the United Kingdom by Mr. Edward Harper, then Chief Engineer of the Telegraph Department, during his period of leave in England.[2] A portion of the apparatus arrived in Colombo in June 1925, with the remainder received in September of the same year.[3] The assembly and installation of the new transmitter took place at the Telegraph Department's workshop, underscoring the role of local technical expertise in operationalising imported technology.

The upgraded system was formally inaugurated at 12:00 noon on 16 December 1925 by Sir Hugh Clifford, Governor of Ceylon.[4] The transmitter, rated at one kilowatt, operated on a wavelength of 800 metres (frequency 375 kHz) and initially used the call sign VPB, which was later changed to ZOH in 1936.[5]

From a financial administrative perspective, the Rs. 9,000 allocation was a relatively modest sum when compared to major infrastructure projects of the era. Nevertheless, in the context of early broadcasting, it represented a strategic investment in technical capacity-building, marking the transition from improvised apparatus to a purpose-built system.[6] This funding also demonstrated the colonial government's willingness to support technological modernisation in line with contemporary developments in the British Empire.

Footnotes:

1. Government of Ceylon, Financial Estimates for the Year 1925 (Colombo: Government Press, 1925), 112.
2. Edward Harper, Personal Correspondence and Technical Notes, 1925 (Colombo Telegraph Department Archives, File B/142), 4.
3. C. L. P. Gunawardana, This is Colombo Calling (Colombo: Perali Publishers, 1990), 20.
4. "Opening of the New Broadcasting Transmitter," Times of Ceylon, December 17, 1925, 5.
5. Broadcasting Department Records, "Change of Call Sign VPB to ZOH," (Colombo: Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications Archives, 1936), File No. BR/36/12.
6. Administrative Report of the Postmaster General for the Year 1925 (Colombo: Government Press, 1926), 14–15.

25 July 1925

Establishment of the Royal College, Colombo Radio Society in Imperial Context



Official crest of Royal College, Colombo, *a premier educational institution in (Ceylon) Sri Lanka. The crest is gold on a black background and features the college motto,* ***"Disce Aut Discede", which is Latin for "Learn or Depart".***

The formal establishment of the Royal College, Colombo Radio Society on 25 July 1925 marked a significant educational and technical milestone in the history of science education in colonial Ceylon. **Mr. M. J. Wijesinghe was appointed as the inaugural President, and Mr. R. H. De Mel assumed duties as Secretary. The annual membership fee was fixed at one rupee.[1]**

Although the initiative was locally conceived, its organisational model, aims, and technical operations closely paralleled developments in Britain and other parts of the British Empire during the interwar years. In Britain, school-based wireless societies began appearing from 1922 onwards in response to the BBC's rapid growth and the increasing availability of commercially produced crystal sets. Prestigious schools such as Rugby School and Eton College

maintained radio societies dedicated not only to operating amateur transmitters under Post Office licensing regulations, but also to training pupils in the theoretical and practical aspects of radio engineering.[2] Such societies often functioned in close association with local amateur radio clubs, and their activities included the construction of aerials, tuning experiments, and live reception of BBC educational broadcasts.[3]

Similarly, in colonial India, elite institutions such as Presidency College, Calcutta, and St. Xavier's College, Bombay, established amateur wireless clubs by the mid-1920s. These groups blended extra-curricular technical education with imperial cultural integration retransmitting BBC relays, conducting morse code training, and inviting visiting British engineers for lectures.[4] The Indian societies were also subject to the Indian Telegraph Act (1885), which imposed licensing restrictions similar to those in Britain and Ceylon, thus creating an operational framework closely tied to imperial communications policy.[5]



Royal College Colombo established its Radio Society (originally the Radio Listeners Club) in 1925, *making it one of the oldest clubs at the school, founded by prefects during* ***Principal Major H.L. Reed's*** *tenure, coinciding with the launch of broadcasting in Ceylon (now Sri Lanka).*

Key Details:

Founding Year: 1925.

Original Name: Radio Listeners Club.

Founders: College Prefects.

Context: *This aligns with the start of Colombo Radio (later Radio Ceylon), making Sri Lanka an early adopter of broadcasting in Asia.*

The Radio Club continues today as a significant part of Royal College, pioneering initiatives and keeping the legacy of early radio in Sri Lanka alive.

Analytical Note:

The Royal College initiative reflected these imperial patterns in several ways. First, it combined educational aims with a spirit of technological amateurism, mirroring the ethos of British public school societies. Second, it served as a pipeline for technically inclined students to enter colonial technical services, much as in India, where several amateur radio club members later joined the Posts and Telegraphs Department. Third, its activities reinforced the cultural prestige of science and engineering as tools of modernity within the colonial educational hierarchy. The nominal membership fee set at one rupee also reflected both exclusivity and accessibility, positioning the society as a semi-elite but open forum for scientific engagement among the student body.

By situating the Royal College Radio Society alongside its British and Indian counterparts, it becomes evident that such school-based technical associations functioned as microcosms of the imperial science and technology network. They were simultaneously instruments of local innovation and vehicles for perpetuating a shared imperial technical culture in which radio served both as a tool of learning and a medium of imperial cohesion.

Footnotes:

1. "Royal College, Colombo Radio Society Formed," Times of Ceylon, July 26, 1925.
2. D. M. Colambage, Guvan Viduli Vanshaya, (Colombo: M. D. Gunasena & Company, 1990), 54.
3. Gerald Garratt, The Early Days of Broadcasting (London: Iliffe, 1928), 142–44.
4. Rakesh Kumar, "Amateur Radio and Science Education in Colonial India," Indian Journal of History of Science 45, no. 2 (2010): 201–18.
5. Indian Telegraph Act, No. XIII of 1885 (Government of India, 1885).

15 August 1925

Scholarships for Radio Engineering Training: The First Scholarship Recipient was Mr. Arumugam Nadarasa.

In August 1925, the colonial administration of Ceylon undertook a pioneering initiative to strengthen local expertise in radio engineering.[1] Mr. Edward Harper, widely recognised as the principal architect of the Colombo Broadcasting Service, was deeply impressed by the dedication and technical proficiency of several Inspectors of Telegraphs and Telephones.[2] He consequently recommended that these individuals be afforded the opportunity to receive specialised training at the British Post Office Engineering Department, then regarded as a leading institution in the field.[3]

The first scholarship awarded under this initiative went to Mr. Arumugam Nadarasa, who departed for the United Kingdom on 10 August 1925 to pursue advanced studies in radio engineering.[4] Upon his return, Nadarasa emerged as a pivotal figure in the development of Ceylon's broadcasting infrastructure. His engineering contributions included the design, remodelling, and construction of several transmitters of national importance:

1. **A 1-kilowatt transmitter, brought into service on 16 December 1925, initially radiating at 800 metres (376 kHz) and later remodelled to operate at 428.5 metres (700 kHz).[5]**
2. **The upgrading of the 1-kilowatt transmitter to a 2.5-kilowatt capacity.[6]**
3. **The construction of a 5-kilowatt transmitter.[7]**
4. **The construction of a 15-kilowatt transmitter.[8]**

In recognition of his contributions, Mr. Nadarasa became the first Sri Lankan to serve as Chief Posts and Telegraph Engineer and Controller of Broadcasting.[9] This early investment in technical training thus yielded long-term institutional leadership.

Following Nadarasa's example, the second scholarship, in 1936, was awarded to Mr. W. E. de Silva, who subsequently made his own significant contributions to telecommunications and broadcasting.[10] A further

notable case was that of Mr. Benat Wijetilaka, who, motivated by personal commitment, self-financed his training in the United Kingdom 1938 and, upon his return, joined the Government Electrical Department as an engineer.[11]

These early measures, combining state-supported and self-initiated professional development, laid the foundation for a skilled cadre of Ceylonese engineers capable of sustaining and expanding the nation's broadcasting and telecommunications systems.[12]

Footnotes:

1. "Training in Radio Engineering: Ceylonese Telegraph Inspectors to Proceed to Britain," Times of Ceylon, August 8, 1925, 5.
2. Ibid.
3. G. M. D. Howes, Wireless and Empire: Technical Education in the British Colonies (London: Wireless Press, 1928), 134–35.
4. "Mr. A. Nadarasa Leaves for England," Ceylon Observer, August 10, 1925, 6.
5. Department of Posts and Telecommunications, Annual Report, 1925–1926 (Colombo: Government Printer, 1926), 18.
6. C. L. P. Gunawardana, This is Colombo Calling (Colombo: Perali Publishers, 1990), 18.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid.
9. "Appointment of Chief Telegraphs and Telephone Engineer," Times of Ceylon, July 2, 1948, 4.
10. "Scholarship Awarded to Mr. W. E. de Silva," Ceylon Daily News, March 5, 1936, 7.
11. "Mr. B. Wijetilaka's Technical Training," Ceylon Observer, September 12, 1938, 8.
12. Howes, Wireless and Empire, 137–38.



Mr. Ayampillai Nadarasa

Ayampillai Nadarasa first Sri Lankan to serve as Chief Telegraphs and Telephone Engineer and Controller of Broadcasting.

Ayampillai Nadarasa was an assistant engineer in the Telegraph and Telephone Department in Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) in the 1920s, who played a significant pioneering role in establishing the island's first radio broadcasting services.

Role in the Telegraph and Telephone Department

Pioneer Broadcaster:

Nadarasa worked as an assistant to Edward Harper, the then Chief Engineer of the Telegraph Office. Harper initiated experimental radio broadcasts as early as 1923.

Establishment of Radio Ceylon:

The experiments were successful, leading to the official inauguration of a regular broadcasting service on December 16, 1925, under the administration of the Telegraph Department. This made Ceylon the first country in Asia to have a regular radio broadcast service.

Technical Contributions:

Nadarasa was instrumental in the technical aspects of early broadcasting. He was responsible for building the 5-kilowatt transmitter that, in 1937, expanded the broadcast range to cover the entire country and beyond. He received specialized training in radio engineering in England to support this work.

In recognition of his contributions, Mr. Nadarasa became the first Sri Lankan to serve as Chief Telegraphs and Telephone Engineer and Controller of Broadcasting.

September 1925

Arrival and Assembly of the Second Shipment of Radio Equipment

In September 1925, the second and final consignment of radio broadcasting equipment originally ordered from the United Kingdom in late 1924 arrived in Ceylon, representing a pivotal step in the technical consolidation of the island's nascent broadcasting service.[1] The shipment, procured through official colonial channels, included high-power transmitting apparatus, precision tuning units, and supplementary studio equipment manufactured to British Post Office specifications.[2]

Following its arrival at Colombo Port, the equipment was transported to the Telegraphs and Telephone Workshop, where it was carefully unpacked, tested, and assembled by a select engineering team under the supervision of Mr. Edward Harper, Chief Engineer and recognised founder of the Colombo Broadcasting Service.[3] Harper's leadership in this phase reflected his dual role as both a technical innovator and an institutional architect of broadcasting in Ceylon. **His engineering staff many of whom had been trained within the Government Telegraph Department applied skills in circuit alignment, valve calibration, and antenna coupling, ensuring that the imported technology was adapted to the island's tropical climatic conditions and operational requirements.**

Once the assembly was completed, the equipment was installed at the designated broadcasting facility in Welikada, a location chosen for its relative elevation, secure surroundings, and proximity to key telegraph infrastructure. The Times of Ceylon, in its issue dated 8 December 1925, confirmed that the engineering work had been carried out under Harper's personal supervision, noting that the project demonstrated "the continuing advancement of Ceylon's broadcasting capacity under expert technical direction."[4]

Analytical Note:

This installation marked not merely a logistical completion of procurement, but a substantive enhancement in the colony's broadcasting capabilities. With the commissioning of this second shipment, Ceylon's radio service transitioned from an experimental and intermittent operation to one capable of sustaining regular scheduled transmissions at improved signal strength and clarity. In a broader imperial context, the development paralleled similar expansions in other British colonies and dominions during the mid-1920s, when second-phase equipment shipments often coincided with the formalisation of broadcasting schedules and the institutionalisation of engineering standards based on British practice.[5]

Footnotes:

1. "Arrival of Broadcasting Apparatus," Times of Ceylon, September 14, 1925.
2. C. L. P. Gunawardana, This is Colombo Calling (Colombo: Perali Publishers, 1990), 20.
3. D. M. Colombage, Guwan Viduli Vanshaya (Colombo: M. D. Gunasena & Company, 1989), 55.
4. Times of Ceylon, "Assembly of Second Broadcasting Plant," December 8, 1925.
5. Hugh Chignell, Public Issue Radio: Broadcasting Beyond the BBC (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2011), 42–44

14 & 16 December 1925

Expansion of Programmes and Installation of the One Kilowatt Transmitter at Welikada

The closing weeks of 1925 marked a decisive transition in the technical and operational profile of the Colombo Broadcasting Service. The installation of a new[1] kilowatt transmitter at the purpose-built transmitting station in Welikada represented a substantial enhancement in broadcast capacity and signal quality.1 Constructed with the objective of delivering a threefold broadcasting service continuous wave (CW), interrupted continuous wave (ICW), and telephony the station's design and technical specifications were prepared under the supervision of the Chief Engineer of Telegraphs and Telephones.[2] A significant proportion of the transmitter components was fabricated and assembled in the Telegraph Department's own workshops, demonstrating the engineering self-sufficiency of the colonial communications service.[3]

In parallel, a ½ kilowatt quenched spark-gap transmitter was installed at the Central Telegraph Office (C.T.O.) in Colombo to function as an emergency broadcasting facility. This auxiliary arrangement ensured operational redundancy and continuity of service in the event of primary transmitter failure, thereby reinforcing the reliability of the nascent broadcasting network.[4]

The expanded technical infrastructure was immediately reflected in the daily programme schedule. On 14 December 1925, as advertised in the local press, the broadcast day was notably extended and diversified:

11:30 a.m. – Time Signal

12:00 noon to 12:30 p.m. – Mail News, Public Works Department Road Report, News Bulletin, Weather Report

4:45 to 5:00 p.m. – Market and Share Transactions, General News

5:00 p.m. – Time Signal

6:00 to 8:00 p.m. – Bristol Hotel Orchestra Performance [5]



CBS Transmitting Station in Welikada (This photograph was taken in 1929)

The first 1 kw radio transmitter in Asia was installed and launched in Welikada, Colombo, on December 16, 1925.

Key details of the installation and launch:

Station Name:

The station was named Colombo Broadcasting Service, (CBS) and used the call sign "Colombo Calling".

Significance:

The launch made it the first radio station in Asia and the second oldest in the world, just three years after the launch of the BBC.

Initial Experiments:

This radio transmitter was built under the leadership of Chief Engineer Edward Harper, with the assistance of other Ceylonese engineers in the Telegraph Department, using surplus equipment from the Telegraph Department's warehouse.

Operation:

The station initially operated on a medium wave frequency with one kilowatt of output power.

Evolution:

The service was formalized with the establishment of the Radio Ceylon in 1949, Ceylon Broadcasting Corporation in 1967, which later became the Sri Lanka Broadcasting Corporation (SLBC).

Two days later, on 16 December 1925, the new 1 kilowatt transmitter was formally inaugurated by HisExcellency the Governor of Ceylon. On this ceremonial occasion, an extended schedule was broadcast:

11:30 a.m. – Time Signal
12:00 noon to 12:30 p.m. – Mail News, P.W.D. Road Report, News Bulletin, Weather Report
4:45 to 5:15 p.m. – Market and Share Prices, General News
9:00 p.m. – Special Concert 10:30
p.m. – Time Signal [6]

A notice published in the press on the morning of 16 December announced the change in service:

"The new broadcasting apparatus, which arrived recently, has now been installed and will displace the improvised apparatus hitherto used. The Governor will today inaugurate the new service by a few remarks, which will be broadcast at 12 noon. The wavelength will be 800 metres." [7]

Analytical Note:

This combination of technological upgrading, expanded programme scheduling, and ceremonial public launch marked a key milestone in the institutionalisation of broadcasting in Ceylon, signifying the definitive shift from experimental transmissions to a structured and professionally managed public service. [8]

Footnotes:

1. "Installation of New Transmitter," The Times of Ceylon, December 13, 1925, 5.
2. "Programme for Inauguration of New Transmitter," The Times of Ceylon, December 16, 1925, 6.
3. C. L. P. Gunawardana, This is Colombo Calling (Colombo: Perali Publishers, 1990), 20.
4. "Emergency Broadcasting Arrangements," The Times of Ceylon, December 16, 1925, 6.
5. "Broadcasting Programmes," The Ceylon Observer, December 14, 1925, 4.
6. C. L. P. Gunawardana, This is Colombo Calling (Colombo: Perali Publishers, 1990), 21.
7. Ibid.
8. D. M. Colombage, Guwan Viduli Vanshaya (Colombo: M.D. Gunasena & Company, 1989) 09– 10.

16 December 1925

Formal and Official Inauguration of the Colombo Broadcasting Service: Opening of the newly Installed One Kilowatt Radio Transmitter At Welikada Transmission station

The formal and official inauguration of the newly installed one-kilowatt radio transmitter at the Welikada transmission station took place on 16 December 1925, representing a landmark moment in the technological and institutional evolution of broadcasting in Ceylon.[1] While this date was chosen for ceremonial purposes, contemporary programme schedules published in the local press on 14 and 16 December reveal that the transmitter had already been placed in operation before the official event.[2] Indeed, on the day of the inauguration, the scheduled broadcast was briefly interrupted at 12:00 noon to accommodate a live address by His Excellency the Governor of Ceylon, Sir Hugh Clifford, delivered from Queen's House and relayed to the public via the new transmitter.[3]



Sir Hugh Charles Clifford Govenar Genaral of Ceylon (1925 - 1927)

He was a British colonial administrator and a writer, primarily known for his extensive service and works relating to the Malay Peninsula.

Sir Clifford served in various capacities in the British Empire, including as Governor of Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) and Governor of the Straits Settlements.

He was a prolific writer, penning numerous short stories and essays about the people and life in the Malay Peninsula. His writings often explored the cultural differences between the British and the Malay people.

He was appointed a Knight Grand Cross of the Order of St Michael and St George (GCMG) and a Knight Grand Cross of the Order of the British Empire (GBE).

The ceremony, held at the Welikada Transmission station, was attended by several key figures in the colony's communications administration: Mr. Maurice Salvador Sreshta, C.C.S., Postmaster General of Ceylon; Mr. Edward Harper, Chief Engineer of Posts and Telegraph Department a team of skilled technicians from the Central Posts and Telegraph Department (C.T.O.); and a select audience of invited guests representing both government and private interests in wireless development.[4]

Proceedings commenced with a formal address by Mr. Harper, who outlined the technical specifications and developmental history of the new transmitter. He emphasised that its commissioning represented the culmination of several years of planning, procurement, and experimental work by the Telegraph Department, as well as a transition from makeshift apparatus to a modern, purpose-built facility. 5 Harper underscored the broader significance of this milestone, noting that it would enable Ceylon to provide regular, higher-quality broadcasts over an expanded service schedule. Concluding his remarks, he formally invited the Governor to declare the transmitter operational.[6]

In his address, Sir Hugh Clifford paid tribute to Harper and his engineering team for their pioneering achievements, remarking that their work had positioned Ceylon among the foremost British colonial territories in adopting and applying one of the most revolutionary scientific developments of the early twentieth century.[7] His speech symbolically delivered from Queen's House, the seat of colonial executive authority was transmitted via landline to the C.T.O., then broadcast through the new Welikada transmitter, demonstrating the technical reliability and reach of the station.[8]

The event was extensively covered in the local press, both for its ceremonial value and for its demonstration of broadcasting's potential as a medium for governance, public information, and cultural programming.[9] It represented not merely the inauguration of a piece of equipment, but the formal institutionalisation of radio broadcasting as a public service in Ceylon a step that transformed earlier experimental transmissions into a regularised, state-managed communication channel with a clear role in the colony's modernisation trajectory.[10]

Footnotes:

1. "Programme for Inauguration of New Transmitter," The Times of Ceylon, December 16, 1925, 6.
2. "Broadcasting Programmes," The Ceylon Observer, December 14, 1925, 4.
3. "Programme for Inauguration of New Transmitter," 6.
4. "Official Opening of Broadcasting Station," The Times of Ceylon, December 17, 1925, 5.
5. C. L. P. Gunawardana, This is Colombo Calling (Colombo: Perali Publishers, 1990), 22.
6. Ibid.
7. "Governor Opens Broadcasting Service," The Ceylon Observer, December 17, 1925, 5.
8. "Programme for Inauguration of New Transmitter," 6.
9. "Governor Opens Broadcasting Service," The Ceylon Observer, December 17, 1925, 5.
10. D. M. Colombage, Guwan Viduli Vanshaya (Colombo: M.D. Gunasena & Company, 1989), 09.

December 1925

Extract from the Administrative Report of the postmaster Genaral - 1925

The Commissioning of Ceylon's Principal Broadcasting Installation

By the close of 1925, Ceylon's transition from improvised wireless broadcasting to a formally established radio service had reached a decisive milestone. The Government had, in the preceding year, authorised funding for the procurement of a complete high-power broadcasting installation from the United Kingdom.[1] **The order, placed in late 1924, was fulfilled in two consignments: the first arriving in June 1925 and the second in September.[2] Upon arrival, the apparatus was transported to the Telegraphs and Telephone Workshops, where it was assembled under the supervision of Mr. Edward Harper, Chief Engineer and founder of the Colombo Broadcasting Service.[3]**

The new transmitting facility, located at Welikada, was designed to provide a threefold service continuous wave, interrupted continuous wave, and telephony.[4] The technical design work was carried out in the Office of the Chief Engineer, with a considerable proportion of the mechanical components fabricated locally at the Telegraph Workshops, a reflection of the Department's growing in-house engineering capability.[5]

The telegraphy section of the plant became operational in October 1925 and, according to Acting Postmaster General H. W. Codrington, had "performed satisfactorily since its implementation."[6] The broadcasting section, powered by a one-kilowatt valve transmitter, was officially inaugurated on 16 December 1925 by His Excellency Sir Hugh Clifford, Governor of Ceylon, in a ceremony that marked the formal commencement of scheduled radio service from the new facility.[7] The event received favourable contemporary press coverage, which emphasised both the improved transmission quality and the symbolic significance of Ceylon entering the ranks of countries with permanent broadcasting infrastructure.[8]

Prior to the commissioning of the Welikada station, the Colombo Broadcasting Service had operated with an improvised half-kilowatt transmitter, offering irregular programming constrained by technical limitations.[9] By year's end, the number of licensed radio listeners had reached 176 a modest but steady increase that Codrington predicted would accelerate with the improved transmission power and expanded coverage of the new plant.[10]

The 1925 schedule had developed into a twice-daily transmission pattern, comprising news bulletins, meteorological reports, road condition updates, share market quotations, and musical programmes.[11] In all, 46 broadcasts were conducted during the year, amounting to 415 hours of airtime.[12] Musical items were entirely voluntary in nature, contributed by both "ladies and gentlemen" who, as the Postmaster General recorded, "generously contributed their time and talent" without remuneration.[13] The Department, in its report, expressed formal gratitude for these contributions and indicated its intention to broaden the scope and relevance of the programme service in 1926.[14]

In technological terms, 1925 also marked the complete replacement of the spark transmitter at Welikada with the modern valve transmitter operating on interrupted continuous wave.[15] As a safeguard, a halfkilowatt quenched spark transmitter was installed at the Central Telegraph Office (C.T.O.) for emergency use.[16]

These developments financial, engineering, operational, and ceremonial collectively signalled the institutionalisation of broadcasting in Ceylon. The year closed with a service that had advanced far beyond experimental transmissions, positioning radio as a permanent feature of the island's communications landscape.

Footnotes:

1. Legislative Council of Ceylon, Proceedings of the Legislative Council, 1924 (Colombo: Government a. Printer, 1925), 214.
2. H. W. Codrington, Administration Report of the Postmaster General for the Year 1925 (Colombo: Government Printer, 1926), 2.
3. Ibid.; Edward Harper, "Notes on the Establishment of Broadcasting in Ceylon," Times of Ceylon, December 20, 1925
4. Codrington, Administration Report, 2.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid., 3.
8. "Opening of the Broadcasting Station," Times of Ceylon, December 17, 1925, 7.
9. Codrington, Administration Report, 3.
10. Ibid., 4.
11. Ibid., 5.
12. Ibid.
13. Ibid., 6.
14. Ibid.
15. Ibid., 7.
16. Ibid.

December 1925

Radio Licence Statistics

In mid-1925, the Office of the Chief Engineer, Telegraphs and Telephones, initiated the systematic recording of monthly radio broadcasting licence statistics.[1] This practice commenced in July, coinciding with the arrival of the first shipment of new broadcasting equipment and the gradual improvement of transmission capabilities.[2] The records reveal a consistent upward trajectory in the number of licensed radio receivers across the second half of the year. The monthly figures, as reported in departmental records, were as follows:

July:	**129**
August:	**137**
September:	**149**
October:	**157**
November:	**165**
December:	**176**

This steady increase reflected a growing public engagement with radio broadcasting in Ceylon, a development that paralleled both the technical enhancements to the service and its formal inauguration at the new Welikada transmitting station on 16 December 1925.[3] The closing figure for December, representing a 36 percent increase over the July total, was cited by Acting Postmaster General H. W. Codrington as indicative of the medium's emerging importance in the island's communications landscape.[4]

Footnotes:

1. 1.H. W. Codrington, Administration Report of the Postmaster General for the Year 1925 (Colombo:
2. Government Printer, 1926), 4.
3. Ibid., 2.
4. Ibid., 3
5. Ibid., 4.

December 1925

Inaugural Year of Broadcasting in Ceylon: Establishment and Early Operations

Progress

1. Establishment of the Colombo Broadcasting Service:

1925 marked the official inception of radio broadcasting in Ceylon, with the first experimental transmission conducted from a small studio located at the Telegraph Department in Colombo.[1] This pioneering initiative was primarily aimed at testing the feasibility of wireless communication for public reception, aligning with broader imperial efforts to develop broadcasting across British colonies.

2. Initial Programming and Content:

Programming during 1925 was highly experimental and limited in scope, focusing mainly on English-language news bulletins, music recordings, and occasional live performances.[2] Despite the nascent stage of the service, the station sought to engage the public through scheduled announcements, demonstrating a commitment to consistency and public accessibility.

3. Technical Infrastructure and Transmitter Operations:

The early operations relied on a single medium wave transmitter, operating on the frequency later designated as VPB, shared with maritime communication services.[3] This arrangement allowed for limited domestic reception and represented a critical first step in establishing technical expertise in broadcasting within Ceylon.

4. Listener Engagement and Public Reception:

Although formal statistics on radio ownership were not systematically maintained in 1925, anecdotal evidence and archival correspondence indicate growing public curiosity and interest in wireless listening. Public exhibitions and demonstrations, such as those organized by the Telegraph Department, provided citizens with hands-on exposure to radio technology, fostering an initial listener base.[4]

Setbacks and Challenges

1. Limited Coverage and Technical Constraints:

Signal strength and geographic coverage were extremely restricted, confining reception primarily to Colombo and immediate surrounding areas. Maintenance and operational expertise were limited, requiring support from trained engineers returning from the United Kingdom.

2. Financial and Administrative Constraints:

Budgetary provisions for broadcasting in 1925 were minimal, reflecting the experimental nature of the project. Staffing was limited, and administrative structures were still evolving, with responsibilities shared between the Telegraph Department and a small number of technical personnel.

3. Content and Language Limitations:

Programming was almost exclusively in English, reflecting colonial administrative priorities. The absence of Sinhala and Tamil content limited the initial inclusivity and cultural resonance of broadcasts.

Analytical Note

The year 1925 represents the foundational phase of radio broadcasting in Ceylon. While coverage was limited and operations experimental, the establishment of a formal broadcasting station, even in embryonic form, laid the groundwork for subsequent expansion. Technologically, the infrastructure initiated technical competence in transmitter operation and studio management. Administratively, the year set a precedent for integrating broadcasting into colonial communication networks. Culturally, although audience reach was initially narrow, the early broadcasts began to familiarize the public with radio as a medium for information, music, and communal engagement.

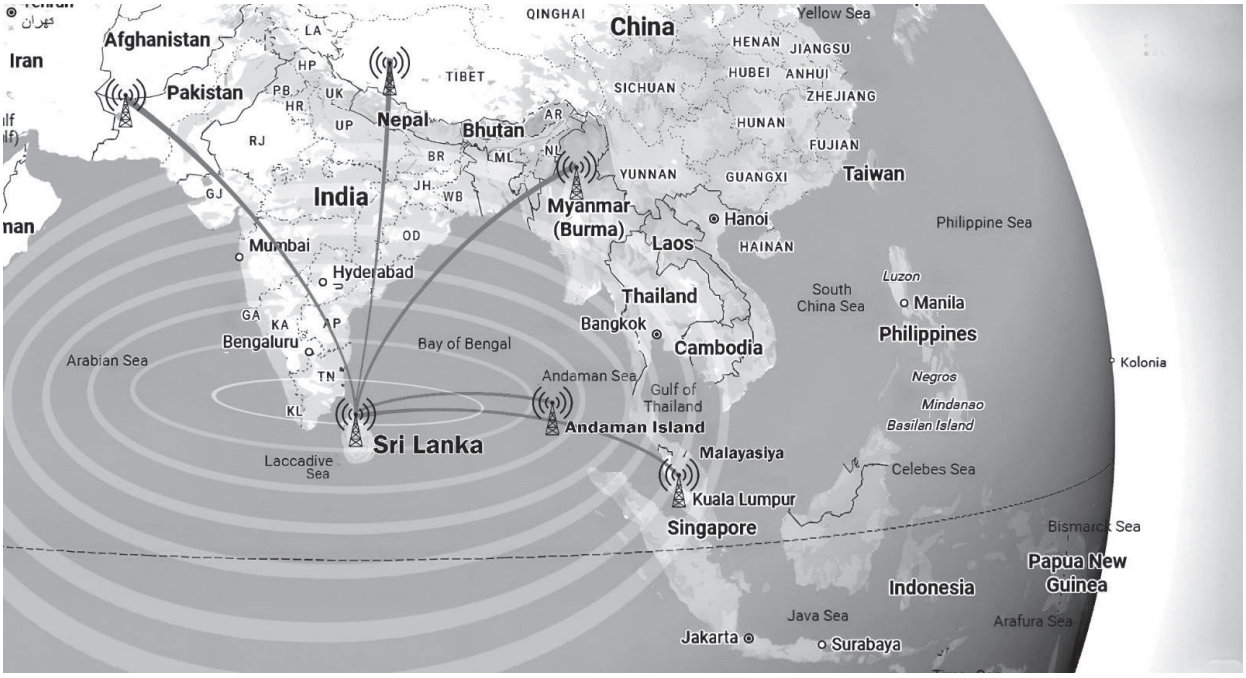
Footnotes

1. Department of Broadcasting, Souvenir: Fifty Years of Radio Ceylon, 1925–1975 (Colombo: Government Press, 1975), 5.
2. Nimal Chandrasiri, History of Broadcasting in Sri Lanka: 1925–1975 (Colombo: Department of Information, 1980), 12.
3. Ibid., 14.
4. Ibid., 13.

1926

Programme Management and International Reception of Early Radio Broadcasting in Ceylon

In 1926, the organisation and management of radio broadcasting in Ceylon remained, during its formative stage, under the exclusive control of the technical staff of the Post and Telegraph Department. This arrangement persisted until the appointment of R. R. Anderson, a member of the Postal Clerical Service, as the first officially designated Broadcasting Announcer. Administrative oversight rested with the Chief Engineer of Telegraphs and Telephones, who concurrently served as the Controller of Broadcasting, under whose supervision the Announcer discharged his duties.[1]



A map showing the radio signal coverage of programmes broadcast by the Colombo Broadcasting Service (CBS) by 1926.

It should be noted that this map was prepared based on letters sent to the Colombo Broadcasting Service (CBS) by listeners stating that the radio signals were received in good quality and with good reception.

The Postmaster General's Administrative Report of 1926 states that letters of appreciation were received from Karachi, Pakistan, the Himalayan foothills of Nepal, Burma, the Federated Malay States (Malaysia) and the Andaman Islands.

At this early juncture, there was little evidence of sustained public criticism regarding programme quality or policy. The daily schedule was concise and functional, typically including news bulletins, weather reports, road conditions, stock market quotations, short musical segments, and the official time signal relayed from the Chatham Street Clock Tower.[2] The emphasis was on reliability and technical precision rather than on programme diversity or cultural production.

From a technical standpoint, the Colombo broadcasting station was widely regarded as an efficient and reliable operation. The Department of Posts and Telegraphs reported "a gratifying degree of success in maintaining both strength and clearness of signal over considerable distances."[3] Numerous letters of appreciation arrived from listeners both within Ceylon and from across the Indian Ocean region. A listener in Karachi (approx. 1,500 miles) wrote that "Colombo's music and news reach us with a fullness and clearness surpassing even stations much nearer."[4] Another, writing from the foothills of the Himalayas (1,700 miles), described the broadcasts as "our principal link with the outside world during the long winter months."[5]

The reach of the station extended to Burma (1,500 miles), the Federated Malay States including Perak, Selangor, Negeri Sembilan, and Pahang (1,450 miles) and the Andaman Islands (900 miles). A planter in Pahang reported:

"The evening music from Colombo is the most welcome part of our day; the violin solos are particularly well received here, and your time signal sets every watch in the estate." [6]

Lisener correspondence for the year totalled 150 letters, of which 52 originated outside Ceylon. Of these, 96 were wholly complimentary, 35 offered constructive suggestions, and only 19 contained criticism mostly of a minor or technical nature, such as occasional signal fading during monsoonal weather.[7]

The Department also emphasised the "generous public spirit" of voluntary contributors both men and women who performed musical items, delivered talks, or assisted in programme organisation without remuneration. This volunteerism, combined with the fact that the service was offered free of charge to the public, was seen as "a matter of pride and evidence of the growing civic consciousness of the Colony."[8] Such efforts laid the social and cultural foundation upon which Ceylon's subsequent broadcasting achievements would be built.

Footnotes:

1. Department of Posts and Telegraph (Ceylon), Annual Report of the Director of Posts and Telegraphs for the Year 1926 (Colombo: Government Printer, 1927), 14.
2. Ibid., 15.1. C. L. P. Gunawardana, This is Colombo Calling (Colombo: Perali Publishers, 1990), 24–25.
3. Ibid.
4. Listener letter, Karachi, quoted in Department of Posts and Telegraph, Annual Report (1926), 17.
5. Listener letter, Himalayan foothills, quoted in Department of Posts and Telegraph, Annual Report (1926), 17.
6. Listener letter, Pahang, Federated Malay States, quoted in Department of Posts and Telegraphs, Annual Report (1926), 17.
7. Department of Posts and Telegraph, Annual Report (1926), 18.
8. Ibid.

1926

Relocation of the Broadcasting Studio to Colombo University College

By early 1926, it had become increasingly evident that the improvised broadcasting studio situated in a small room within the Central Telephone Exchange in Colombo was inadequate for the expanding requirements of the Colombo Broadcasting Service. In particular, the confined space presented practical difficulties in accommodating amateur concert parties, which by this time had become a regular and popular feature of the programme schedule.[1]

In response to these limitations, Professor R. Marrs, Principal of Colombo University College, extended a formal offer to the Post and Telegraph Department to utilise the college's staff room at its Thurston Road premises. This venue, though intended for academic purposes, was temporarily adapted into a functioning broadcasting studio, representing a significant improvement in available space and acoustics.[2]

From this new location, the Colombo Broadcasting Service transmitted an increasingly varied schedule of programmes, reflecting both the technical possibilities of the upgraded facilities and the growing cultural ambitions of the service. These included public lectures, live relays of religious services from churches in Colombo Fort and Kollupitiya, as well as cultural performances by local artists.[3]

A noteworthy element of this period was the voluntary work of **Mr. R. C. P. Beck,** who organised and presented dance and concert programmes for the first three months without remuneration, a contribution later recognised in the Department's annual report.[4] Another prominent feature was the inclusion of high-quality oriental music, curated and organised by resident cultural authorities.



New Broadcasting Studio at Colombo University College 1927

Professor R. Marrs, Principal of Colombo University College, extended a formal offer to the Post and Telegraph Department to utilise the college's staff room at its Thurston Road university premises. This venue, though intended for academic purposes, was temporarily adapted into a functioning broadcasting studio, representing a significant improvement in available space and acoustics.



The Church of Christ, Galle Face, Colombo

The first live religious program broadcast by the Colombo Broadcasting Service was a service held on the morning of August 8, 1926, from Christ Church, Galle Face, Colombo. Christ Church, Galle Face, in Colombo, Sri Lanka, is a historic Anglican church consecrated on October 13, 1853, established as a Church Missionary Society (CMS) hub to promote the "Union of Races". Situated near the Galle Face Green, it was initially built with kabook stone, later replaced in 1898-1899 with an Early Gothic style brick structure after structural collapse. Key Historical Aspects:

Foundation: *The foundation stone was laid on January 21, 1853, by Bishop of Colombo, the Rt. Rev. Chapman.*

Purpose: *Founded to serve as the CMS Cathedral and a center for evangelical worship, offering services in English, Tamil, and Sinhala.*

Architectural Evolution: *The original 1853 church was replaced in 1899 by a new building designed in the Gothic style, featuring intricate timber, mosaic floors, and stained-glass windows.*

Key Features & Additions: *A 76-foot belfry was added in 1918-1919, housing a one-ton bell.*

Wartime Significance: *During World War II, the church served as a place of worship for British and allied soldiers.*

Structural & Land Changes: *Following damage, the church was reconstructed at the end of the 19th century. Significant portions of land were lost to road expansion in 1961 and 1978, and part was sold in 1981.*

Today, *the church remains an active place of worship and a landmark amidst modern Colombo, maintaining its commitment to a multi-racial congregation.*

These broadcasts, which drew upon both traditional repertoires and contemporary compositions, substantially enriched the programme content and broadened the cultural scope of early radio broadcasting in Ceylon.[5]



The Church of St. Michael & All Angels in Polwatte, Kollupitiya

The first Christmas Eve service broadcast live by the Colombo Broadcasting Service (CBS) was broadcast from St. Michael's Church, Colpetty, Colombo on 24 December 1927.

The Church of St. Michael & All Angels in Polwatte, Kollupitiya, is a historic Anglican church consecrated in 1887, known locally as ***"Gal Palliya"*** *(Stone Church). Founded by British missionaries, the current Neo-Gothic granite structure, completed in 1922, features distinct stained glass, a vaulted ceiling, and serves as a significant landmark of colonial ecclesiastical architecture. Key Historical Details*

Origins: *The mission began in 1844, initially serving the local dhobi community near Beira Lake with a cadjan-roofed chapel.*

Evolution: *A chapel dedicated to St. Thomas (1865) was replaced due to expansion needs.*

Consecration: *The church was dedicated to St. Michael and All Angels on September 29, 1887.*

Structure: *Due to overcrowding, a new building was constructed, with the present, larger granite structure completed and consecrated on St. Michael's Day in 1922.*

Significance: *It serves as a prominent center of worship, with services held in English, Sinhala, and Tamil.*

Architecture: *The church is noted for its Gothic style, including pointed arches and intricate, detailed interiors.*

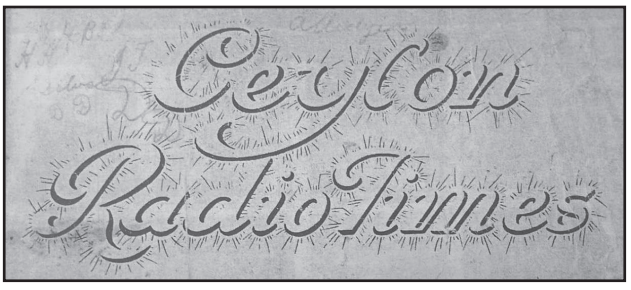
Footnotes:

1. Department of Posts and Telegraphs (Ceylon), Annual Report of the Director of Posts and Telegraphs for the Year 1926 (Colombo: Government Printer, 1927), 15.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid., 16.1. C. L. P. Gunawardana, This is Colombo Calling (Colombo: Perali Publishers, 1990), 25.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.

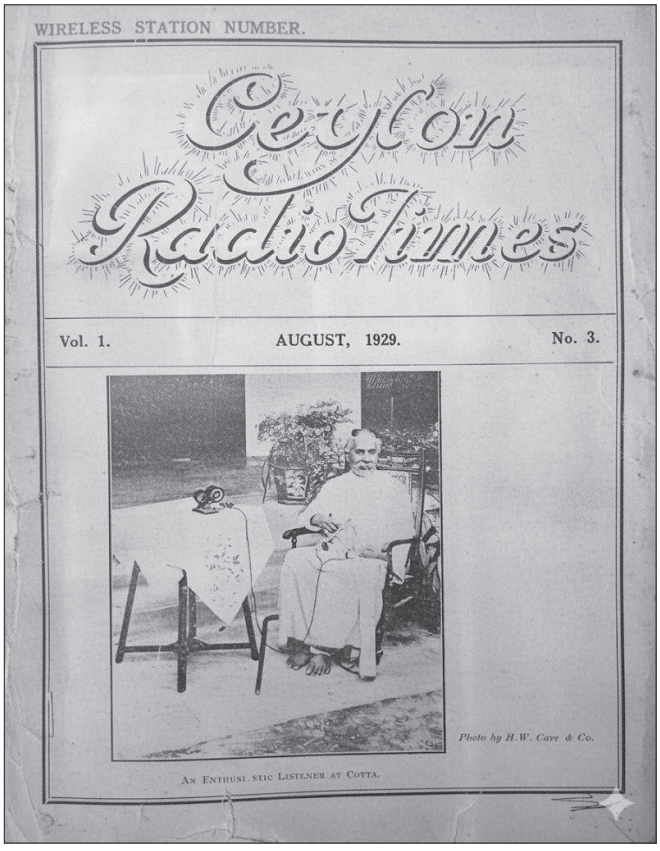
29 November 1926

Introduction of Printed Broadcast Programmes

The fiscal year 1926–1927 marked a turning point in the organisational development of the Colombo Broadcasting Service, particularly in the realm of programme dissemination and listener engagement. In the official budgetary estimates for that year, the Legislative Council authorised the allocation of Rs. 3,000 for the express purpose of producing printed broadcast schedules.[1]



The Ceylon Radio Times *was a publication similar in nature and purpose to the* ***BBC's The Listener and Radio Times,*** *serving as the official journal for its respective broadcasting service. Both were physical magazines that provided radio listings and related editorial content.*


WIRELESS STATION NUMBER.

Ceylon Radio Times

Vol. 1. AUGUST, 1929. No. 3.

Photo by H.W. Cave & Co.

An Enthusiastic Listener at Cotta.


The Listener, November 6, 1929

SPECIAL ILLUSTRATED SUPPLEMENT ON PURITANISM

The Listener

Published by the British Broadcasting Corporation

Vol. II. No. 43 NOVEMBER 6, 1929 [Registered at the G.P.O. as a Newspaper] TWOPENCE

Principal Contents

POINTS OF VIEW—V. By J. B. S. HALDANE ... 601
HOW LIFE BEGAN ON EARTH—THE EVIDENCE OF FOSSILS. By SIR ARTHUR SMITH WOODWARD ... 604
MIND AND BODY. By PROFESSOR WILLIAM BROWN ... 613
CAPITAL AND THE INVESTOR—II. THE SMALL INVESTOR. By A. EMIL DAVIES 615

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Comparison of the Publications
Ceylon Radio Times (CBS)
The Listener (BBC)

Broadcaster:

British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC).
Colombo Brodcasting Service, Radio Ceylon (later the Sri Lanka Broadcasting Corporation)

Purpose:

An intellectual journal that published transcriptions of significant broadcast talks, literary works, reviews, and cultural commentary. It was an intellectual counterpart to the BBC's main listings magazine, the Radio Times.
The official organ of Radio Ceylon, intended to publicize radio programs and publish content related to broadcasting. Content Focused on serious cultural and current affairs content, including articles, book reviews, and crosswords. Primarily contained programme schedules, but also included other content, with some sources noting it had "wonderfully good" programming considering the resources of the island at the time.

Format:

A weekly magazine, initially in a large A3 format.
A physical publication, published fortnightly in English, Sinhala, and Tamil editions.

In summary:

Both were official print extensions of their respective public broadcasters, providing programme details and expanding on broadcast content for their listeners. While The Listener had a distinct, high-brow intellectual focus and the Ceylon Radio Times focused more generally on programme details, their fundamental roles as official guides to the airwaves were very similar.



THE RADIO TIMES

THE OFFICIAL ORGAN OF THE B.B.C.

Vol. 1. No. 1. EVERY FRIDAY. Two Pence.

OFFICIAL PROGRAMMES OF THE BRITISH BROADCASTING COMPANY.

For the Week Commencing SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 30th.

LONDON CARDIFF
BIRMINGHAM NEWCASTLE
MANCHESTER GLASGOW

SPECIAL CONTENTS:

LORD CAWFORD'S MESSAGE TO LISTENERS.

P. P. ECKERSLEY ON "SIMULTANEOUS BROADCASTING"

A SONG OF ANCIENT CHINA.

GOSSIP ABOUT ARTISTES.

WIRELESS HUMOUR.

THE "UNCLES" CORNER.

LETTERS FROM LISTENERS.

WHAT'S IN THE AIR?

By ARTHUR R. BURROWS, Director of Programmes.

BY ARTHUR R. BURROWS.

The Radio Times BBC 1922

Comparison of the Publications
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Primarily contained programme schedules, but also included other content, with some sources noting it had "wonderfully good" programming considering the resources of the island at the time.
Format:
A weekly magazine, initially in a large A3 format.
A physical publication, published fortnightly in English, Sinhala, and Tamil editions.

This appropriation signalled both an administrative recognition of the growing regularity of broadcast operations and an intention to formalise audience communication.

On 29 November 1926, the first printed monthly broadcast programme was issued, Printed by the Government Press and distributed to licensed radio listeners throughout the island.[2] The publication provided advance details of scheduled content, including musical performances, lectures, religious services, and special events, enabling listeners to plan their listening activities in a more systematic manner. [3]

To defray the cost of postage, the printed programme was offered on a subscription basis at an annual rate of Rs. 1.50.[4] While modest in price, this subscription model represented an early attempt at audience-funded supplementary services, creating a precedent for later revenue-generating initiatives such as souvenir publications and special programme booklets.[5]

Analytical Note:

The introduction of a printed broadcast schedule in 1926 was more than an administrative convenience it represented a critical moment in the professionalisation of radio broadcasting in Ceylon.

Firstly , it transformed listening from a casual or incidental activity into an act of intentional cultural consumption, reinforcing radio's role as a planned leisure and educational medium.[6]

Secondly , it enhanced the station's public accountability, as the publication of advance schedules created an implicit promise to deliver advertised content, thus shaping listener expectations and service standards.

Thirdly, it positioned the Colombo Broadcasting Service in line with international broadcasting norms of the 1920s, when printed programme guides such as the BBC's Radio Times, first issued in September 1923 were becoming a defining feature of modern broadcasting infrastructure.[7]

Footnotes:

1. Legislative Council of Ceylon, Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the Year 1926–1927 (Colombo: Government Printer, 1926), 45.
2. Department of Posts and Telegraphs (Ceylon), Annual Report of the Director of Posts and Telegraphs for the Year 1926 (Colombo: Government Printer, 1927), 16.
3. C. L. P. Gunawardana, This is Colombo Calling (Colombo: Perali Publishers, 1990), 25–26.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. Asa Briggs, The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom, Vol. I: The Birth of Broadcasting (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961), 196–97.
7. Ibid., 195.

December 1926

Commendation from the Postmaster General of Great Britain for Mr. Edward Harper

In December 1926, the Postmaster General of the United Kingdom, Sir William Mitchell-Thomson, while introducing a bill in the British Parliament concerning the future of the British Broadcasting Company, offered high commendation for the progress of broadcasting within the British Empire. In his address, he remarked:

"Four years ago broadcasting was a toy, whereas today it is a power. How great a power is not yet, perhaps, apprehended. It is power not only national but international."[1]

In light of this acknowledgment, it is notable that Ceylon, under the visionary leadership of Mr. Edward Harper, Chief Engineer of the Telegraph and Telephone Service, had already recognized the immense potential of broadcasting.



Sir William Lowson Mitchell-Thomson, 1st Baron Selsdon KBE PC
known as Sir William Mitchell-Thomson, 2nd Baronet, from 1918 to 1932, was a Scottish politician who served as ***British Postmaster-General from 1924 till 1929.***

As early as 1924, Ceylon emerged as one of the first British colonies to harness and implement this transformative medium for the benefit of its population.[2]

Evidence from the Times of Ceylon confirms that experimental broadcasts were conducted on 22 February 1924, during the opening of the Colombo YMCA building, making Ceylon one of the earliest colonial territories to enter the broadcasting era.[3] **Moreover, the Ceylon Government allocated funds in its 1926–27 budget for the printing of monthly broadcast programmes, further institutionalizing the service and reflecting official recognition of its importance.[4]**

This early initiative stands as a testament to Harper's foresight and the island's progressive embrace of one of the most influential technological advancements of the modern era. His work not only prefigured the Postmaster General's parliamentary observations but also situated Ceylon within the vanguard of broadcasting innovation in the Empire.

Footnotes:

1. United Kingdom, Parliamentary Debates (Hansard), House of Commons, 6 December 1926, vol. 200, col. 53.
2. Edward Harper, "Report on Experimental Wireless Broadcasting, 1924," Ceylon Telegraph Department Papers, National Archives of Sri Lanka.
3. Times of Ceylon, February 23, 1924.
4. Ceylon Legislative Council Debates, Financial Estimates, 1926–27, Government of Ceylon, Colombo; see also Ceylon Government Gazette, November 29, 1926, which records the printing of the first monthly broadcast programme.

December 1926

Growrh in Radio Licences and Institutional Consolidation and Expansion of Broadcasting in Ceylon

By the end of 1926, Ceylon's broadcasting service had progressed from its experimental origins into a more structured and publicly engaged medium. Under the leadership of Edward Harper, Chief Engineer of the Telegraph and Telephone Service, the first printed monthly broadcast programme was issued on 29 November 1926, produced by the Government Press and distributed to licensed listeners.[1] This initiative not only formalized the schedule of transmissions but also enhanced accessibility and awareness of broadcasting among the population.[2]

The impact of these institutional measures is evident in the rapid expansion of the listener base. By the close of 1926, the number of licensed radio receivers had risen to approximately 448, representing an increase of 272 licences compared to the previous year.[3] Concurrently, the volume of programming expanded significantly, with a total of 968 programmes transmitted during the year, amounting to an estimated 820 hours of scheduled broadcasting.[4]

When compared to other territories in the British Empire, Ceylon's progress was particularly noteworthy. Broadcasting in India was still in its formative stage, with the Indian Broadcasting Company only formally established in 1927, while Burma and Malaya relied largely on amateur stations during the same period.[5] **Ceylon thus emerged as one of the earliest colonial administrations to institutionalize radio broadcasting, well ahead of several larger territories. This achievement underscores both Harper's foresight and the island's readiness to embrace new communication technologies, ensuring that by the mid-1920s, radio had already begun to take root as a medium of cultural, educational, and social significance.**

Footnotes:

1. Ceylon Government Gazette, November 29, 1926.
2. Edward Harper, "Report on Experimental Wireless Broadcasting, 1924," Ceylon Telegraph Department Papers, National Archives of Sri Lanka.
3. Ceylon, Administrative Report of the Postmaster General, 1926 (Colombo: Government Printer, 1927), 12.
4. Ibid., 13.
5. Chandrika Kaul, Communications, Media and the Imperial Experience: Britain and India in the Twentieth Century (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 41–45.

1927

January 1927

Contribution of Pioneering Scholars to the Colombo Broadcasting Service

During 1927, the Colombo Broadcasting Service increasingly drew upon the island's scientific and scholarly community to shape talks and public lectures. Although complete weekly programme bills for that year survive chiefly in newspapers and departmental files, the following figures can be securely connected to early broadcasting in Ceylon and to topics consistent with their professional portfolios:

1. **Dr. Joseph Pearson -** Director, Colombo Museum (National Museum, Colombo); eminent zoologist and naturalist. Pearson's institutional role and published work on Ceylonese fauna make him a natural fit for popular science broadcasts in this period; Radio Ceylon retrospectives note museum-linked contributions in the station's formative years.[1]

2. **Dr. R. L. Spittel -** Surgeon and anthropologist; noted for work with the Veddas. Spittel is attested as a radio lecturer by the late 1930s and is repeatedly cited in broadcasting histories as an early contributor; this supports (though does not by itself date) participation in the Service's late-1920s talk formats.[2]

3. **(Dr.) Cyril Wace (C. W.) Nicholas -** was indeed a notable historian and archaeologist with a significant output related to Ceylon (now Sri Lanka). His output in Ceylonese history and archaeology, appearances in general-interest broadcast talks are plausible but require a check against 1927 programme bills to assign with certainty.[3]

4. **Dr. Wasey Woods -** Associated with colonial medical / public-health work in Ceylon. Talks on sanitation and health align with the Service's educational remit in these years; specific titles/dates should be verified against weekly schedules.[4]

5. **Dr. F. O'Brien Ellison -** An educator / academic referenced in early programme reminiscences; likely involved in science or education broadcasts; confirmation of exact appearances remains an archival task.[5]

6. **Prof. D. R. R. Burt -** University College academic. Given the Service's collaboration with University College staff for public lectures, Burt's participation is consistent with the Service's 1926–27 talk series; precise billings to be confirmed in newspapers.[6]



Dr. Richard Lionel Spittel,
a notable Ceylonese physician and author, commonly known as ***Dr. R.L. Spittel.***
He was a renowned city surgeon who also served as a ***"jungle doctor"*** *to the Veddahs (Sri Lanka's indigenous people).*

Beyond his medical practice, he was known for his extensive writings on the Veddah community and his tireless crusades for wildlife conservation in Sri Lanka.

He lived from December 9, 1881, to September 3, 1969. His work included descriptive writings and a book titled Essentials of Surgery.

7. **Prof. Leigh Smith -** Probably a humanities or social-science academic connected with University College; likely contributor of lecture-style programmes; specific dates/topics pending programme-page verification.[7]

8. **Ronald Ross -** Nobel Laureate (1902) for the malaria parasite. Ross's medical outreach and visibility made him a marquee name for health-education broadcasting across the Empire; however, a positive identification of this Ronald Ross on the Colombo schedule must be established from local programme lists.[8]

9. **W. J. Bell -** Early wireless/radio engineer / administrator associated with technical development at Colombo; a plausible voice for technical talks and demonstrations in the Service's engineering-forward phase.[9]

10. W. N. Ray - Likely a colonial educator / civil servant providing general-interest talks; requires programme-page corroboration for 1927.[10]

11. A. J. Bamford - Superintendent, Colombo Observatory. Bamford's published research on Ceylon meteorology and instrumentation, and his Observatory post, make him a strong candidate for scientific and meteorological broadcasts carried by the Service.[11]

Note:

The pattern evident in 1926–27 experts offering short lectures and topical talks reflects the Service's use of museum staff, university teachers, medical officers, and technical personnel to build a schedule that blended education with public service. Programme bills in the Ceylon Daily News and the Postmaster-General's Administrative Reports for these years should be consulted to pin down exact dates, titles, and languages for the individual items listed above.[12]

Footnotes:

1. C. L. Pujitha-Gunawardana, This Is Colombo Calling, 1924–1949 (Reminiscences) (Nugegoda: Perali Publishers, 1990), esp. early chapters on programme development and institutional partners; see also Joseph Pearson's institutional biography: "Joseph Pearson (zoologist)," Wikipedia, last modified June 2024, accessed August 16, 2025.
2. R. L. Spittel documented as a broadcaster: see Tamil compilation quoting broadcast talk notices (late 1930s), which demonstrates his radio presence even if later than 1927; Pujitha-Gunawardana also lists medical/anthropological talks among early features. "Untitled [compiled broadcast notices]," Noolaham PDF, accessed August 16, 2025; Pujitha-Gunawardana, This Is Colombo Calling, passim.
3. For the Nicholas scholarly family's prominence in Ceylonese history/archaeology in this era, see general references in Pujitha-Gunawardana, This Is Colombo Calling; specific broadcast attributions should be checked against 1927 programme pages in the Ceylon Daily News.
4. Pujitha-Gunawardana, This Is Colombo Calling, on medical and public-health talks in the late 1920s; precise appearances of "Dr. Wasey Woods" require inspection of programme bills.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid.
8. On Ronald Ross's identity and suitability as a medical broadcaster, see biographical context in standard references; attribution to Colombo in 1927 requires local listings. Pujitha-Gunawardana, This Is Colombo Calling.
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid.
11. For A. J. Bamford's role and Ceylon-based scientific publications, see "Colombo Observatory, Ceylon," Archives Hub (JISC), collection summary; see also A. J. Bamford, "The Design of Rain Gages," Meteorological Magazine 57 (1922): 240–43 (cited in a technical bibliography summarizing tests in Ceylon).

12. Postmaster-General, Administrative Report of the Postmaster-General, Ceylon, 1926–1927 (Colombo: Government Press, 1927–28); Pujitha-Gunawardana, This Is Colombo Calling (contains appendices on early programme growth and licensee counts); for broader narrative of 1924–27 experiments and schedules, see "Colombo Calling," Vernon Corea blog, which aggregates historical notes and images (use as a pointer to primary sources).

March 1927

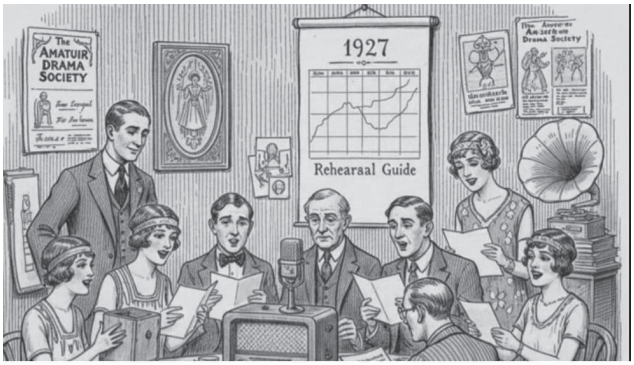
Introduction of BBC Short Plays to Colombo Broadcasting

In early 1927, the Colombo Broadcasting Station began relaying short radio dramas produced by the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC). The first BBC-affiliated broadcast in Ceylon featured a production entitled Wireless Drama, which was staged by the Ceylon Amateur Dramatic Society under the direction of J. S. M. Patterson.[1] This development marked a significant expansion of Ceylon's radio programming, aligning it with the standards and artistic aspirations of international broadcasting.

The introduction of BBC dramatic content represented a deliberate cultural elevation in the scope of local radio. By incorporating such material, Colombo's broadcasting service not only diversified its offerings but also demonstrated an increasing alignment with metropolitan BBC practices during this formative period of global broadcasting.[2]

Reperence Notes:

1. Arthur Burrows, The Story of Broadcasting (London: Cassell and Company, 1924), 115; see also "Phyllis M. Twigg (Moira Meighn), the BBC's First Original Radio Dramatist," Kultura Press, September 24, 2022, https://kulturapress.com.



BBC Radio Drama 1927

In 1927, the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) was exploring and defining its approach to radio drama, leading to the development of a "definite school of wireless drama". The BBC's work in this period is documented in historical accounts and archives, including the "Talks and Lectures" publications from that year. Key aspects of BBC wireless drama in 1927

Include:

Establishment of the BBC The year 1927 marked a significant change as the British Broadcasting Company became the British Broadcasting Corporation by Royal Charter in January.

*John Reith, now Sir John Reith, became its first Director-General, solidifying the BBC's public service mandate to *"educate, inform and entertain".*

Developing an Art Form There was an active effort to define the unique characteristics and potential of radio as a medium for dramatic expression, distinct from stage theatre.

Pioneering Playwrights The BBC engaged various writers, including Lady Gregory, one of the earliest radio playwrights, although most dramatists at the time were male.

Programming Context Drama was part of a rapidly expanding range of programming that also saw the first live sports commentaries of events like the FA Cup Final, the Boat Race, and the Derby.

Archival Information Detailed information on the specific plays and programming from this era can be found in the BBC's "Programmes as Broadcast" lists and handbooks from the period.



This image captures a moment during a radio drama recording session, likely related to the BBC's "A Wireless War" production.

The scene depicts a group of actors gathered around microphones in a studio, holding scripts and seemingly in the midst of a performance.

Radio dramas were highly popular, peaking in the 1940s, and this image reflects the collaborative nature of bringing these performances to life.

The setup, including the vintage microphones and the formal attire of the participants, suggests a historical context for the recording.

"A Wireless War" is a specific production that follows the BBC's radio actors as they are evacuated to the countryside in 1939 to continue their work during wartime.

The first specially written play for the BBC was The Truth About Father Christmas, written and performed by Phyllis Twigg (under the pen name Moira Meighn) and broadcast live on Christmas Eve 1922 from station 2LO. By contrast, Richard Hughes's Danger long assumed to be the first BBC radio play was not transmitted until January 1924. See Asa Briggs, The Birth of Broadcasting: The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom, Volume I (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), 141.

2. "BBC Radio Drama History: Shakespeare Adaptations, 1923," Kultura Press, August 30, 2022, https://kulturapress.com. The BBC's early dramatic experiments included the broadcast of excerpts from Julius Caesar on February 16, 1923, featuring Robert Atkins and Basil Gill. For context on early Ceylonese broadcasting, see "Sri Lanka Broadcasting Corporation," Wikipedia, last modified July 2025, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sri_Lanka Broadcasting_Corporation.

May 1927

The Introduction of Sports News on the Colombo Broadcasting Service

The regular broadcast of sports news on the Colombo Broadcasting Service commenced in May 1927, representing an important milestone in the development of radio journalism in Ceylon.[1] This initiative was spearheaded by Sampal Peter Foenander S.P.Foenander, a distinguished sports journalist associated with the Ceylon Observer, who became one of the earliest voices to bring organized sports reporting to the airwaves.[2]

In the absence of a teleprinter system at the broadcasting station, sports reports were manually compiled from daily newspapers and other available print media.[3] Despite these logistical limitations, the inclusion of sports coverage reflected both the increasing public appetite for athletic events and the broader transformation of radio into a medium for timely and engaging information dissemination.[4]

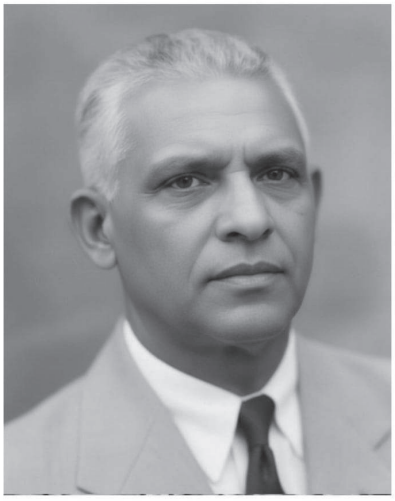
Footnotes:

1. "Sports Broadcasts in Ceylon," Ceylon Observer, May 15, 1927, 6.
2. C. L. P. Gunawardana, This is Colombo Calling (Colombo: Perali Publishers, 1990), 26.
3. Ibid.
4. James Curran and Jean Seaton, Power Without Responsibility: Press, Broadcasting and the Internet in Britain, 7th ed. (London: Routledge, 2010), 102–3.

May 1927

The First Live Sinhala Musical Programme on the Colombo Broadcasting Service

In 1927, approximately ten percent of the broadcasting hours on the Colombo Broadcasting Service were dedicated to Oriental music, encompassing Sinhala, Tamil, and Indian musical traditions.[1] **A landmark event in this programming was the broadcast of the first live Sinhala musical performance, presented by M. G. Perera along with his pupils.[2] Among the performers were C. R. Batuwantudawe and Don Manis Pattiaratchi, both students of Perera. At the time, Perera conducted a music class specifically aimed at white-collar workers, reflecting a deliberate effort to democratize musical education and promote indigenous musical culture through the medium of radio.[3]**



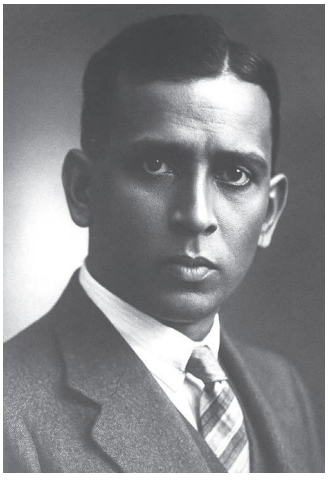
Mr. M G. Perera

Footnotes:

1. Sunil Abeysekera, Voices over the Air: The Evolution of Broadcasting in Sri Lanka (Colombo: Lake House Press, 1997), 31–32.
2. G. S. Perera, Broadcasting in Sri Lanka: A Historical Overview (Colombo: Department of Information, 1982), 45.
3. R. A. L. H. Peiris, "The Development of Mass Communication in Ceylon," Ceylon Journal of Historical Studies 6, no. 1 (1957): 28.



Mr. C. R. Batuwanthudawa



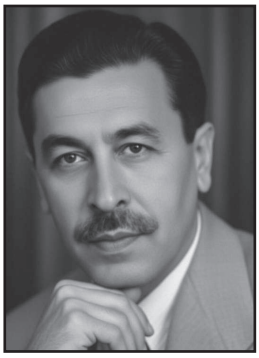
Mr. Don Manis Pattiarchchi

May 1927

Pioneering Sinhala Music Performers on the Colombo Broadcasting Service

Following the first live Sinhala musical broadcast on the Colombo Broadcasting Service in May 1927, a substantial number of vocalists and musicians began contributing regularly to Sinhala music programming, many sustaining their involvement over the subsequent three decades.[1] **Among these pioneering artists were K. Sadaris Silva, T. C. Senanayake, B. Eddie de Silva, H. W. Rupasinghe, T. Terence Fernando, T. V. Edwin Perera, Kokila Devi, H. Don Vincent, M. K. Vincent, and Greta Jeanette de Silva.[2] Additional contributors included Sarana Gupta Amarasinghe, K. Lionel Perera, Ananda Samarakoon, A. R. M. Ibrahim, Wilfred J. Peiris, and Regina Perera. Institutional participants, such as Sri Vaishaka College, Wellawatte, and the Posts and Telegeaph Department Drama Society, also played a key role in popularizing Sinhala musical broadcasts.[3]**

The sustained contributions of these individuals and institutions laid the foundation for a robust tradition of indigenous music on Sri Lankan radio, reflecting an increasing public appreciation for national cultural expression within the domain of public broadcasting.[4]



Mr. H. W Rupasingha (Rupasingha Master)



Mr. K. Sadaris (Sadaris Master)



Mr. M. K. Vincent



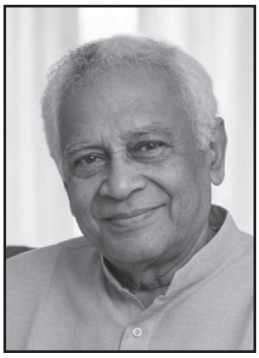
Mrs. Kokila Devi Weerathunga



Mrs. Greta Jeanette de Silva



Mrs. Regina Perera



Mr. Saranaguptha Amarasingha



Mr. Ananda Samarakoon



Mr. A. R. M. Ibrahim



Mrs. Ceciliana Dias



Mrs. Nona Zubeida



Mrs. V.P. Leelawathi



Mr. Devar Suryasena



Mr. Hubert Rajapaksha



Mr. Titus Samaraweera

Footnotes:

1. Sunil Abeysekera, Voices over the Air: The Evolution of Broadcasting in Sri Lanka (Colombo: Lake House Press, 1997), 33–34.
2. G. S. Perera, Broadcasting in Sri Lanka: A Historical Overview (Colombo: Department of Information, 1982), 47.
3. D. M. Colambage, Guvan Viduli Vanshaya, (Colombo: M. D. Gunasena & Company, 1990), 10 - 11.
4. Ibid.

27 October 1927

R. R. Anderson:
Colombo's (CBS) First Full-Fledged Broadcasting Announcer

On 27 October 1927, a European listener in India commended the performance of Colombo's English-language announcer, R. R. Anderson, describing him as "the best he had ever heard."[1] Anderson was the first full-fledged announcer of the Colombo Broadcasting Service, carrying responsibility not only for live English broadcasts but also for organizing programmes in Sinhala and Tamil, languages under the direction of the Chief Engineer of Posts and Telegraph and the Controller of Broadcasting.[2] The Postmaster General served as the Director of Broadcasting during this period.[3]

From the inception of broadcasting in Ceylon until September 1934, Anderson performed dual duties as both announcer and programme officer.[4] During this period, he reported to his immediate superior that he felt "tongue-tied" before the microphone and requested reassignment. Consequently, on 1 October 1934, he was relieved of his announcing duties and assigned full-time to programme work, designated as **"Clerk Broadcasting," code CBC.[5] All announcers were required to work under the supervision of the CRC. Anderson devoted twelve years to the Colombo Broadcasting Service, residing at the station premises, which were reputedly haunted, and made occasional visits home to see his wife and children.[6]**

In 1936, Anderson reported suffering from neurasthenia and melancholia, seeking a complete change of duties. He was reverted to his substantive position in the Postal Clerical Service in February 1936 and ultimately retired at the age of sixty as an **Executive Grade, Special Class Postal Clerical Servant.[7]** Following his departure, he refrained from entering the Broadcasting Station but continued to follow its programmes, particularly English-language talks on Buddhism, and frequently congratulated notable speakers such as C. L. P. Gunawardana by telephone.[8]

Footnotes:

1. D. M. Colombage, Guwan Viduli Vanshaya (Colombo: M. D. Gunasena & Company, 1989), 13.
2. Sunil Abeysekera, Voices over the Air: The Evolution of Broadcasting in Sri Lanka (Colombo: Lake House Press, 1997), 37.
3. C. L. P. Gunawardana, This is Colombo Calling (Colombo: Perali Publishers, 1990), 27–28.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid.

11 November 1927

The First BBC Relay Attempt in Ceylon



On 11 November 1927, the Colombo Broadcasting Service undertook its first attempt to relay a transmission from the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) to Ceylon via shortwave technology.[1] **The broadcast originated from the Albert Hall Memorial Festival in London, during which Edward, the Prince of Wales (later King Edward VIII), delivered an address.[2]** This experiment represented a pioneering effort to connect Ceylonese audiences with international broadcasts and to integrate global content into local radio programming.

Although the local receiving apparatus reportedly functioned satisfactorily, the signal strength was notably weak, and the transmission suffered from pronounced fading, rendering the relay technically unsuccessful.[3]

The Royal Albert Hall Memorial Festival,

Officially known as the Royal British Legion Festival of Remembrance, is an annual event held at the Royal Albert Hall in London to honor the sacrifices made by the British and Commonwealth Armed Forces community.

History

The first Festival of Remembrance was organized by the British Legion (now the Royal British Legion) in 1927 and held at the Royal Albert Hall. However, an earlier event, "In Memory 1914-1918-A Cenotaph In Sound," was held in 1923, which served as a precursor.

Initial Concept:

The idea for a national event stemmed from the desire to commemorate the first anniversary of the end of World War I with a universal two-minute silence, a practice suggested by King George V in 1919.

Early Years:

The 1927 festival was an immediate success, featuring military bands, community singing of war songs, and incorporating the two-minute silence and "The Last Post" bugle call. The Royal Family has attended the event since its early days, with King George V and Queen Mary attending in 1928.

Broadcasting:

The show has been broadcast by BBC Radio since 1927 and later televised by BBC One, making it a nationwide event.

Evolution:

Over the decades, the festival has evolved to include personal testimonies, storytelling, musical performances by various artists, and a poppy drop from the ceiling during the two-minute silence.

Background and Purpose:

The Festival of Remembrance serves as the primary commemorative event the day before Remembrance Sunday. It is distinct from the permanent Albert Memorial located north of the Hall, which was commissioned by Queen Victoria in memory of her late husband, Prince Albert, who died in 1861. The Hall itself was named in his honor and opened in 1871, fulfilling his vision for the advancement of the arts and sciences.

Nevertheless, the attempt constituted an important early step in international radio communication and provided a foundation for subsequent improvements in relay technology and transnational broadcasting.[4]

Footnotes:

1. G. S. Perera, Broadcasting in Sri Lanka: A Historical Overview (Colombo: Department of Information, 1982), 49.
2. D. M. Colombage, Guwan Viduli Vanshaya (Colombo: M. D. Gunasena & Company, 1989), 60.
3. Sunil Abeysekera, Voices over the Air: The Evolution of Broadcasting in Sri Lanka (Colombo: Lake House Press, 1997), 35.
4. Ibid., 36.



The structure in the image is the Albert Memorial, an ornate monument located in Kensington Gardens, London.

It was commissvioned by Queen Victoria in memory of her beloved husband, Prince Albert, who died of typhoid in 1861, at the age of 42.

Designed by Sir George Gilbert Scott in the Gothic Revival style, the memorial was opened in 1872.

The memorial features a 14-foot gilded statue of Prince Albert seated beneath a gothic-style canopy topped by a spire, reaching a total height of 176 feet.

The design was partly inspired by the 13th-century Eleanor Crosses.

It stands directly north of the Royal Albert Hall.

11 November 1927

The First BBC Relay Attempt in Ceylon: Analysis from the BBC's Perspective

1. Strategic and Symbolic Objectives

From the BBC's standpoint, the relay represented a deliberate effort to project Britain's cultural, political, and ceremonial events to the wider Empire. Broadcasting the Albert Hall Memorial Festival including the address by Edward, the Prince of Wales was both a technological demonstration and a form of soft power diplomacy. By attempting to relay such events to distant audiences in Ceylon, the BBC sought to affirm its role as a global cultural broadcaster and strengthen imperial cohesion through shared media experiences.

2. Technical Experimentation

The 1927 relay must be seen as part of the BBC's early experimentation with shortwave technology. While domestic broadcasting relied on medium-wave (AM) frequencies, shortwave offered the possibility of long-distance, cross-continental transmission. The BBC likely anticipated challenges with signal fading, atmospheric interference, and reception quality, but the experiment provided invaluable operational data for improving relay protocols, antenna design, and scheduling for tropical reception conditions.

3. Institutional Learning and Knowledge Transfer

The attempted relay served as a testing ground for international collaboration, as the BBC had to coordinate with local engineers and receivers in Ceylon. Although the broadcast was not technically successful, it generated lessons about signal propagation over long distances, timing, and atmospheric effects. These insights contributed directly to the refinement of future shortwave services, including the eventual launch of the BBC Empire Service in 1932, which institutionalized international broadcasting to the colonies and dominions.

4. Public Relations and Empire-Building Considerations

Even an unsuccessful relay carried symbolic value. Reports of the attempt would have been framed positively in official correspondence and internal reports: the BBC demonstrated a commitment to innovation and global outreach. For the BBC, the primary objective was not merely flawless transmission but establishing the credibility of radio as a medium capable of linking Britain with its overseas audiences.

5. Legacy in BBC International Broadcasting

From the BBC perspective, the Ceylon relay foreshadowed the development of structured empire wide programming, which included a mix of news, cultural content, and ceremonial events. It illustrated both the promise and limitations of early radio technology, helping shape policies and investments in transmitter infrastructure, frequency management, and technical training that would underpin the BBC's global services.



Edward VIII, as prince of Wales
(later King Edward VIII)

Edward VIII, who was the Prince of Wales at the time the photo was taken. The photo shows him in military uniform, likely during or shortly after the First World War, an era when he frequently toured British dominions and other countries.

Analytical Note:

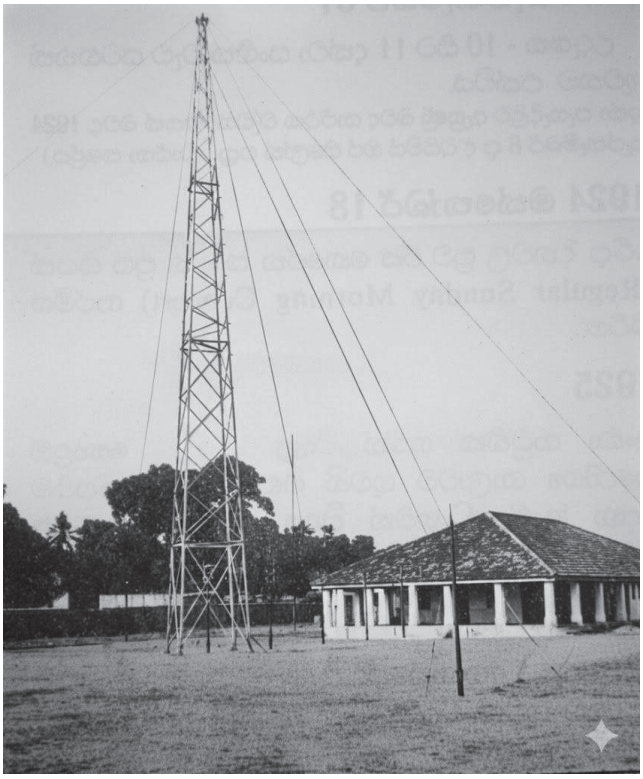
For the BBC, the 11 November 1927 relay to Ceylon was less about immediate technical success and more about strategic experimentation, cultural diplomacy, and institutional learning. It exemplified the corporation's early ambition to project Britain's voice globally and test the viability of international broadcasting, laying the groundwork for the Empire Service and later worldwide shortwave networks.

December 1927

Relocation of the Programme Office, Broadcasting Equipment and Studio to Torrington Square

By December 1927, the Colombo Broadcasting Service had identified significant operational inefficiencies in its existing broadcasting arrangements. At that time, programmes were transmitted by installing a microphone and portable amplifier at a temporary studio within the University College premises shortly before each broadcast. The signal was then routed through the Central Telegraph Office (C.T.O.) for transmission to the listening public.[1] This ad hoc arrangement proved cumbersome, time-consuming, and limited in technical reliability, constraining the station's ability to deliver consistent and professional broadcasts.

In response to these limitations, the broadcasting authorities decided to relocate the Programme Office, studio facilities, and equipment to the premises at Torrington Square, which had recently been vacated by the Lunatic Asylum.[2] This relocation offered several advantages: it provided larger and more adaptable physical space, allowed for a more permanent and technically stable studio configuration, and facilitated the consolidation of administrative and technical functions under one roof. The move also reflected the early recognition of broadcasting as a professional enterprise requiring purpose-built facilities rather than temporary or improvised arrangements.[3]



Colombo Broadcasting Service Premises. (December, 1927)

The broadcasting authorities decided to relocate the Programme Office, studio facilities, and equipment to ***the premises at Torrington Square, which had recently been vacated by the Lunatic Asylum.***

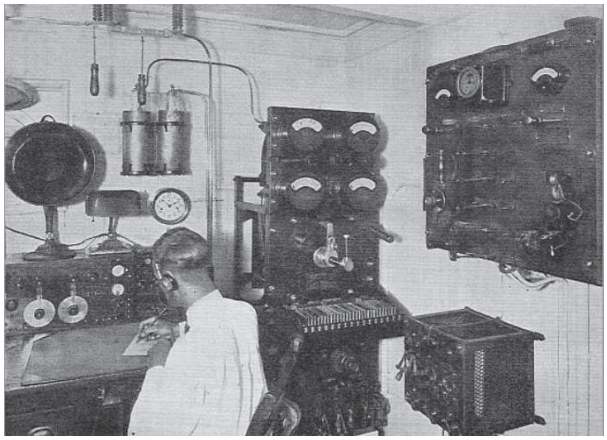
This relocation offered several advantages:

It provided larger and more adaptable physical space, allowed for a more permanent and technically stable studio configuration, and facilitated the ***consolidation of administrative and technical functions under one roof.***

Torrington Square subsequently became the foundation for the modern national broadcasting infrastructure in Ceylon. Over time, the site was developed into the headquarters of the Sri Lanka Broadcasting Corporation (SLBC), featuring purpose-built studios, modern equipment, and dedicated programme offices.[4] This relocation marked a pivotal step in the institutionalization of broadcasting in Ceylon, signaling the transition from experimental operations to a permanent, organized, and professional radio service capable of supporting a growing and diverse programme schedule.

Footnotes:

1. G. S. Perera, Broadcasting in Sri Lanka: A Historical Overview (Colombo: Department of Information, 1982), 55.
2. D. M. Colombage, Guwan Viduli Vanshaya (Colombo: M. D. Gunasena & Company, 1989), 68.
3. Sunil Abeysekera, Voices over the Air: The Evolution of Broadcasting in Sri Lanka (Colombo: Lake House Press, 1997), 39–40.
4. C. L. P. Gunawardana, This is Colombo Calling (Colombo: Perali Publishers, 1990), 27.



Early 20th-century radio room

likely from the 1920s, showing an operator at work with vintage equipment. This type of setup was crucial for early wireless communication and broadcasting.

The operator is using a large, complex radio transmitter, possibly a remote-control unit for a station like WCCO, as suggested by similar images from that era.

The equipment features numerous dials, large vacuum tubes (possibly water-cooled), and a large wall-mounted control panel, characteristic of early high-power transmitters.

Early radio stations used master oscillator-power amplifier (MOPA) designs and various modulation techniques like Heising modulation.

The scene reflects the pioneering days of radio, a time when technology was rapidly advancing, with the first commercial broadcast transmitters emerging in the early 1920s.

December 1927

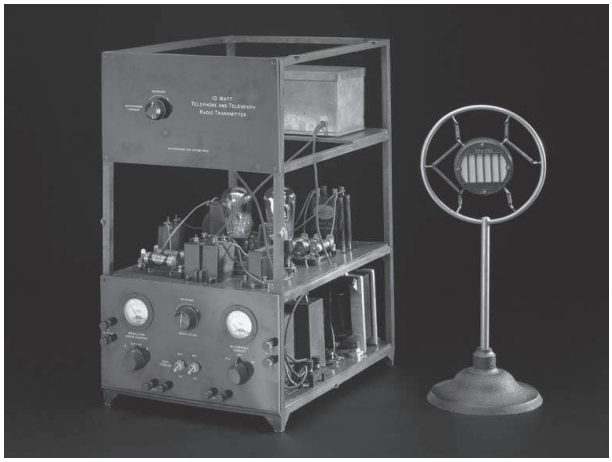
Radio License Issuance and Its Growth

The Annual Administrative Report of the Postmaster General for 1927 recorded that a total of 924 radio licenses had been issued in Ceylon by the end of that year.[1] This represented a significant increase from the 448 licenses registered in December 1926, reflecting the issuance of 476 additional licenses within a twelve-month period.[2]

Analytical Note:

This substantial growth underscores the expanding public enthusiasm for, and adoption of, radio broadcasting during its formative phase in Ceylon. The doubling of licenses within a single year is particularly noteworthy when considered against the economic and social backdrop of the late 1920s.

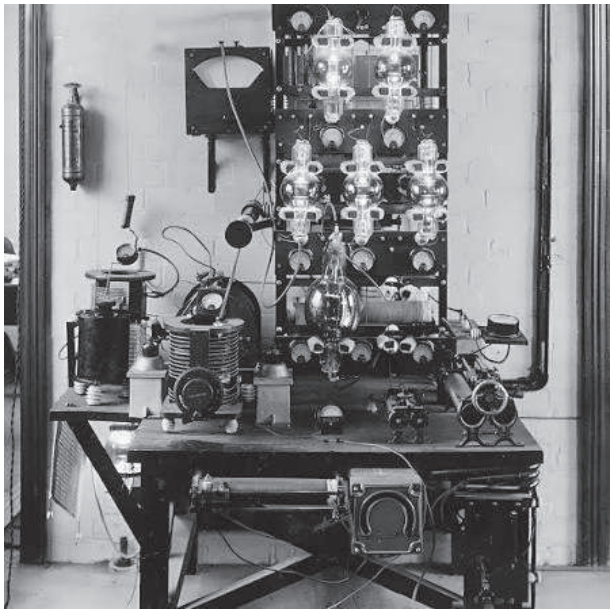
At the time, radio receiving sets were relatively expensive and accessible primarily to the urban middle and upper classes, as well as to selected institutional audiences such as schools, clubs, and government offices.[3] **The willingness of nearly 500 new subscribers to invest in licenses suggests that broadcasting had already begun to establish itself not merely as a novelty but as a valued medium of information and entertainment.**



This is a historical 10 Watt Telephone and Telegraph Radio Transmitter.

It is a vintage electronic device with a wooden frame. It has dials, gauges, and switches displayed on a red surface. The device provided a calibrated low-level, modulated, wide-band, RF signal to test radio receivers.

A critical part of these generators is their attenuator, which needed careful shielding to get microvolt level signals.



BBC Daventry Empire (Short Wave) Transmitting Station (5XGB) in 1926.

Moreover, the Postmaster General's licensing records provide a reliable quantitative measure of radio's diffusion across the island. Licensing was not only a regulatory mechanism to ensure state control over wireless communication but also a fiscal instrument that contributed to funding broadcasting operations.[4] The marked increase in license uptake indicates both the success of early programming initiatives such as live musical performances, educational lectures, and sports reportsand the growing prestige of the Colombo Broadcasting Service.

This trend also aligns with global developments of the same period, when broadcasting was rapidly expanding from experimental transmissions into a recognized medium of mass communication. By 1927, similar growth trajectories were visible in British India, Australia, and other parts of the British Empire.[5] In this sense, the surge in Ceylon's license numbers reflected the island's integration into wider technological and cultural shifts, foreshadowing the central role radio would play in shaping public life during the decades to follow.

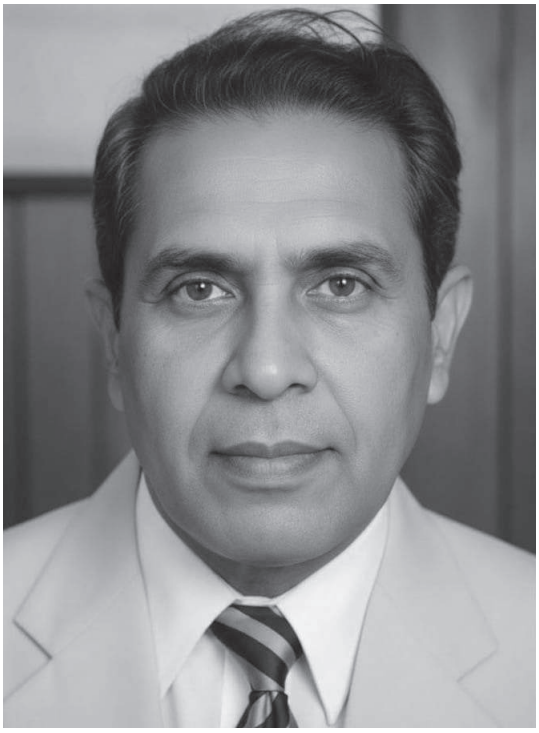
Footnotes:

1. Ceylon, Report of the Postmaster General for the Year 1927 (Colombo: Government Printer, 1928), 12.
2. Ibid., 11.
3. D. M. Colombage, Guwan Viduli Vanshaya (Colombo: M. D. Gunasena & Company, 1989), 34.
4. G. S. Perera, Broadcasting in Sri Lanka: A Historical Overview (Colombo: Department of Information, 1982), 59.
5. Asa Briggs, The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom, Vol. I: The Birth of Broadcasting (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961), 289–92.

1928

28 February 1928

The First Sinhala Radio Talk: Clarifying a Historical Misconception



Pandit P. T. Gunawardana

This is the person who first gave a lecture in Sinhala on the Colombo Broadcasting Service (CBS) under the title "Lankave Tarunaya" (The Youth of Ceylon) on 28 February 1928.

On 28 February 1928, Pandit P. T. Gunawardena delivered a radio talk entitled "The Youth of Ceylon" (Lankāvē Taruṇaya), which is documented as the first Sinhala-language address broadcast over the Ceylon Radio Service.[1] This event occupies a significant place in the historiography of broadcasting in Sri Lanka, as it challenges the long-standing but inaccurate belief that the first Sinhala broadcast was made by the Most Venerable Pelene Sri Vajiragnana Maha Nayaka Thero.

It is essential to distinguish between these two milestones. The Most Venerable Pelene Sri Vajiragnana Maha Nayaka Thero undoubtedly delivered the first Buddhist sermon in Sinhala to be broadcast via radio a landmark event in the religious and cultural adaptation of the medium.[2] However, this sermon occurred after the talk by Pandit Gunawardena. Contemporary reports in both the 'Dinamina' and the 'Times of Ceylon,' dated 27 and 28 February 1928, provide clear evidence that Gunawardena's address preceded the broadcast of the Maha Nayaka Thero.[3]

Therefore, when assessing the chronology of Sinhala broadcasting, Pandit Gunawardena must be credited as the pioneer who delivered the first Sinhala-language radio address, while the Maha Nayaka Thero retains the distinction of inaugurating Sinhala Buddhist preaching over the airwaves. This clarification not only rectifies a historical misconception but also underscores the multifaceted character of early Sinhala broadcasting, which embraced both secular intellectual discourse and religious instruction.

Footnotes:

1. Times of Ceylon, 27 February 1928, 5; Dinamina, 28 February 1928, 3.
2. D. M. Colombage, Guwan Viduli Vanshaya (Colombo: M. D. Gunasena & Company, 1989), 16.
3. Times of Ceylon, 28 February 1928, 4; Dinamina, 28 February 1928, 3.

21 April 1928

The First Buddhist Sermon Broadcast in Ceylon: The Contribution of the Most Venerable Pelene Sri Vajiragnana Maha Nayaka Thero

On 21 April 1928, a milestone was reached in the history of the Colombo Broadcasting Service when a Buddhist sermon was delivered for the first time over the radio. This historic address was given by the Most Venerable Pelene Sri Vajiragnana Maha Nayaka Thero of Vajiraramaya, Bambalapitiya, who thus became the first Buddhist prelate in Ceylon to utilize the medium of broadcasting for the dissemination of religious discourse.[1] The sermon, delivered in Sinhala, was directed primarily to Sinhala-speaking listeners and marked the formal integration of Buddhist teaching into the emerging cultural and communicative landscape of radio in Ceylon.



Most Venarable Palane Siri Vajiragnana Mah NayakaThera

(November 25, 1878 – September 21, 1955) was a Sri Lankan (Sinhala) scholar Buddhist monk, who founded the Siri Vajiraramaya temple in Bambalapitiya, Sri Lanka.

Venarable Palane Thero was also the Maha Nayaka (head) of Amarapura Sri Dharmarakshita sect for 37 years from August 5, 1918 until his death in 1955.



Colonel John Lionel Kotalawala, CH KBE KStJ PC

He served as the Minister of Communications and Works in the Second Council of State of Ceylon from 1936 to 1947.

The printed programme of 21 April 1928 explicitly announced the occasion:

"Ven'ble Palane Sri Vajiragnana Nayake Thero of Vajiraramaya, Bambalapitiya has kindly consented to broadcast in Sinhalese. This, we feel sure, is the first step in the right direto broadcast in Sinhalese. This, we feel sure, is the first step in the right direction and one which will ction and one which will be appreciated by our Sinhalese listeners. Other gentlemen in the foremost rank of Sinhalese orators are being approached in the near future."[2]



Dr. N. M. Perera

Dr. N. M. Perera, a prominent Sri Lankan statesman and the first Marxist to enter the country's Second Council of State of Ceylon 1936.

He was a Leader of the Lanka Sama Samaja Party, a parliamentarian, Leader of the Opposition, and Minister of Finance.

Dr. Perera was the first local to obtain a PhD and DSc, earning him the nickname "Double Doctor".

He advocated for local industry and the establishment of direct links between producers and consumer cooperatives.

He passed away on August 14, 1979, but his contributions to parliamentary politics remain relevant.



Mr. D. P. Jayasekara

Mr. D. P. Jayasekara, Supiritedant Engineer of Colombo Broadcasting Service, (CBS)

In the mid-1930s, Mr. D. P. Jayasekara, Supiritedant Engineer of Radio a renowned broadcasting engineer (later Chief Posts and Telegraph Engineer) who worked for the Colombo Broadcasting Service, (CBS) *provided the Mahanayake Thero with all the necessary technical facilities to conduct Buddhist sermons from the Vajiraramaya Temple where he resided.*

Following this inaugural broadcast, the Venerable Maha Nayaka Thero continued to deliver sermons and discourses by radio for nearly two decades, earning admiration from audiences of diverse religious backgrounds who understood Sinhala.[3] His presence on air became so valued that in 1940, the Honourable Minister of Communications and Works, Colonel J. L. Kotalawala, under whose purview broadcasting fell, officially directed that arrangements be made for the Thero to deliver two sermons per month.[4] To accommodate the Thero's age and health, D. P. Jayasekera, Superintending Engineer of Radio (later Chief Post and Telegraph Engineer), arranged technical facilities at Vajiraramaya, enabling the Thero to broadcast directly from Vijiraramaya Tempale.[5]

Instead of being confined to two sermons per month, the Venerable Thero was additionally invited to deliver a 30-minute topical address in addition to his customary Full Moon Poya Day sermon a proposal he accepted. At that time, it was not the practice to require advance scripts from eminent religious or scholarly speakers, including Buddhist clergy.[6]

One notable episode illustrating both the Thero's intellectual engagement and the trust placed in his judgment concerned his proposed sermon on "Caste and Class Distinction."

The subject provoked objections in the State Council, raised by Dr. N. M. Perera, who questioned the propriety of allowing such a topic to be aired.[7] In response, Shirley da Silva, Superintendent of Broadcasting, defended the Thero's integrity, affirming his readiness to "offer his neck" should the sermon contain any material deemed controversial or subversive.[8] Satisfied with this assurance, the Honourable Minister permitted the broadcast to proceed unaltered.

Anolytical Note:

This episode underscores the extraordinary reverence, trust, and authority commanded by the Most Venerable Pelene Sri Vajiragnana Maha Nayaka Thero. His pioneering broadcasts not only consolidated the place of Buddhism within the broadcasting culture of Ceylon but also established radio as a medium capable of addressing both spiritual and social concerns in the public sphere.

Footnotes:

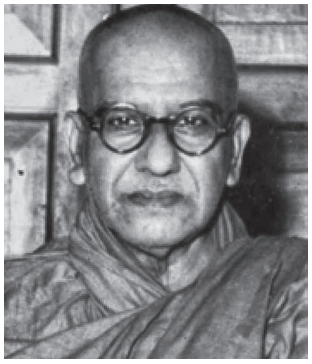
1. Annual Administrative Report of the Postmaster General, 1928 (Colombo: Government Printer, 1929), 14.
2. Colombo Broadcasting Service Programme Schedule, 21 April 1928, Government Press, Colombo.
3. D. M. Colombage, Guwan Viduli Vanshaya (Colombo: M. D. Gunasena & Company, 1989), 17–18.
4. Ceylon State Council Debates, Hansard, Session of June 1940.
5. Ibid.
6. Shirley da Silva, interview by author, cited in H. M. Gunasekera, History of Broadcasting in Ceylon (Colombo: Lake House Investments, 1967), 102.
7. Ceylon State Council Debates, Hansard, Session of July 1940.
8. Ibid.

1928

Listener Testimony and the Later Years of Broadcasting by the Venerable Pelene Sri Vajiragnana Maha Nayaka Thero

In November 1937, Mr. A. M. Buhari, Attorney-at-Law of Matara, purchased a radio set. The first programme he listened to was a sermon delivered by the Venerable Pelene Sri Vajiragnana Maha Nayaka Thero. Deeply impressed by the discourse, Buhari immediately wrote to the Thero, observing that the benefit he derived from listening to the sermon alone was sufficient to justify the expense of acquiring the radio set.[1]

Upon receiving the letter, the Superintendent of Radio, Mr. Shirley da Silva, wrote to Buhari on 3 November 1937, formally seeking permission to publish the contents of his testimony. Buhari replied on 8 November 1937, graciously granting permission and expressing his sincere appreciation for the work of the Colombo Broadcasting Service.[2]



Most Venerable Pelene Siri Vajiragnana Maha Nayaka Thero,

Maha Nayaka Thero, known for promoting Buddhism, education, and social welfare, he was a prolific writer whose articles could fill many volumes.

He is remembered for his perfect qualities as a monk: learned, amenable, profound, erudite, and an upholder of the Dhamma

The letter was subsequently publicized in the local press, where it attracted both admiration and controversy. Some members of Buhari's own community voiced displeasure at his open commendation of a Buddhist sermon. **In response, Buhari explained that his appreciation was not directed exclusively toward the religious content but rather toward the universal moral guidance, practical wisdom, and accessibility of the discourse, which resonated with listeners regardless of race, creed, or religion.[3]**

A decade later, following his Vesak Full Moon Day broadcast in 1947, the Venerable Maha Nayaka Thero expressed his inability to continue his regular radio sermons, citing his advanced age and declining health.[4] However, his enduring sense of duty toward the listening public was demonstrated on 28 June 1947, when the Colombo Broadcasting Service commemorated the registration of its 10,000th Sinhala broadcast licensee. On this occasion, the Thero rose from his sickbed at the General Hospital, Colombo, to deliver a brief but symbolic three-minute address, broadcast from 7:49 to 7:52 p.m.[5] This gesture, undertaken despite serious illness, testifies both to the Thero's commitment to Sinhala-speaking audiences and to the moral authority he retained during the final phase of his broadcasting career.

Together, these episodes the testimony of an appreciative listener in 1937, officially sanctioned and widely circulated, and the Thero's own final act of dedication in 1947 underscore the profound social, cultural, and spiritual impact of his pioneering role in religious broadcasting in Ceylon.

Footnotes:

1. C. L. P. Gunawardana, This is Colombo Calling (Colombo: Perali Publishers, 1990), 29–30.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.

December 1928

Developments in Public Service Broadcasting

By the close of 1928, the programming scope of the Colombo Radio Service had begun to reflect a more explicitly public service orientation. Whereas earlier transmissions were largely cultural or experimental, a discernible shift occurred as government departments increasingly utilized the medium as a tool of direct communication with the population. Notably, the Police Department, the Department of Health, the Railways Department, and the Department of Education contributed regular content to broadcasts, thereby transforming radio into a platform for disseminating official information of both administrative and social importance.[1]

Of particular significance in that year was the inaugural use of broadcasting for matters of criminal investigation and public safety. An automobile theft case illustrated this emergent function: details of the stolen vehicle were circulated via radio, leading to its eventual recovery in an abandoned state approximately sixty miles from Colombo.[2] This event demonstrated, for the first time, the potential of broadcasting to operate as an instrument of law enforcement, extending its role beyond entertainment and education to encompass community security.

From the perspective of broadcasting history, the 1928 incident underscores two important themes. First, it reflects the institutional embedding of radio within colonial governance structures, where the medium served to extend state authority and surveillance capacity. Second, it anticipates a broader global trajectory wherein public service broadcasting was defined not merely by cultural or educational obligations, but also by its utility in promoting social order and collective welfare.[3] In the Ceylonese context, this development can be understood as an early experiment in aligning broadcasting with the practical and disciplinary concerns of governance, thus foreshadowing its later role as a mediator between the state and society.

Footnotes:

1. The Ceylon Observer, "Broadcasting Notes," December 1928, Colombo, 5.
2. D. M. Colambage, Guvan Viduli Vanshaya, (Colombo: M. D. Gunasena & Company, 1990), 81.
3. Asa Briggs, The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom, Volume II: The Golden Age of Wireless (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965), 47–49.

December 1928

Radio License Issuance and Its Growth as of December 1928

The Annual Administrative Report of the Postmaster General for 1928 records that by the close of the year, a total of 1,290 radio licenses had been issued in Ceylon.[1] This figure represents a substantial increase from the 924 licenses reported at the end of 1927, thus reflecting a net growth of 366 new licenses within a single year.[2]

Analytical Note:

This expansion is significant in two respects. First, it marks the steady consolidation of radio as a popular medium in the island, moving beyond its experimental origins into an accepted feature of domestic and social life. Second, the figures underscore the emergent consumer culture of the late 1920s, in which technological adoption paralleled wider processes of modernization and urbanization under colonial governance. The diffusion of licenses may be read not merely as an administrative statistic but as evidence of the growing public investment both financial and cultural in the possibilities of broadcasting as an instrument of information, leisure, and social identity.

Footnotes:

1. Ceylon. Administration Report of the Postmaster General for the Year 1928 (Colombo: Government Printer, 1929), 3.
2. Ceylon. Administration Report of the Postmaster General for the Year 1927 (Colombo: Government Printer, 1928), 2.

1929

January 1929

Establishment of a Broadcasting Support Fund

In January 1929, the Ceylon and South Indian Broadcasting Society inaugurated a special fund with the objective of assisting the telecommunications authorities in their attempts to improve the quality of radio programming.[1] This initiative illustrates the Society's recognition of the importance of adequate financial and institutional support for the nascent medium of broadcasting, which, by the late 1920s, was beginning to establish itself as a vital component of cultural and technological modernity in Ceylon.

The creation of this fund is significant for several reasons. **First,** it indicates an early partnership between civil society organizations and state-affiliated technical authorities, reflecting the collaborative nature of broadcasting in its formative years.[2] **Second,** the measure highlights the perception, even at this early stage, that broadcasting required not merely technological infrastructure but also sustained investment to ensure programmatic richness and cultural relevance. **Third,** it underscores the role of voluntary societies in bridging the gap between government policy and public interest in the development of communications media.[3]

Ultimately, the establishment of the Broadcasting Support Fund can be interpreted as an acknowledgment that broadcasting, unlike purely commercial ventures, demanded a broader social commitment to thrive. It was a pioneering attempt to institutionalize financial support for radio programming and thereby secure the long-term sustainability of the medium in both Ceylon and South India.

Footnotes:

1. Annual Administrative Report of the Postmaster General, Ceylon, 1929.
2. D. M. Colombage, Guwan Viduli Vanshaya (Colombo: M. D. Gunasena & Company, 1989), 79.
3. C. P. L. Gunawardana, This is Colombo Calling (Colombo: Perali Publications, 1990), 30.

January 1929

Institutionalization of Buddhist Sermons on Radio: The Introduction and Evolution of Poya Day Broadcasts

The year 1929 marked a pivotal moment in the history of religious broadcasting in Ceylon, with the formal introduction of Buddhist sermons (bana) in Sinhala on each of the four Poya Day evenings in the monthly program schedule of the Ceylon Radio Service.[1] **The initial coordination of this segment was undertaken by Mr. T. A. W. Gunawardene, Chief Clerk of the Chief Posts and Telegraph Engineer's Office, who managed the broadcasts until his retirement in 1932.[2] Following this period, the format was revised so that bana sermons were transmitted once every two weeks, typically on Sunday mornings.**

A further significant development occurred in September 1937, when Mr. Shirley da Silva was appointed Superintendent of the Colombo Broadcasting Broadcasting Service.[3] Under his leadership, bana preaching was institutionalized as a permanent feature of the programming schedule, broadcast on every Poya Day evening as well as on Sunday mornings. This shift reflected a deliberate and sustained institutional commitment to providing religious content, acknowledging the centrality of Buddhism to the cultural and spiritual life of the majority of the listening public.

In the initial stages of organizing these broadcasts, the Broadcasting Station issued a formal letter of invitation to Buddhist preachers, prepared in consultation with the Most Venerable Pelene Sri Vajiragnana Maha Nayaka Thero.[4] This letter outlined the technical and rhetorical expectations for delivering a sermon via radio, emphasizing the dual need to respect religious decorum and to adapt traditional preaching to the new medium. The key guidelines included:

1. The majority of listeners were Sinhala-speaking Buddhists, and the sermons were expected to address their religious and cultural needs.
2. Non-Buddhists who understood Sinhala also formed part of the audience; therefore, sermons should employ accessible, colloquial Sinhala rather than elevated literary diction.
3. Broadcasting was free from caste, class, and creed distinctions; preachers were cautioned to avoid language that might offend any segment of the audience.

4. Given the presence of educated and time-conscious listeners, sermons were to remain focused on the theme, avoid unnecessary digressions, and be supported by reasoning and clear argumentation.
5. **Clarity of diction was emphasized; preachers were instructed to avoid throat-clearing, exaggerated breathing, or other distracting noises.**
6. Technical advice included maintaining an appropriate distance from the microphone, speaking in a natural tone without shouting, and avoiding sudden shifts in vocal register.

These carefully crafted instructions reveal the early awareness of broadcasting authorities that the spoken word, when transmitted via radio, demanded new rhetorical and technical sensibilities.[5] Once preachers became accustomed to these protocols, the formal letter of invitation was replaced with a simplified printed postcard, which merely indicated the subject, date, and time of the scheduled sermon. This transition signaled the professionalization and routinization of religious broadcasting, consolidating the place of bana sermons as a regular and recognizable element of the national soundscape.

Footnotes:

1. Annual Administrative Report of the Postmaster General, Ceylon, 1929.
2. D. M. Colombage, Guwan Viduli Vanshaya (Colombo: M. D. Gunasena & Company, 1989), 55.
3. C. P. L. Gunawardana, This is Colombo Calling (Colombo: Perali Publications, 1990), 31.
4. Ibid., 28.
5. Colombage, Guwan Viduli Vanshaya, 56.

March 1929

Installation of Radio Receiving Equipment for the Governor

In March 1929, the Posts and Telegraph Department constructed and installed a complete radio receiving set at Queen's House, Colombo, to facilitate His Excellency the Governor's ability to monitor the programmes of the Colombo Broadcasting Service.[1] This initiative is emblematic of the colonial administration's recognition of radio as both a technological innovation and a medium of governance, warranting close observation at the highest levels of authority.



Sir Herbert James Stanley.

The Governor of British Ceylon in 1929

Sir Herbert Stanley's term as the 25th ***Governor of British Ceylon began on August 20, 1928, and lasted until February 11, 1931.*** *During parts of 1929, the Colonial Secretary, Bernard Henry Bourdillon, also served in an acting capacity when the Governor was absent.* ***The head of state during this time was King George V***

The installation of receiving equipment at the Governor's official residence holds several interpretive dimensions. **First,** it signified the symbolic integration of broadcasting into the sphere of colonial governance, underscoring the medium's potential as an instrument of influence, information flow, and cultural dissemination.[2] **Second,** by providing the Governor with direct access to programming, the measure reflected an implicit expectation of oversight suggesting that radio content was not merely a matter of entertainment or public education, but a cultural resource with political and administrative implications.[3] **Third,** the reliance on the Telegraph Workshops for the design and installation highlights the technical expertise within the colonial state apparatus, which played a pivotal role in sustaining early broadcasting infrastructure in Ceylon.[4]

Analytical Note:

In broader terms, the Governor's early engagement with broadcasting can be situated within the global colonial experience of the 1920s and 1930s, when imperial administrations increasingly sought to monitor, regulate, and, where necessary, harness radio for political legitimacy.[5] Thus, this episode reflects not merely a technical development but also an early articulation of the relationship between broadcasting and state power in Ceylon.

Footnotes:

1. Annual Administrative Report of the Postmaster General, Ceylon, 1929.
2. D. M. Colombage, Guwan Viduli Vanshaya (Colombo: M. D. Gunasena & Company, 1989), 61.
3. C. P. L. Gunawardana, This is Colombo Calling (Colombo: Perali Publications, 1990), 33.
4. Ibid.
5. Asa Briggs, The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom, Volume II: The Golden Age of Wireless (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965), 47–48.

May 1929

The Emergence of Sinhala Music in Broadcasting

By May 1929, Sinhala music had begun to establish a significant presence within the programming of the Colombo Broadcasting Service, gradually transcending its initial confinement to a limited segment of the broadcast schedule.[1] The growing popularity of this music among radio audiences was formally recognized in a memorandum submitted by Mr. Charles Dias to the Chief Posts and Telegraph Engineer and Controller of Broadcasting.[2] In his proposal, Mr. Dias advocated for the establishment of a dedicated studio orchestra, thereby institutionalizing the production and performance of Sinhala music within the framework of national broadcasting.

This development carries several implications for the history of radio in Ceylon.

First, it highlights the responsiveness of the Ceylon Radio Service to audience preferences, reflecting an early attempt to align programming with cultural taste and public demand.[3]

Second, the proposal to establish a studio orchestra signifies the transition of Sinhala music from informal or ad hoc performances to professionally organized, state-supported productions. This institutionalization not only enhanced the technical and artistic quality of performances but also contributed to the construction of a distinct national musical identity within the emerging medium of radio.[4]

Third, the initiative demonstrates the role of individual agency, as figures such as Mr. Charles Dias were instrumental in advocating for and shaping culturally meaningful programming.

Overall, the emergence of Sinhala music on radio in 1929 illustrates the convergence of technological, cultural, and institutional factors, marking a pivotal moment in the development of a broadcasting repertoire that was both locally resonant and publicly accessible.[5]

Footnotes:

1. Annual Administrative Report of the Postmaster General, Ceylon, 1929.
2. D. M. Colombage, Guwan Viduli Vanshaya (Colombo: M. D. Gunasena & Company, 1989), 67.
3. C. P. L. Gunawardana, This is Colombo Calling (Colombo: Perali Publications, 1990), 31.
4. Ibid., 32.
5. Ibid.



Mr. Charles Dias

Charles Dias was a pioneering Sri Lankan lawyer, playwright, and producer *who played a key role in the early 20th-century Sinhala theatre movement, particularly in the Nurthi tradition. He is credited with producing the first play staged at Tower Hall, Pandukabhaya, on December 16, 1911.*

Key Contributions and Works

Nurthi Producer: *Dias was a prominent figure in producing Nurthi (musical theatre), bringing theatrical arts to the forefront of Sinhalese entertainment.*

Renowned Productions:

He produced several notable plays, including:

Pandukabhaya (1911)

Hemamali

Vidura

Padmawathie

Sivamma Danapala

Legacy:

His work contributed significantly to the establishment of the Tower Hall Theatre, which remains synonymous with traditional Sinhala theatre.

December 1929

The Economic Crisis and Its Impact on Broadcasting

Despite the increasing attention devoted to programming quality in 1929, the progress of broadcasting in Ceylon was significantly hampered by the wider economic downturn that marked the close of the decade.[1] **The effects of this financial strain were most evident in the stagnation of radio licensing: not only did the number of new licences fail to grow as anticipated, but many existing licensees also declined to renew their subscriptions.**[2] As a direct consequence, budgetary allocations for programming were depleted, particularly the funds earmarked for the engagement of artistes. This financial shortfall necessitated the curtailment of programme schedules, underscoring the vulnerability of early broadcasting to broader economic cycles.

In response to these challenges, the Radio Club of Ceylon and South India intervened by establishing a Programme Fund, designed to provide supplementary financial resources to sustain broadcasting activities.[3] Radio apparatus dealers also contributed to this effort, pledging a monthly sum of Rs. 150, thereby demonstrating the role of commercial stakeholders in preserving the viability of broadcasting during periods of financial instability.[4] Moreover, the Radio Club alleviated government expenses associated with publishing the monthly printed programme by incorporating the schedule into its domestic journal, The Ceylon Radio Times.[5]

This episode highlights several important dynamics in the history of broadcasting in Ceylon.

First, it illustrates the precariousness of early radio, which, unlike later state-funded systems, remained heavily dependent on licence fees and external patronage.

Second, the formation of the Programme Fund represents an early instance of collaborative financing between civil society organizations, private enterprise, and state authorities, reflecting a hybrid model of cultural support.

Third, the crisis underscored the dual nature of broadcasting as both a cultural service and a financial burden, requiring innovative solutions to sustain its continuity.

In broader terms, this development mirrors similar patterns in other parts of the British Empire, where economic volatility in the late 1920s and early 1930s forced broadcasting services to balance state oversight with private initiative.[6]

Footnotes:

1. Annual Administrative Report of the Postmaster General, Ceylon, 1929.
2. C. P. L. Gunawardana, This is Colombo Calling (Colombo: Perali Publications, 1990), 33.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. Asa Briggs, The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom, Volume II: The Golden Age of Wireless (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965), 59–60.

December 1929

The Onset of the Great Depression and Colonial Broadcasting (1929–1933)

The economic crisis that emerged in 1929 and deepened into the Great Depression (1929–1933) had a profound impact on broadcasting infrastructures across the British Empire.[1] In Ceylon, as seen in the December 1929 setback, radio was heavily dependent on revenue from licence fees and supplementary patronage; when disposable income among the middle classes contracted, the number of new licences stagnated and renewals declined.[2] This forced programming cutbacks, reduced engagement of artistes, and increased reliance on civic associations such as the Radio Club and commercial dealers to sustain even a basic level of broadcast operations.

Similar challenges were experienced across other colonial territories. In India, for instance, the Indian Broadcasting Company (IBC), a private venture that operated the Bombay and Calcutta stations from 1927, collapsed in 1930 under the weight of financial insolvency, aggravated by the Depression.[3] The failure of the IBC compelled the Government of India to assume direct responsibility, leading to the establishment of All India Radio (AIR) in 1936, which institutionalized broadcasting under state control.[4]

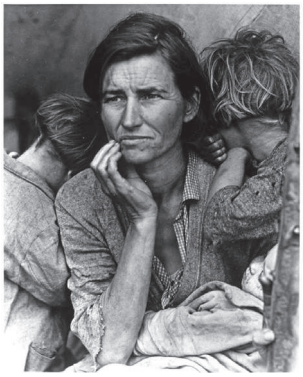
In Malaya, Singapore, and Hong Kong, broadcasting services struggled with budgetary constraints, often reducing local programming hours and increasing reliance on relays of British or imported content.[5] These stations became symbols of austerity as much as cultural service, underscoring the vulnerability of colonial broadcasting infrastructures to global financial volatility.

Meanwhile, in Britain, the BBC weathered the Depression comparatively well, sustained by the licence fee system and the state's recognition of broadcasting as a vital cultural and political instrument.[6] The contrast between Britain and its colonies underscores the asymmetry of resource allocation: while metropolitan broadcasting matured institutionally during the Depression, colonial services remained fragile, piecemeal, and often dependent on improvisation.

In broader perspective, the Great Depression acted as a catalyst for the reconfiguration of colonial broadcasting systems. It hastened the shift from fragile, semi-private arrangements to more formal state oversight, as financial instability exposed the inadequacy of relying solely on private capital or voluntary associations. In Ceylon, as elsewhere, the Depression underscored the necessity of embedding broadcasting within a stable institutional framework, paving the way for more structured state involvement in subsequent decades.[7]









The Great Depression (1929-1933)

was the most severe economic downturn in modern history, marked by a catastrophic stock market crash, mass unemployment, widespread bank failures, and a sharp decline in industrial production. The crisis was global and was primarily characterized by economic collapse rather than a single government interdiction.

Key Aspects of the Great Depression (1929-1933)

Beginning and Timeline:

The Depression began with the stock market crash on Wall Street in October 1929 ("Black Thursday" and "Black Tuesday"). The economy continued to contract, hitting its lowest point in March 1933.

Economic Indicators:

Unemployment: *The U.S. unemployment rate soared from about 3% in 1929 to nearly 25% by 1933.* ***Production and GDP:*** *Industrial production plummeted by almost 47%, and GDP fell by 30%.* ***Banking:*** *Over 9,000 U.S. banks failed, wiping out millions of savings accounts and causing a collapse of the banking system by 1933.* ***Causes:*** *A combination of factors contributed to the crisis, including: Excessive stock market speculation and buying on margin (using borrowed money). A decline in consumer demand and a large gap between the rich and the poor. Bank failures that reduced the money supply and credit availability. The international gold standard, which transmitted the U.S. crisis globally through fixed exchange rates and constrained national policy responses. Policy mistakes like the Smoot-Hawley Tariff Act of 1930, which imposed steep tariffs and triggered retaliatory measures, leading to a contraction of global trade. The "Interdiction" Aspect The user's reference to "interdiction" is likely a mistranslation or a misunderstanding of a specific policy. The primary "interdiction" of the era was actually Prohibition, the nationwide ban on the production, importation, transportation, and sale of alcoholic beverages, which lasted from 1920 to 1933. While it coincided with the Great Depression, it was a separate social and political issue, not an economic cause or effect of the Depression itself. It was finally repealed by the 21st Amendment in December 1933, near the end of the Depression's worst phase.*

Recovery Efforts (Post-1933)

Recovery began after Franklin D. Roosevelt was inaugurated in March 1933 and implemented his New Deal programs. Key actions included:

A national "bank holiday" to restore confidence in the banking system.

Abandonment of the gold standard to expand the money supply.

Increased government spending on social welfare programs and public works to create jobs and stimulate demand.

Footnotes:

1. Charles A. H. Clark, Radio and Empire: The Global Diffusion of Broadcasting in Interwar Britain (London: Routledge, 2016), 44.
2. Annual Administrative Report of the Postmaster General, Ceylon, 1929.
3. L. S. Rathore, History of Broadcasting in India (New Delhi: Publications Division, Government of India, 1980), 27–29.
4. Ibid., 32–33.
5. G. D. Kelley, Colonial Airwaves: Radio and Empire in Southeast Asia, 1920–1945 (Singapore: NUS Press, 2009), 51–55.
6. Asa Briggs, The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom, Volume II: The Golden Age of Wireless (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965), 59–62.
7. C. P. L. Gunawardana, This is Colombo Calling (Colombo: Perali Publications, 1990), 33.

December 1929

Radio License Issuance and Its Growth as of December 1929

The Annual Administrative Report of the Postmaster General for 1929 records that a total of 1,380 radio licenses had been issued by the end of the year.[1] This represents a modest increase from the 1,290 licenses recorded in December 1928, indicating the issuance of an additional 90 licenses over the course of twelve months.[2] Concurrently, the total airtime allocated for broadcasting programmes amounted to 1,498 hours, reflecting the sustained operational capacity of the Colombo Broadcasting Service.[3]

The data reveal several important aspects of early broadcasting in Ceylon.

First, despite the economic difficulties of 1929 associated with the onset of the Great Depression, the continued, if moderate, growth in license issuance indicates that radio maintained a stable, albeit constrained, audience base.[4]

Second, the increase in airtime suggests that programming expansion continued even under financial pressures, demonstrating the resilience of the early broadcasting infrastructure and the commitment of the authorities to maintain public service.

Third, the incremental growth in licensing also underscores the socio-economic selectivity of early radio audiences, as ownership remained largely confined to those with the disposable income to acquire and maintain a set.[5]

In broader perspective, the Ceylon experience reflects a pattern common across colonial broadcasting systems during the late 1920s and early 1930s: public engagement with radio persisted despite macroeconomic constraints, but expansion was gradual, often contingent on auxiliary funding from

civil society or commercial stakeholders.[6] These statistics thus provide quantitative evidence of both the popularity of radio and the structural challenges confronting the nascent broadcasting service.

Footnotes:

1. Annual Administrative Report of the Postmaster General, Ceylon, 1929.
2. Ibid.
3. D. M. Colombage, Guwan Viduli Vanshaya (Colombo: M. D. Gunasena & Company, 1989), 34.
4. C. P. L. Gunawardana, This is Colombo Calling (Colombo: Perali Publications, 1990), 33.
5. Ibid.
6. Asa Briggs, The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom, Volume II: The Golden Age of Wireless (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965), 59–60.

December 1929

The Colombo Broadcasting Service: An Analysis of Its Development and Challenges, 1920s–1930s

The Colombo Broadcasting Service (CBS), established in the mid-1920s, represented a pioneering experiment in colonial-era broadcasting in South Asia. Its trajectory between the 1920s and 1930s can be characterized by gradual expansion punctuated by technical, economic, and administrative challenges, reflecting both the opportunities and constraints of early radio in Ceylon.

Early Establishment and Growth (1925–1928)

The mid-1920s witnessed the experimental phase of broadcasting, with transmissions originating from the Central Posts and Telegraph Office.[1] Initial programmes were largely limited in scope, featuring music, announcements, and occasional lectures. The first licensed listeners were primarily urban elites, reflecting both the high cost of receiving equipment and the socio-economic selectivity of early audiences.[2] By 1926–1927, the CBS had begun to formalize its programming through printed monthly schedules, and licences gradually increased, indicating a growing public engagement with radio.[3]

Institutional Developments and Cultural Integration (1928–1929)

From 1928 onwards, CBS expanded both technically and culturally. The introduction of Sinhala music, the establishment of the Poya Day bana broadcasts, and the institutionalization of studio orchestras reflected a deliberate strategy to cultivate local content.[4] The station also benefited from support from civil society organizations such as the Radio Club of Ceylon and South India, which helped fund programming and printed schedules, especially during times of economic constraint.[5]

Technical advancements included the construction of radio receiving equipment for the Governor in 1929, symbolizing both administrative engagement and the perceived importance of broadcasting as a medium of governance.[6]

Economic and Operational Challenges (1929–1933)

Despite these achievements, CBS faced significant financial and operational challenges, particularly with the onset of the Great Depression in late 1929. The number of radio licences stagnated, and many existing licensees failed to renew, leading to curtailed programming.[7] The depletion of funds for artistes' remuneration and operational costs revealed the vulnerability of an early broadcasting system reliant on licence fees and voluntary contributions.[8]

The response to these challenges demonstrated a hybrid model of support: the Radio Club initiated a Programme Fund, commercial dealers contributed monthly sums, and the cost of printed schedules was incorporated into domestic journals. These measures reflect the station's resilience but also highlight its dependence on external support rather than stable institutional funding.[9]

Summary of Ups and Downs

Ups:

1. Growth of licensed audiences and airtime.
2. Institutionalization of Sinhala music and Poya Day sermons.
3. Technical advancements and administrative recognition (Governor's radio set).
4. Civil society and commercial support mitigating financial pressures.
5. Professionalization of broadcasting staff and structured programme schedules.

Downs:

1. Financial vulnerability, particularly during the Depression.
2. Dependence on voluntary contributions and private patronage.
3. Programme curtailments due to budgetary constraints.
4. Limited access among non-urban or lower-income populations.

Overall, the Colombo Broadcasting Service (CBS) between the 1920s and 1930s illustrates the tensions inherent in early colonial broadcasting: the need to balance cultural service, audience engagement, and financial sustainability within a context of technological novelty and economic instability. The station's successes in institutionalizing local music and religious programming, alongside the challenges of economic crises, offer valuable insight into both the evolution of broadcasting in Ceylon and the broader dynamics of media development in colonial Asia.

Footnotes:

1. Annual Administrative Report of the Postmaster General, Ceylon, 1925–1928.
2. D. M. Colombage, Guwan Viduli Vanshaya (Colombo: M. D. Gunasena & Company, 1989), 41–45.
3. C. P. L. Gunawardana, This is Colombo Calling (Colombo: Perali Publications, 1990), 16–18.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.
7. Annual Administrative Report of the Postmaster General, Ceylon, 1929.
8. Colombage, Guwan Viduli Vanshaya, 72.
9. Gunawardana, This is Colombo Calling, 34.

1930

09 January 1930

Radio Exhibition at the Maradana Technical College



Mr. Lachlan Macrae
Director of Education,
Government of Ceylon

A significant milestone in the development of broadcasting in Ceylon was the radio exhibition held on 9 and 10 January 1930 at the Maradana Technical College. The event was jointly organized by the Radio Society of Ceylon and South India, with active institutional support from the Department of Telecommunications.[1] The exhibition attracted considerable public attention, drawing a large audience that underscored the growing curiosity and enthusiasm surrounding wireless technology during this formative period.

The exhibition was formally inaugurated by Mr. L. McRae, then Director of Education.[2] In his posts and keynote address at the opening ceremony, Mr. Edward Harper, Chief Engineer of the Department of Telegraph and widely acknowledged as the pioneering figure of Ceylonese broadcasting, emphasized the disciplined and professional ethos underpinning Colombo Broadcasting Services operations.[3] He noted that the success of the service derived not solely from the technical staff of the department but also from the voluntary contributions of numerous individuals who offered their time and expertise in the service of the station. Harper's recognition of these volunteer efforts highlights the hybrid nature of early broadcasting in Ceylon, wherein both official institutional structures and voluntary civic engagement contributed to the station's expansion and legitimacy.



Mr. Edward Harper
Chief Engineer
Posts and Telegraph Department
Government of Ceylon

In retrospect, the Maradana exhibition marked more than a public display of radio equipment; it symbolized the consolidation of radio as a modern medium in colonial Ceylon. It served to promote public awareness of wireless broadcasting, reinforced official endorsement of the medium, and provided a platform for articulating the values of professionalism, discipline, and civic participation in its development. The exhibition may thus be regarded as an early example of how broadcasting in Ceylon sought to position itself both as a state-managed service and as a collaborative cultural endeavor.

Footnotes:

1. Annual Administrative Report of the Postmaster General for the Year 1930 (Colombo: Government Printer, 1931), 8.
2. C. P. L. Gunawardana, This is Colombo Calling (Colombo: Perali Publications, 1990), 33.
3. D. M. Colombage, Guwan Viduli Vanshaya (Colombo: M. D. Gunasena & Company, 1989), 55.



Government Technical College Maradana

Established in 1893 as the Government Technical School in a renovated coffee store near Maradana Railway Station, this institution is the oldest technical college in Sri Lanka. Renamed Ceylon Technical College in 1906, it pioneered scientific and engineering education, later forming the basis for the University of Moratuwa.

Key Historical Milestones

Establishment (1893): Founded to provide technical education for government departments, initially focusing on engineering, science, and crafts.

Renaming (1906):

Renamed Ceylon Technical College, it became the center for studying chemistry, physics, biology, and engineering.

Evolution & Transitions:

Prior to 1921, it provided training for medical students.

Full-time technician courses were moved to the new Institute of Practical Technology at Katubedda in 1960, which later became the University of Moratuwa.

Arts and crafts sections were transferred to the Government College of Fine Arts in 1953.

Modern Era:

Known as Maradana College of Technology, it is part of the Department of Technical Education & Training (DTET) network, offering NVQ level courses and diplomas.

Significance

The site is a recognized landmark in Maradana.

It has played a crucial role in providing vocational training for over 132 years,(until 2025) feeding into various industrial sectors.

January 1930

The 1930 Radio Exhibition in Ceylon within the Wider Colonial Broadcasting Context (Comparative Analysis)

The radio exhibition at the Maradana Technical College in January 1930 may be interpreted not merely as a local technological showcase but also as part of a wider pattern of colonial broadcasting initiatives across Asia during a period of economic contraction. The late 1920s and early 1930s coincided with the onset of the Great Depression, which had profound repercussions on the financial structures of colonial administrations and their ability to sustain cultural and infrastructural projects.[1] Against this backdrop, exhibitions such as that in Colombo demonstrated a dual purpose: first, to stimulate public enthusiasm and generate a culture of wireless listening despite limited economic resources; and second, to justify continued governmental and institutional investment in broadcasting by presenting it as a tool of modernity and public education.



Indian Broadcasting Company (IBC)

Indian broadcasting began with private radio clubs in 1923, leading to the formation of the ***Indian Broadcasting Company (IBC) in 1927.***
After the IBC failed, the government took over, creating the Indian State Broadcasting Service (ISBS) in 1930, which became All India Radio (AIR) in 1936. It was later renamed Akashvani in 1956 and became a public service broadcaster under Prasar Bharati in 1997.
Key Milestones in Indian Broadcasting History:
1923:
Radio Club of Bombay initiates the first radio broadcast.
July 23, 1927:
The private Indian Broadcasting Company (IBC) is formed with stations in Bombay and Calcutta.
1930:
The government takes over, forming the Indian State Broadcasting Service (ISBS).
June 8, 1936:
ISBS is renamed All India Radio (AIR).
1937:
Central News Organisation (CNO) is established.
1947:
At independence, AIR has 6 stations.
1956:
AIR adopts the name "Akashvani".
1959:
Television broadcasting (Doordarshan) begins in Delhi as an experiment.
1976:
Doordarshan becomes a separate department from AIR.
September 15, 1997: *Prasar Bharati, an autonomous statutory body, is established to manage both Doordarshan and All India Radio.*
Growth and Modernization
Radio:
AIR now operates a massive network reaching over 98% of the population, broadcasting in 23 languages and 146 dialects.
Privatization:
Private FM radio entered in the 2000s, with significant expansion in 2005 and 2019, including major networks like Radio Mirchi and Red FM.
Digital Shift:
AIR has moved toward digital transmission using Digital Radio Mondiale (DRM).



Burma Broadcasting Service (BBS)

Radio service in Burma began in 1936 during the British colonial era, with the first official station, Burma State Broadcasting Service, launching in 1939, *later becoming the Burma Broadcasting Service (BBS) in 1946. Throughout its history, radio has been a tool of state control, evolving from a British colonial medium to a Japanese propaganda tool during WWII, then to a state-monopoly under military rule and a vital source of information during modern conflicts.*

Key Eras of Radio in Burma (Myanmar):

Colonial Era (1936–1948):

Began in 1936, with the official Burma State Broadcasting Service launching on Oct 1, 1939, airing news, music, and football. During WWII, Japanese forces took over, renaming it "All Burma Broadcasting Station" (1942–1945), before it returned to British control as the Burma Broadcasting Service (BBS).

Independence and Early Post-Colonial Era (1948–1988):

After 1948, the service was renamed Myanma Athan (Voice of Burma), broadcasting national and foreign news, education, and entertainment

Military Rule and Propaganda (1988–2010):

Following the 1988 coup, the military government renamed the service Myanmar Radio and its parent organization as Myanmar Radio and Television (MRTV). It became a strict state monopoly for propaganda, although underground stations continued to operate.

Liberalization and Digital Age (2011–Present):

A brief period of reform (2011–2020) allowed some media freedom, but following the February 2021 coup, state media is again heavily restricted, with independent radio (such as the Democratic Voice of Burma - DVB) pushed back underground or operating from exile.



Radio Malaya (RM)

Radio broadcasting in Malaysia began in the 1920s, initiated by amateur radio enthusiasts and the establishment of wireless societies in Johor (1923), Penang (1925), and Kuala Lumpur (1928). ***The first official station, Radio Malaya, was established on April 1, 1946,*** *now known as Radio Televisyen Malaysia (RTM), the national public broadcaster.*

Key developments in the history of Malaysian radio include:

Early Beginnings:

The first radio set was introduced in 1912 by A.L. Birch. Regular, organized broadcasts began with the British-Malaya Broadcasting Corporation in 1935.

Post-War Era:

Radio Malaya was established in 1946 in Penang, eventually moving its headquarters to Kuala Lumpur in 1959.

National Broadcasting (RTM):

With the formation of Malaysia in 1963, Radio Malaya became Radio Malaysia. In 1969, it merged with Televisyen Malaysia to form Radio Televisyen Malaysia (RTM).

Evolution of Content:

Radio 1 (formerly Rangkaian Nasional) became the first to broadcast 24 hours a day in 1971. Early broadcasts were monophonic, upgrading to stereo with CD capabilities in the early 1990s.

Privatization:

The 1990s saw the rise of private radio stations, with companies like Astro Audio and Media Prima Audio now dominating the market.

Modern Era:

As of 2026, RTM operates numerous stations in multiple languages, while private stations provide diverse entertainment, with a significant portion of the audience listening via digital platforms and apps.

Today

Malaysian radio is a mix of public service broadcasting by RTM and commercial, private networks.

In India, the Indian Broadcasting Company (IBC) had entered a period of severe financial difficulty by 1930. Established with much promise in 1927, the IBC was forced into liquidation by 1930 due to insufficient revenues and the inability of the license system to cover operational costs.[2] Broadcasting was subsequently assumed by the colonial state under the auspices of "Indian State Broadcasting," later to evolve into All India Radio in 1936.[3] The Ceylonese exhibition, held during the same year that India's experiment with private-commercial broadcasting collapsed, thus underscores how Ceylon's broadcasting was deliberately framed as a disciplined, state-supported venture rather than as a purely commercial enterprise.

Elsewhere in Asia, similar tensions were visible. In Burma and Malaya, broadcasting in the early 1930s remained rudimentary, with occasional experimental services operating under the technical supervision of telegraph and telecommunication departments.[4] In these colonies, the Depression constrained investment in transmission infrastructure and limited the capacity to expand audiences. Against this regional background, Ceylon's decision to host a public exhibition, highlighting both departmental achievements and voluntary contributions, may be read as a strategic assertion of progressiveness a demonstration that, despite economic adversity, Ceylonese broadcasting was expanding in scope and cultural legitimacy.

From a broader imperial perspective, the Maradana exhibition also mirrored initiatives in Britain, where the BBC frequently organized exhibitions and public demonstrations to cultivate a culture of listening and strengthen the legitimacy of license fees.[5] By aligning itself with this model, Ceylon projected its broadcasting service as an integral part of a wider imperial communication network that prized discipline, professionalism, and civic collaboration. Harper's emphasis on volunteer contributions at the exhibition was particularly significant in this regard, as it echoed broader colonial narratives of modernity achieved through both state-led initiatives and the cooperative participation of colonial subjects.

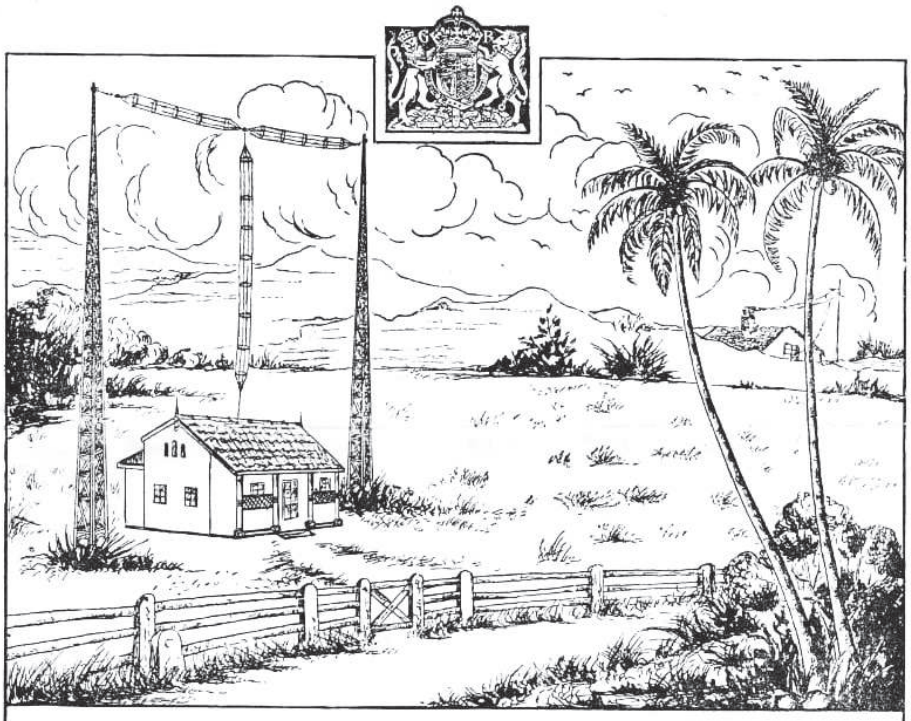
Thus, the 1930 exhibition was more than a localized event; it reflected and responded to global challenges. By situating broadcasting within a framework of civic pride and governmental endorsement, the exhibition positioned Ceylonese broadcasting as resilient to economic turbulence and as a model of stability compared to the crises facing neighboring Asian colonies.

Footnotes:

1. Susan L. Carruthers, Winning Hearts and Minds: British Governments, the Media, and Colonial Counter-Insurgency, 1944–1960 (London: Leicester University Press, 1995), 17.
2. Asa Briggs, The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom, Vol. II: The Golden Age of Wireless (London: Oxford University Press, 1965), 183–84.
3. Indira Chowdhury, The Material World of Radio: Sound, Technology, and Culture in Colonial India (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2021), 42–43.
4. Annual Administrative Reports of the Posts and Telegraphs Departments (Burma, Malaya), 1929–1931.
5. Paddy Scannell and David Cardiff, A Social History of British Broadcasting: 1922–1939, Serving the Nation (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), 62.

February / March 1930

Colombo Broadcasting Service
Programme for February and March 1930
Operated By the post and Telegraph Department



COLOMBO

BROADCASTING SERVICE.

WAVELENGTH—800 metres. FREQUENCY—375 kilocycles.

Programme for February,

1930.

OPERATED BY THE POST AND TELEGRAPH DEPARTMENT.

A. C. RICHARDS, ACTING GOVERNMENT PRINTER, COLOMBO, CEYLON.

Block by Survey Dept. Ceylon.

11(1)30–800

February 3, Monday.

7.0 to 8.30 p.m. SINHALESE CONCERT by the members of the Arya Sinhala Natya Sabha, broadcast from the Studio through the courtesy of Mr. G. D. Edmund Seneviratne.

8.30 to 8.40 p.m. General news bulletin in English.

8.40 to 8.55 p.m. "EDUCATIONAL LECTURE SERIES". Lecture No. 14. "SOME FAMOUS ENGLISH LETTER WRITERS—HORACE WALPOLE", by M. Winifred Hughes, M.A., Cambridge University Extra-Mural Lecturer.

Synopsis: Life and character of Walpole. Walpole's treatment of contemporary events. Power and variety of description and narrative passages. Characterization and anecdote in the letters.

February 4, Tuesday.

6.45 to 7.0 p.m. HEALTH TALK in Sinhalese, under the auspices of the Department of Medical and Sanitary Services, on "HEALTH EDUCATION".

7.0 to 7.15 p.m. HINDUSTANI AND GUJERATI SONGS, broadcast from the Studio by Mr. Dorab Rustomjee.

1. In Hindustani .. "Nar Jaki Pati Varta" (Rag: Bharva. Taal: Lavni)
2. In Gujerati .. "Sun Aiye Dildar Gulraksar" (Rag: Yamen. Taal: Kalyan)

7.15 to 8.30 p.m. VARIETY. New issues of "Columbia" records selected and arranged by Mr. E. A. Broadbent Littaur for Messrs. Miller & Co., Ltd.

8.30 p.m. General news bulletin.

February 5, Wednesday.

6.30 to 7.20 p.m. "His Master's Voice" NEW RECORDS not previously broadcast in Ceylon.

7.20 p.m. General news bulletin.

9.0 to 10.15 p.m. AFTER DINNER CONCERT, broadcast from the Studio, kindly organized by Mrs. Noel Gratiaen.

February 6, Thursday.

4.25 to 4.45 p.m. (approx.) SPEECHES at opening of NEW WIRELESS RECEIVING INSTALLATION provided by the Hospital Wireless Fund at the VICTORIA HOME FOR INCURABLES, COLOMBO.

Introductory Remarks.—Mr. R. F. Dias, Chairman, Hospital Wireless Fund Committee, and President, Radio Club of Ceylon and South India.

Opening Remarks.—The Hon. Mr. R. N. Thaine, C.M.G., Government Agent, Western Province, Chairman, Victoria Home for Incurables Committee.

(These speeches will be translated and broadcast also in Sinhalese. Mr. R. F. Dias and the Hon. Mr. R. N. Thaine will speak from the Studio, so that the patients in the Home may be able to hear their remarks through the new installation. Thereafter, a visit of inspection will be paid to the Home.)

6.30 to 7.20 p.m. LIGHT MUSIC, as recorded for the gramophone.

6.45 p.m. "THE HONEY BEE." A short talk by Mr. Christie Drieberg, B.A., F.H.A.S. (Edin.).

7.20 p.m. General news bulletin.

9.0 to 10.0 p.m. BANA PREACHING from the Studio. The Venerable Pālāné Siri Vajirañana, Nayaka Thero of Vajirarama, Bambalapitiya, will speak on "*Hiri and Ottappa*" (Shame and Fear to do Evil).

February 7, Friday.

7.0 to 7.15 p.m. HEALTH TALK, under the auspices of the Department of Medical and Sanitary Services, on "THE MIGHTY MICROBE". Speaker: Dr. S. F. Chellappah, L.M.S. Ceylon, L.R.C.P. Lond., M.R.C.S. Eng., D.P.H. Lond., D.T.M. and H. Cambridge, Certificate of London School of Tropical Medicine, M. P. H. Harvard, Senior Medical Officer of Health.

7.15 to 8.30 p.m. A GRAMOPHONE SOIRÉE.

("Broadcast" records kindly lent by Messrs. Cargills, Ltd.)

8.30 p.m. General news bulletin.

February 14, Friday.

6.30 to 7.0 p.m. Half an hour of CHAMBER MUSIC.

7.0 to 7.15 p.m. HEALTH TALK, under the auspices of the Department of Medical and Sanitary Services, on "THE DISEASE ON WHICH MILLIONS ARE BEING SPENT". Speaker: Dr. S. T. Gunasekera, L.M.S. Ceylon, L.R.C.P. Lond., M.R.C.S. Eng., D.P.H. Lond., Certificate in Tropical Medicine, London, Assistant Director of Sanitary Services.

7.15 to 7.25 p.m. General news bulletin.

9.0 p.m. onwards. A HUMOROUS RADIO PLAY specially written for the B. B. C., and produced by arrangement with them, entitled "UP THE RIVER", the four scenes of which are on the River Thames. The whole kindly arranged by Mr. J. S. M. Paterson, assisted by Miss. Margôt Evans, and Mr. W. H. Marshall.

February 15, Saturday.

6.30 to 7.20 p.m. SINHALESE MUSIC, and a TALK in Sinhalese on "BROADCASTING IN CEYLON" by Mr. Alexander Weliwita, Editor, "Dinamina".

7.20 p.m. General news bulletin in English.

9.0 to 10.15 p.m. AFTER DINNER CONCERT, broadcast from the Studio, kindly organized by Miss Gracie Keyt.

February 16, Sunday.

10.30 a.m. to 12.0 noon. By kind permission of Mr. Arthur E. Ephraums, a MATINÉE MUSICALE by the Mount Lavinia Grand Hotel Viennese Orchestra, broadcast from the Studio under the direction of Herr Robert Drescher. The programme will be—

1.	Waltz	"Be Jolly and Happy"	Joh. Strauss
2.	Overture	"The Dumbness of Portici"	E. Auber
3.	Violin Solo	"Serenade" (Toselli)	Herr August Lehner
4.	Fantasia from the Opera	"Faust"	Ch. Gounod
5.	Selection	"Remembrances of Master Lehar"	J. S. M. Geiger
6.	Entr'acte	"In a Monastery Garden" (By request)	A. Ketelbey
7.	March	"Vienna, always Vienna"	H. Schranel

12.0 noon. Bulletin of the Radio Club of Ceylon and South India.

4.45 to 5.15 p.m. Half an hour of TAMIL MUSIC. Programme arranged by Mr. Edward N. Swaminathan.

6.0 p.m. onwards. EVENING SERVICE, relayed from St. Peter's Church, Fort, conducted by the Archdeacon of Colombo, the Ven. N. C. Christopherson, M.A. (Oxon), M.C.

8.0 to 9.0 p.m. DINNER HOUR MUSIC. Programme arranged by "Cephas".

February 17, Monday.

6.15 to 6.30 p.m. "EDUCATIONAL LECTURE SERIES". Lecture No. 16. "THE CHANGING SCHOOL", by Dr. P. B. Ballard, M.A., D. Litt.

Synopsis: Educational changes compared to the Bessemer Process of making steel. Grammar and Spelling. Arithmetic, Geometry, Art, Geography, and History. Discipline. Future changes.

6.30 to 8.0 p.m. A special request programme of BUNGALOW DANCE MUSIC, with vocal and instrumental interludes.

8.0 p.m. General news bulletin.

February 18, Tuesday.

7.0 to 8.30 p.m. ORIENTAL CONCERT by the members of the Wijaranjana Sabha, broadcast from the Studio through the courtesy of Mr. H. Heenatigala.

7.40 p.m. HEALTH TALK in Sinhalese, under the auspices of the Department of Medical and Sanitary Services, on "Health Exhibitions".

8.30 p.m. General news bulletin in English.

February 19, Wednesday.

6.30 to 7.20 p.m. SUNDOWN MUSIC. New issues of "Columbia" records selected and arranged by Mr. E. A. Broadbent Littaur for Messrs. Miller & Co., Ltd.

7.20 p.m. General news bulletin.

9.0 to 10.15 p.m. AFTER DINNER CONCERT, broadcast from the Studio, kindly organized by Mr. R. W. Bryant.

February 20, Thursday.

7.0 to 8.30 p.m. ORIENTAL CONCERT, broadcast from the Studio, kindly organized by Mr. M. G. Perera. Introductory talk by Mr. Perera.

side Ceylon, payable in advance to the Postmaster-General, Colombo.

February 20, Thursday—*contd.*

8.30 p.m. General news bulletin in English.

9.0 to 10.0 p.m. BANA PREACHING from the Studio by the Rev. Chittrabanaka Siri Saddahamachariya Walane Dhammananda of Saranapalaramaya, Walane, Panadure organized by Mr. D. E. K. Wijewardene of Tandrimulla, Panadure.

February 21, Friday.

7.0 to 7.15 p.m. HEALTH TALK, under the auspices of the Department of Medical and Sanitary Services, on "FIGHTING THE MOSQUITO". Speaker: Dr. K. J. Rustomjee, M.R.C.S. Eng., L.R.C.P. Lond., D.T.M. Liverpool, D.P.H. Liverpool, Superintendent, Anti-Malarial Campaign.

7.15 to 8.30 p.m. TWELVE TALKS ON MELODY, by Sir Walford Davies, Mus. Doc., F.R.C.O. (Violin: Marjorie Hayward).

1.	On Melodic Outline	7.	On Balance, Part I.
2.	Eight Definitions	8.	On Balance, Part II.
3.	On Scales	9.	Finishing Touches
4.	On Musical Meanings	10.	On Cadence
5.	On Adventure, Part I.	11.	On Complete Melody
6.	On Adventure, Part II.	12.	Beethoven at work

SUPPLEMENTARY ILLUSTRATION RECORDS.

Sir Walford Davies (Piano) and Marjorie Hayward (Violin).

"Berenice," Largo in E Flat	.. ..	Handel
Adagio in E Flat from Sonata No. 10, Op. 96	.. ..	Beethoven

Sir Walford Davies (Piano), Marjorie Hayward (Violin), and Cedric Sharpe (Cello).

Suite of Melodies from "Alcina", "Alexander's Feast", and "Otho"	.. ..	Handel
Largo in E Flat from Trio No. 4, Op. 11	.. ..	Beethoven
Presto in E Flat from Trio No. 1, Op. 1	.. ..	Beethoven

Sir Walford Davies' first set of "Talks on Melody" were issued in 1922 and created much interest in educational circles. Since then the British Broadcasting Corporation has come into being, and with it an enormous new public in school and home for Sir Walford's talks. He is unquestionably the most popular broadcaster.

Now Sir Walford Davies has re-recorded his "Talks on Melody" in revised form. Not only does he copiously illustrate them with his inimitable pianoforte playing, but he is again partnered by Miss Marjorie Hayward.

Sir Walford's talks are full of ripe wisdom, of humour and humanity, and will appeal to everyone in his worldwide circle of listeners.

(Programme arranged by Mr. A. R. Ephraums. "H. M. V." records lent by The Colombo Stores, Ltd.)

8.30 p.m. General news bulletin.

February 22, Saturday.

6.30 to 7.20 p.m. A VARIETY PROGRAMME on "His Master's Voice" records.

Artistes: Gracie Fields, Maurice Chevalier, Noel Coward, Frank Crumit, Winnie Melville, and Derek Oldham, Cortot, Kreisler, De Groot's Orchestra, Yehudi Menuhin (the wonder boy violinist), and other favourite stars.

7.20 p.m. General news bulletin.

9.30 p.m. onwards. A SINHALESE PLAY, staged by the members of the Arya Sinhala Natya Sabha, relayed from the Tower Hall through the courtesy of Mr. G. D. Edmund Seneviratne.

February 23, Sunday.

10.30 a.m. to 12.0 noon. "His Master's Voice" NEW RECORDS not previously broadcast in Ceylon.

12.0 noon. Bulletin of the Radio Club of Ceylon and South India.

4.45 to 5.15 p.m. Half an hour of SINHALESE MUSIC provided on the latest "Odeon" records.

6.0 p.m. onwards. EVENING SERVICE, relayed from Christ Church, Galle Face, conducted by the Rev. C. W. Reeves, M.A.

8.0 to 9.0 p.m. DINNER HOUR MUSIC.

("Columbia" records selected and arranged by Mr. E. A. Broadbent Littaur for Messrs. Miller & Co., Ltd.)

COLOMBO

BROADCASTING SERVICE.

WAVELENGTH—800 metres. FREQUENCY—375 kilocycles.

Programme for March,

1930.

OPERATED BY THE POST AND TELEGRAPH DEPARTMENT.

A. C. RICHARDS, ACTING GOVERNMENT PRINTER, COLOMBO, CEYLON.

Block by Survey Dept. Ceylon.

11(2)30—800

Hints for the Beginner in Broadcast Listening.

(PART I.)

By E. HARPER, *Chief Engineer.*

The Licence.

You will require a licence, which is merely another word for permit to listen to and enjoy the broadcast programmes. This will cost Rs. 10 per annum and can be obtained by filling up a simple form at the nearest Post Office and placing thereon a Rs. 10 stamp. The Postmaster will then hand you the licence in exchange.

The licence must be renewed every 12 months, and as the sums derived from these licences are the only source of income to meet the cost of conducting the broadcast service, the greater the number of listeners the better will be the service provided.

The Listening Set.

Having got your licence, the next question is : What kind of listening set must you buy ?

If you live within 10-15 miles of Colombo and are content to listen by means of earphones (which are just like the familiar telephone receiver) a very simple arrangement known as a crystal set will suffice. This does not require any batteries, and actually gives a more pure reproduction than many of the most expensive sets. If you live outside this radius or wish to receive the programmes on a loud speaker, a rather more elaborate set will be needed, known as a valve set, which may contain one or more valves according to the power required.

A one-valve set will give good reception on earphones within, say, 50 miles of Colombo, with reaction, or if loud speaker reception is desired, a three-valve set is to be recommended.

These require the use of batteries, and if, as is probable, you know little or nothing of the science of electricity, at this stage you begin to fear you will be unable satisfactorily to work such a set and abandon the idea of becoming a listener. This will be a great mistake. A few minutes' chat with a dealer and an actual demonstration of the working of the set will make it clear that most broadcast listening sets are designed for working by a non-technical user and can be operated very simply.

The dealer will no doubt discuss very fluently such matters as "high frequency amplification," "low frequency amplification," "detectors," &c., which may make the beginner's confusion worse confounded.

Here is a very simple explanation of these terms :—

Sound travels from one place to another by means of waves or vibrations of the air. When speaking, the air is made to vibrate about 800 times per second. Music may cause vibrations from about 30 times to about 10,000 times per second, depending on the pitch of the note.

Wireless signals travel through the ether which is supposed to pervade all space and set up very many more vibrations per second. For instance, the Colombo Broadcasting Station when working sets up 375,000 vibrations or waves per second, and each of these waves is 800 metres (about ½ mile) long. These vibrations form what is known as the Carrier Wave, a term you will frequently hear used.

The sound waves are usually referred to as "low frequency" and the wireless waves as "high frequency."

Sound waves will only carry short distances, so in order to make them travel hundreds or perhaps thousands of miles they must be attached in some way to the wireless waves. This is one of the functions of the Broadcasting Station.

When the wireless waves reach your receiver there must be some means of detecting them, hence the term "detector." This may be a metallic crystal of some kind, or a valve, a little gadget rather like an electric lamp, which is one of the most wonderful inventions of the 20th century.

The function of the detector may be described as to separate the wireless waves from the sound waves in which you are principally interested.

Having done so you may wish to make these stronger, or amplify them, to work a loud speaker, which is done by more valves, and so we get the term "low frequency amplification" usually abbreviated to "l.f."

But you may be so far from the Broadcasting Station that the vibrations are too weak for your detector to "detect" them satisfactorily, and you must then first of all, amplify, by means of another valve, the "high frequency" wireless waves.

That is the meaning of the expression "high frequency" or "h.f. amplification."

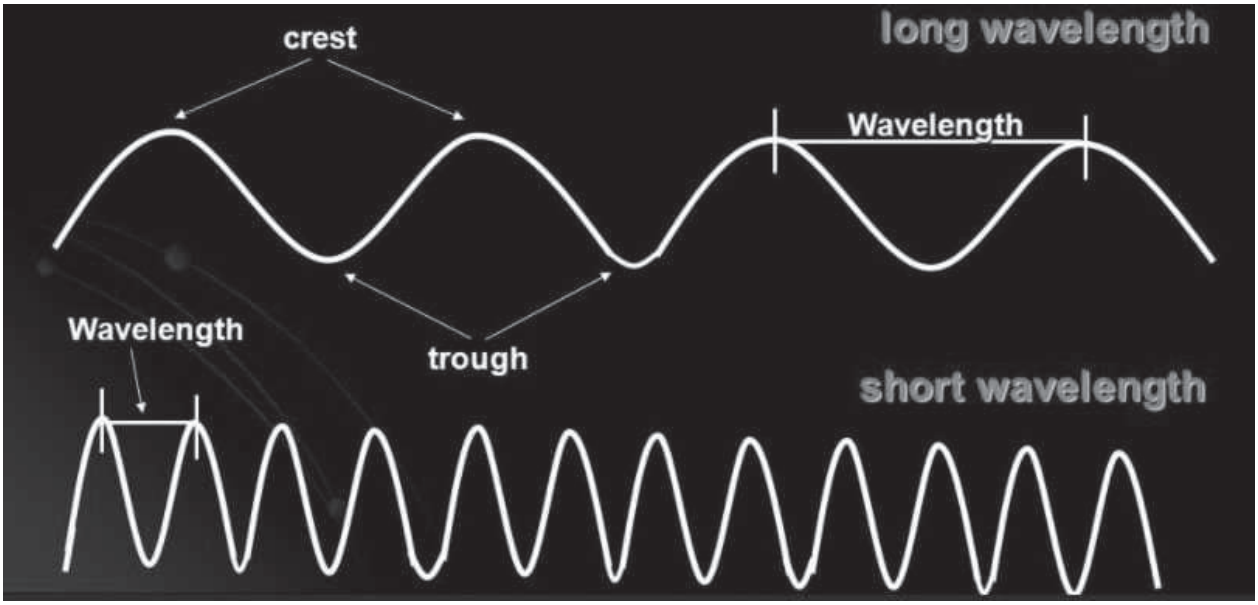
If you wish to listen to Colombo and reside within 50 miles distance you will not need high frequency amplification on your set, which therefore can be simply a detector with low frequency amplifier. If you wish to listen to Calcutta or other distant station you *must* have high frequency stages also.

June 1930

Technical Adjustments (Wavelength) and Broadcast Operations

By mid-1930, significant technical modifications were undertaken in the operations of the Ceylon Broadcasting Service. From its inception until the middle of that year, transmissions had been broadcast on a wavelength of 800 metres. However, pursuant to an international agreement on wavelength allocations, regulatory adjustments were introduced, necessitating a shift in transmissions to 428.5 metres.[1]

At this juncture, the broadcasting centre was equipped with a single medium-wave transmitter of 1 kilowatt capacity. Daily programmes were broadcast from 11:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m., subject to scheduled breaks between 1:30 p.m. and 4:30 p.m., and again between 6:10 p.m. and 6:50 p.m.[2] During school terms, however, additional afternoon transmissions were arranged in order to accommodate educational programmes directed at student listeners, thereby extending the cultural and pedagogical role of the service.[3]



Wavelength

Wavelength is the distance between identical points, or adjacent crests, in the adjacent cycles of a waveform signal propagated in space or along a wire.

In wireless systems, wavelength is usually specified in meters (m), centimeters (cm) or millimeters (mm). In the case of infrared (IR), visible light, ultraviolet (UV) and gamma radiation (γ), the wavelength is more often specified in nanometers (nm) *or angstroms (Å). Nanometers are units of 10-9 m, and angstroms are units of 10-10 m.*

Wavelength is inversely related to frequency, which refers to the number of wave cycles per second. The higher the frequency of the signal, the shorter the wavelength.

Financial considerations also shaped the technical evolution of the service. The projected expenditure for acquiring an additional transmitter was estimated at Rs. 75,000, a sum which reflected both the infrastructural demands of a growing broadcast service and the economic constraints of the late colonial period.[4] **In light of these challenges, Mr. Ayampillai Nadarasa, serving as Regional Telecommunications Engineer, undertook the design of a new 5-kilowatt transmitter. His initiative was instrumental in expanding the service's broadcasting capacity, representing both local engineering ingenuity and the continuing adaptation of Ceylon's broadcasting infrastructure to international standards.**[5]

Footnotes:

1. Annual Administrative Report of the Postmaster General for the Year 1930 (Colombo: Government Printer, 1931), 12.
2. Ibid., 13.
3. Nandana Karunanayake, Sixty Six Years of Radio Broadcasting in Sri Lanka (Moratuwa: The Centre for Media and Policy Studies, 1990), 44.
4. C. P. L. Gunawardana, This is Colombo Calling (Colombo: Perali Publications, 1990), 34.
5. Ibid.; see also Edward Harper's remarks in The Times of Ceylon, June 1930.

30 November 1930

New Strategy of School Broadcasting and Educational Programmes (1930–1931)

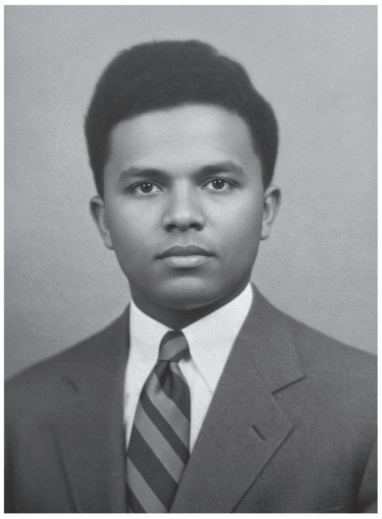
The evolution of educational broadcasting in Ceylon during the early 1930s represents a key development in the formative history of the Ceylon Broadcasting Service. In response to growing interest in instructional radio content, the Director of Education initiated strategic planning for educational programmes in late 1930. On 30 November 1930, a circular was issued to English course supervisors requesting feedback and recommendations to guide the formulation of a comprehensive broadcasting strategy.[1] This initiative demonstrated the colonial education authorities' recognition of radio as a supplementary pedagogical medium capable of extending learning opportunities beyond urban classrooms.



Mr. S. N. Godfrey

Early School Broadcasting and Education Programmes coordination led by the Assistant Director of Education (1930) Mr. S. N. Godfrey.

Parallel initiatives included the introduction of a series of agricultural lectures under the supervision of the Director of Agriculture.[2] These broadcasts, prepared and presented by experts from the Department of Agriculture, focused on improving knowledge in agronomy and related fields. Their integration into the broadcast schedule reflected the dual colonial objectives of enhancing technical education for cultivators and promoting agricultural efficiency in line with broader economic policies.[3]



Mr. St. Elmo Wijekoon

First Secretary of the Education Broadcasting service was Mr. St. Elmo Wijekoon of Royal College.

Civic engagement also played a significant role in fostering a culture of broadcasting. The Radio Club of Ceylon and South India launched Ceylon Radio Times, a periodical providing information on programme schedules, technical developments, and wider broadcasting activities.[4] This publication catered to a growing community of radio enthusiasts and reflected the expanding social and cultural integration of radio in Ceylonese society.

Building upon these initiatives, the formal School Broadcasting Service was inaugurated in May 1931. Twenty-nine schools initially participated, with the early programme coordination led by the Assistant Director of Education, Mr. S. N. Godfrey. The first Secretary of the service was Mr. St. Elmo Wijekoon of Royal College, succeeded by Mr. J. H. de Saram, Inspector of Schools, and later by Mr. L. L. K. Gunatunga when he was attached to the Western Division.[5] All programmes were arranged by the Education Department, while the Colombo Broadcasting Station provided the technical facilities for transmission until the formation of the independent Broadcasting Department on 1 October 1949.[6]

The combined emergence of formal state-led educational initiatives, technical agricultural broadcasts, and voluntary civic contributions illustrates the multifaceted role of radio during this formative period. Broadcasting in Ceylon not only served pedagogical and economic objectives but also cultivated a participatory culture that engaged educators, technical experts, and amateur enthusiasts alike. This interplay between institutional planning and community involvement mirrored global trends in the interwar years, where radio increasingly functioned as both an educational instrument and a medium of social and cultural cohesion.

Footnotes:

1. Annual Administrative Report of the Director of Education for the Year 1930 (Colombo: Government Printer, 1931), 7.
2. Annual Administrative Report of the Director of Agriculture for the Year 1930 (Colombo: Government Printer, 1931), 18.
3. D. M. Colombage, Guwan Viduli Vanshaya (Colombo: M. D. Gunasena & Company, 1989), 57.
4. C. P. L. Gunawardana, This is Colombo Calling (Colombo: Perali Publications, 1990), 34.
5. Annual Administrative Report of the Director of Education for the Year 1931 (Colombo: Government Printer, 1932), 12.
6. Ibid., 13.

December 1930

The Necessity of Appointing a Full-Time Officer for the Colombo Broadcasting Service

In his Annual Administrative Report for the Year 1930, the Postmaster General drew attention to the urgent necessity of appointing a full-time officer to supervise the continued development of the Colombo Broadcasting Service.[1] He stressed that such an appointment was indispensable to maintaining the operational sustainability of the Service, particularly with regard to the management of its commercial functions.

According to the report, the responsibilities of this officer were envisioned to extend well beyond administrative oversight. The Postmaster General emphasized the importance of systematically studying the tastes and preferences of listeners and using this information to plan suitable musical and literary programmes.[2] Additionally, the officer was expected to conduct regular inspections of broadcasting premises and to oversee the efficient coordination of all activities related to programme production and transmission.[3]

This recommendation reflected an emerging recognition of broadcasting as more than a purely technical service. By late 1930, radio in Ceylon was increasingly regarded as a cultural institution, necessitating professionalized management structures capable of balancing commercial sustainability with audience engagement. The proposal to appoint a full-time officer thus signaled the colonial administration's awareness of broadcasting's potential influence in shaping public taste, fostering cultural refinement, and extending the reach of state-sponsored communication.[4]

Analytical Note:

The Postmaster General's appeal for a dedicated officer in 1930 marks a significant administrative turning point in the institutional history of broadcasting in Ceylon. Until this time, broadcasting had been largely managed as an auxiliary service of the Posts and Telegraph Department, dependent upon the voluntary contributions of individuals and the limited availability of engineering staff. By recommending the creation of a professional managerial position, the report underscored the growing complexity of radio as both a commercial and cultural enterprise.

This recommendation must also be situated within broader imperial and global broadcasting trends of the interwar period. Across the British Empire, radio services were transitioning from amateur and experimental operations toward more formalized state-controlled institutions. The call for a full-time officer in Ceylon reflected this trajectory, anticipating the eventual establishment of the Department of Broadcasting in 1949. It further illustrates how colonial administrators recognized that broadcasting could not be left solely to the technical sphere but required specialized cultural and programmatic oversight in order to remain relevant and sustainable.

Footnotes:

1. Annual Administrative Report of the Postmaster General for the Year 1930 (Colombo: Government Printer, 1931), 12.
2. Ibid., 13.
3. bid., 13–14.
4. Ibid.

December 1930

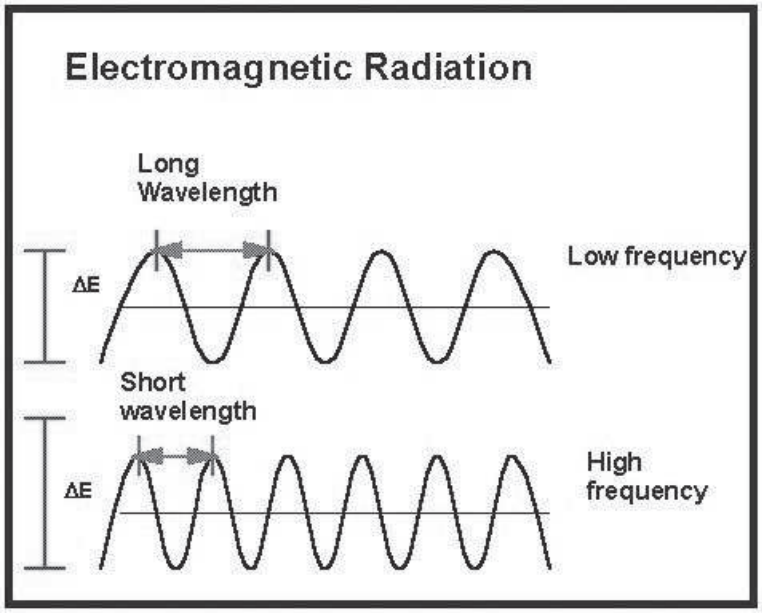
Modification of Transmission Wavelength in Comparative Perspective

From the inception of broadcasting operations in Ceylon until mid-1930, transmissions were conducted on a wavelength of 800 metres, corresponding to a frequency of 375 kilocycles per second (k/cs).[1] **However, following the stipulations of the Washington International Radiotelegraph Convention of 1927, which mandated the reallocation of specific frequencies for maritime communications, it became necessary to adjust the transmission parameters of the Ceylon Broadcasting Service.[2]**

In June 1930, the Colombo medium-wave transmitter was accordingly reconfigured to operate on a new wavelength of 423.5 metres, equivalent to a frequency of 700 k/cs.[3] **This task was undertaken by the engineering personnel of the Post, Telegraph and Telephone Department under the supervision of Regional Telecommunications Engineer Arumugam Nadarasa, assisted by W. E. de Silva, Benet Wijetilaka, and E. C. Wijekoon.[4]** The redesigned transmitter incorporated a 500-watt oscillator driving a final amplifier with two 2.5-kilowatt silica valves, while modulation was achieved through two additional silica-encased modulator valves. Elements of the earlier circuit were retained to economize on resources.[5] Despite these technical refinements, the service radius of the Colombo station did not expand significantly due to atmospheric disturbances characteristic of the tropics, limiting effective reception to roughly thirty miles.[6]

This adjustment did not occur in isolation. The regulatory realignments imposed by the Washington Convention also affected other colonial broadcasting services across the British Empire. In India, for example, the Calcutta and Bombay stations, which had begun transmissions in the late 1920s, were similarly compelled to alter their wavelengths to conform to new allocations, leading to complaints of reduced audibility among listeners during the transition.[7] **In Malaya, the nascent Singapore station (launched in 1930) was also assigned a medium-wave frequency consistent with Washington allocations, although its limited transmitter power mirrored the constraints experienced in Colombo.[8] Likewise, in the Straits Settlements, the reallocation underscored the priority accorded to maritime**

wireless communication routes through the Indian Ocean and South China Sea, with broadcasting services relegated to the narrower spectrum bands available after maritime channels were secured.[9]



Physiological explanation of the 800-meter (375 k/cs) broadcasting power in Ceylon in the late 1920s and early 1930s

The broadcasting transmissions in Ceylon prior to mid-1930 operated on a wavelength of 800 metres, equivalent to a frequency of 375 kilocycles per second (k/cs)

These values are related by the fundamental electromagnetic relationship, where radio waves propagate at the speed of light ***(approximately 300 million metres, or 186,000 miles, per second).*** *Once radiated from the transmitting antenna, the electromagnetic waves travelled outward at this constant velocity, irrespective of the power of the transmitter.*

A one-kilowatt transmitter supplied sufficient electrical energy to generate a radio-frequency carrier at 375 k/cs,

which was then coupled to an antenna system that converted this energy into radiated electromagnetic waves. While transmitter power does not determine the speed or ultimate distance travelled by the waves, it governs the strength of the signal at increasing distances. At medium-wave frequencies such as 375 k/cs, propagation occurred primarily by ground wave during daylight hours and by a combination of ground wave and ionospheric skywave at night.

Under daytime conditions, a one-kilowatt transmitter at this wavelength could provide reliable reception within a limited regional radius, while at night, favourable ionospheric reflection occasionally allowed reception at distances extending to many hundreds of miles. Thus, although the radiated waves physically traversed vast distances almost instantaneously, the practical reception range was constrained by transmitter power, antenna efficiency, and propagation conditions rather than by the fundamental physics of wave propagation.

Analytical Note:

Thus, Ceylon's experience reflects the wider tensions inherent in the interwar broadcasting landscape: colonial administrations sought to promote cultural and educational content via radio, but their efforts were circumscribed by international regulatory frameworks designed primarily around strategic and commercial maritime communication. The engineering ingenuity of Nadarasa and his team demonstrates the resilience of local expertise in adapting to such global impositions, even if the material outcome in terms of range and clarity remained modest.

Footnotes:

1. Annual Administrative Report of the Postmaster General for the Year 1930 (Colombo: Government Printer, 1931), 15.
2. International Radiotelegraph Convention, Washington, 1927.
3. Annual Administrative Report of the Postmaster General for the Year 1930, 16.
4. Ibid.
5. C. P. L. Gunawardana, This Is Colombo Calling (Colombo: Perali Publications, 1990), 18.
6. Annual Administrative Report of the Postmaster General for the Year 1930, 17–18.
7. Philip Woods, "India's First Radio Broadcasts: The Beginnings of the Indian Broadcasting Company," Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television 13, no. 3 (1993): 299–312.
8. Ruth Teer-Tomaselli, "Empire and Radio Colonialism: The Early Development of Radio Broadcasting in Malaya and Singapore," Journal of Southeast Asian Studies 21, no. 1 (1990): 110–12.
9. Daniel R. Headrick, The Invisible Weapon: Telecommunications and International Politics, 1851–1945 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 240–43.

December 1930

Radio License Issuance and Its Growth, 1925–1930

The Annual Administrative Report of the Postmaster General for the Year 1930 records that, despite an increase in total hours of broadcast programming, the growth of licensed radio ownership in Ceylon was limited.[1] By the close of 1930, a total of 1,408 radio licenses had been issued, representing only a marginal increase of twenty-eight compared with the preceding year.[2]

The statistical pattern suggests that the expansion of airtime did not yield a proportionate increase in the listening public. The declining rate of new license registrations underscores both the economic and infrastructural constraints that hindered the diffusion of radio technology within the colony.[3] This trajectory mirrored broader colonial broadcasting contexts, as in India, where limited consumer capacity slowed the spread of wireless receivers despite official efforts to expand programming.[4]

Table 1. Annual Radio License Issuance in Ceylon, 1925–1930

Year	Number of Licensed Sets	Year-on-Year Change
1925	176	-
1926	450	+274
1927	924	+474
1928	1290	+366
1929	1380	+90
1930	1408	+28

Source: Compiled from Annual Administrative Reports of the Postmaster General, 1925–1930.

The above table demonstrates that while the early years (1925–1928) saw steady increases in licensing reflecting both novelty and enthusiasm for the new medium the rate of growth slowed dramatically after 1928. By 1930, the incremental rise of only twenty-eight licenses strongly suggested that Ceylon's radio broadcasting was approaching a plateau, shaped by affordability, limited coverage, and technological barriers.

Footnotes:

1. Annual Administrative Report of the Postmaster General for the Year 1930 (Colombo: Government Printer, 1931), 10.
2. Ibid., 11.
3. D. M. Colombage, Guwan Viduli Vanshaya (Colombo: M. D. Gunasena & Company, 1989), 34.
4. Philip Woods, "India's First Radio Broadcasts: The Beginnings of the Indian Broadcasting Company," Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television 13, no. 3 (1993): 303–4.

December 1930

An Appraisal of Five Years of Radio Broadcasting in Ceylon, 1925–1930

The Annual Administrative Report of the Postmaster General for the Year 1930 provides a valuable evaluative perspective on the first five years of broadcasting in Ceylon.[1] Although broadcasting commenced with the much-celebrated experimental transmissions of December 1925, the progress achieved by 1930 appeared modest when measured against the number of licensed radio receiving sets.[2] The report itself cautions, however, that reliance upon such quantitative indicators alone constitutes a partial and ultimately misleading assessment of the service's developmental trajectory.[3]

In structural terms, broadcasting in Ceylon during this formative period had yet to achieve institutional self-sufficiency. The service remained financially constrained and continued to depend heavily upon the voluntary contributions of a wide range of supporters.[4] Unlike the more resource-endowed Indian Broadcasting Company, which enjoyed corporate investment **(though still plagued by insolvency by 1930),** Ceylonese broadcasting was largely sustained through a hybrid model of government oversight supplemented by civic and amateur support.[5]

Particularly noteworthy was the role of amateur radio societies in both Ceylon and South India. Through the establishment of a Broadcasting Fund, these organizations provided indispensable assistance, enabling the station to secure the participation of visiting and transiting artists, thereby enriching programme content.[6] The Ceylon Radio Club further contributed to the sustainability of operations through the publication and distribution of a monthly programme guide, which offset government expenditure by transferring part of the financial responsibility to the listening community itself.[7]

Taken together, these developments highlight the improvisational and collaborative character of broadcasting in Ceylon during its first half-decade. The service was neither a fully state-subsidized enterprise nor an autonomous commercial undertaking; rather, it reflected a unique colonial adaptation, dependent on voluntary cultural contributions and transnational amateur initiatives. By 1930, although audience growth was limited in quantitative terms, the qualitative foundations of a broadcasting tradition sustained by a blend of official infrastructure and civil society initiative had been firmly established.

Footnotes:

1. Annual Administrative Report of the Postmaster General for the Year 1930 (Colombo: Government Printer, 1931), 14–15.
2. Ibid.
3. Annual Administrative Report of the Postmaster General for the Year 1930, 15.
4. Ibid.
5. Philip Woods, "India's First Radio Broadcasts: The Beginnings of the Indian Broadcasting Company," Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television 13, no. 3 (1993): 302–5.
6. Annual Administrative Report of the Postmaster General for the Year 1930, 16.
7. Ibid.

1931

March 1931

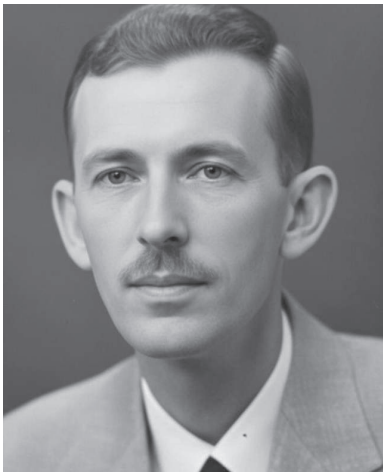
Inception of School Broadcasting and Formation of the School Radio Broadcasting Committee

The formal establishment of school broadcasting in Ceylon occurred in May 1931 under the auspices of the Department of Education, following proposals advanced by the Director of Education.[1] This initiative commenced with the participation of twenty-nine schools, thereby marking a significant milestone in the incorporation of radio into the educational framework of the colony. At its inception, approximately 3,000 students were registered to benefit from the broadcasts.[2]



Mr. S. N. Godfrey

A School Radio Broadcasting Committee was appointed in March 1931 to oversee and coordinate the service.[3] The pioneering members of this committee included Mr. S. N. Godfrey, Assistant Director of Education (Chairman);



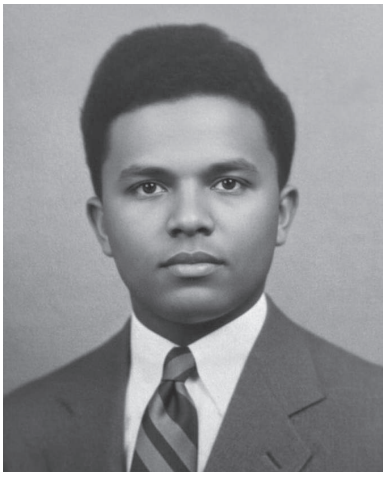
Mr. J. D. Dinwiddie



Mr. P. De. S. Kularathna



Mr. T. B. Jayah



Mr. St. Elmo Wijekoon

Mr. P. D. S. Kularatne; Mr. R. S. D. Seram; Brother Bonaventure; Mr. Edward Harper; Mr. J. D. Dinwiddie; Mr. T. B. Jayah; and Mr. St. Elmo Wijekoon, who served as Secretary.[4] The intellectual and organizational leadership of Mr. Godfrey proved especially decisive in shaping the pedagogical orientation of the early broadcasts.

The programmes were designed, curated, and supervised entirely by the Department of Education, while the Colombo Broadcasting Service provided the necessary transmission facilities.[5] This arrangement remained in effect until 1 October 1949, when the newly established Department of Broadcasting assumed responsibility for all educational radio broadcasting activities.[6] This development not only reflected the pedagogical aspirations of the colonial education system but also paralleled broader international trends in school broadcasting. Similar educational services were being introduced in Britain and India during this period, underscoring Ceylon's early alignment with global innovations in instructional broadcasting.[7]

Footnotes:

1. Annual Administrative Report of the Director of Education for the Year 1931 (Colombo: Government Printer, 1932), 14.
2. Ibid., 15.
3. Ibid.
4. C. P. L. Gunawardana, This Is Colombo Calling (Colombo: Perali Publications, 1990), 34- 35.
5. Annual Administrative Report of the Postmaster General for the Year 1931 (Colombo: Government Printer, 1932), 9.
6. D. M. Colombage, Guwan Viduli Vanshaya (Colombo: M. D. Gunasena & Company, 1989), 56.
7. Asa Briggs, The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom: Volume II, The Golden Age of Wireless (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965), 418–20.

March 1931

Comparative Note: The Emergence of School Broadcasting in Britain and India

The introduction of school broadcasting in Ceylon in 1931 occurred within a broader international framework that saw the simultaneous development of educational broadcasting services in other parts of the British Empire and in Britain itself.

In Britain, the British Broadcasting Company (later the British Broadcasting Corporation, BBC) had initiated regular school broadcasts as early as 1924.[1] These programmes were designed to supplement classroom instruction by providing lectures, dramatizations, and music specifically tailored to educational needs. By the end of the decade, the BBC had developed an extensive School Broadcasting Department with systematic timetables, specially prepared teachers' notes, and close collaboration with the Board of Education.[2] The service quickly became a model emulated by other Commonwealth territories.

In India, All India Radio (AIR), established in 1930, launched its first experimental educational programmes during the early 1930s.[3] These broadcasts, though initially limited in scope and reach, reflected a growing recognition of the potential of radio as a medium for mass education in a country with vast geographical and linguistic diversity. By the mid-1930s, school broadcasting programmes in India included talks on science, history, and hygiene, often supported by printed instructional materials circulated to teachers.[4] Although infrastructural limitations restricted their reach, these early initiatives laid the foundation for the more systematic educational services that AIR developed after independence.

The establishment of school broadcasting in Ceylon thus paralleled these wider developments. Like the BBC and AIR, Ceylonese educational authorities recognized the medium's potential to extend learning opportunities beyond the classroom. However, while Britain and India operated under metropolitan and subcontinental scales respectively, Ceylon's programme was localized and tightly coordinated by the

Department of Education from its inception. This comparative perspective underscores how Ceylon's initiative was both an emulation of metropolitan models and an adaptive response to local educational needs.

Footnotes:

1. Asa Briggs, The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom: Volume II, The Golden Age of Wireless (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965), 315–20.
2. Sian Nicholas, "The British Broadcasting Corporation and Public Service Broadcasting," in The Cambridge History of British Television, ed. James Curran and David Morley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 187.
3. L. S. Ramaiah, Broadcasting in India (New Delhi: Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, 1960), 54–55.
4. Arvind Rajagopal, Politics after Television: Religious Nationalism and the Reshaping of the Indian Public (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 37–38.

April 1931

Talks and Police Broadcasts

A significant development in the programming schedule of 1931 was the introduction of English-language talks on agriculture, designed as part of the broadcasting service's commitment to public education. **These lectures were transmitted from the Department of Agriculture at Peradeniya and relayed via the Colombo–Kandy trunk telephone lines, thereby demonstrating not only the expanding thematic scope of broadcast content but also the technical adaptability of the service.[1]** This marked an early example of the integration of specialist government departments into the national broadcasting framework.

In parallel, the Colombo Broadcasting Service initiated the practice of disseminating announcements from the Police Department, which included crime alerts and public safety messages.[2] Such broadcasts proved immediately effective in bridging the gap between law enforcement and the public. A particularly notable case occurred when details of a stolen motor vehicle in Colombo were broadcast; within two hours, a listener reported its whereabouts in a ravine nearly 60 miles away, enabling the police to apprehend the suspect.[3]

Analytical Note:

These innovations underscore two parallel functions of early broadcasting in Ceylon: first, its pedagogical utility in extending scientific and agricultural knowledge; and second, its emergent role as a tool of governance and public security.

By providing both educational content and rapid communication for law enforcement, radio in Ceylon demonstrated its potential as a modern instrument of statecraft, paralleling trends in other colonial contexts where radio began to serve both cultural and administrative functions.

Footnotes:

1. Annual Administrative Report of the Postmaster General for 1931 (Colombo: Government Press, 1932), 12–13.
2. C. P. L. Gunawardana, This is Colombo Calling (Colombo: Perali Publications, 1990), 34.
3. D. M. Colombage, Guwan Viduli Vanshaya (Colombo: M. D. Gunasena & Company, 1989), 19.

09 September 1931

Proposal for a Programme Planning Committee

On 9 September 1931, the Chief Posts and Telegraph Engineer submitted a report to the Postmaster General recommending the reorganization of programme planning procedures within the Colombo Broadcasting Service. In this report, he stated:

"I believe the time has come to revise the existing method of programme preparation, which has been in operation thus far. Up to the present, the entire responsibility for this task has rested almost exclusively upon myself.

I am now inclined to propose the establishment of a formal committee for this purpose. Although this suggestion has been raised intermittently over the past several years, no concrete steps have yet been taken to implement it.[1]



Ceylon Police Department

In 1930, the Ceylon Police Department, led by ***Inspector General Herbert Layard Dowbiggin,*** *continued expanding its modernization efforts by issuing a dedicated handbook of traffic rules and regulations to manage increasing vehicle traffic. This followed the 1920 introduction of traffic policing and preceded the 1932 relocation of Police Headquarters to Colombo Fort.*

Key Aspects of the Ceylon Police Department Around 1930:

Traffic Management:

Due to the rise in motorized vehicles, 1930 saw the formal issuance of traffic rules, marking a focus on traffic regulation that began in 1920.

Leadership:

Herbert Layard Dowbiggin was the 8th Inspector General of Police (IGP), serving from 1913 to 1937.

Expansion:

The department was strengthening its infrastructure, which led to the move of the Police Headquarters from Maradana to its central location in Colombo Fort shortly after in 1932.

Context:

By this era, the force was already employing structured training, including the "Departmental Order Book" formulated in 1923 for comprehensive police procedures

Operations:

The department continued to focus on maintaining order across the island, with a well-established network of police stations operating under the British colonial administration.

Analytical Note:

This appeal illustrates the growing awareness within the technical leadership of the limitations of an individualized system of programme planning. By 1931, the task of content selection and scheduling had remained concentrated in the hands of a single officer, reflecting the experimental and improvisational nature of broadcasting during its formative years. The proposal for a committee structure, however, signaled a recognition of the need for institutionalized and collaborative mechanisms of cultural governance.[2] It also underscored the increasing complexity of programming demands, as radio moved from a purely technical experiment to a medium of public communication requiring broader consultation and oversight.[3]

Footnotes:

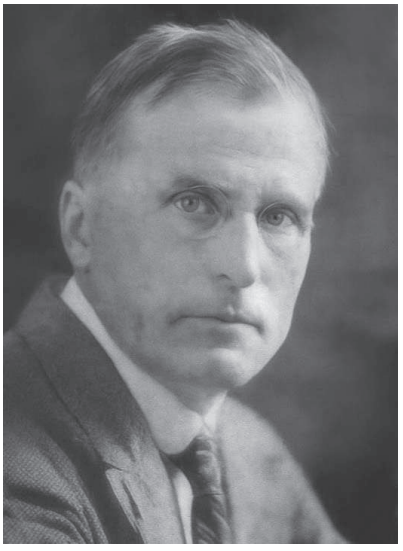
1. Report of the Chief Telegraphs and Telephone Engineer to the Postmaster General, 9 September 1931, cited in Annual Administrative Report of the Postmaster General for 1931 (Colombo: Government Press, 1932), 17.
2. D. M. Colombage, Guwan Viduli Vanshaya (Colombo: M. D. Gunasena & Company, 1989), 21.
3. C. P. L. Gunawardana, This is Colombo Calling (Colombo: Perali Publications, 1990), 35.

15 September 1931

Mr. Edward Harper's Retirement and his Legacy in Ceylon

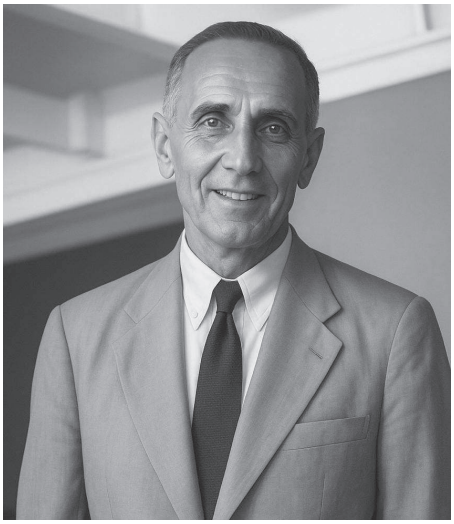
On 15 September 1931, Mr. Edward Harper, a distinguished British civil servant who had served as Chief Posts Telegraph Engineer in Ceylon for approximately ten years, concluded his official tenure and returned to England. He was succeeded by Mr. John Shillitoe, who assumed the position of Chief Posts and Telegraph Engineer and controller of Broadcasting.[1]

Harper held multiple key roles, including Chief Engineer of Telegraphs and Telephones, Controller of Broadcasting, and notably, the principal architect of the Colombo Broadcasting Service.[2] Prior to his departure, he submitted a formal proposal to the colonial administration advocating for the separation of telegraph and telephone services from the postal department. This recommendation, however, was not accepted by the British authorities at the time. Consequently, Harper retired from government service and returned to the United Kingdom.[3]



Mr. Edward Harper (M.I.E.E.) (M.I.Radio E.)
Chief Engineer and Controler of Broadcasting 1921 - 1931
Posts and Telegraph Department Government of Ceylon

He was accompanied by several senior colleagues, including Mr. J. Penman, Assistant Chief Engineer of Telegraphs and Telephones (A.M.I.E.E.), and Mr. F. E. Kennard (M.I.E.E.), Principal of the Government Technical College, Colombo.[4] Upon their return to England, Harper and Kennard co-founded Harken Electrical Company Ltd., an enterprise combining the first three letters of their surnames, established at 18A South End, Croydon, England.[5] Subsequently, three other senior engineers Mr. A. T. Kingston, Mr. H. S. Bryant, and Mr. R. P. Amarasingha also resigned from Ceylonese service and joined their former colleagues in England.[6]



Mr. John Shillitoe (M.I.E.E)
Chief Engineer and Controler of
Broadcasting From September 1931
Posts and Telegraph Departmen
Government of Ceylon

It is noteworthy that Harper's 1931 proposal for structural separation of telegraph and telephone services from the postal department was ultimately implemented five decades in 1980, later by the Honourable D. B. Wijetunga, then Minister and later Governor of the North Western Province of Sri Lanka.[7]

Additionally, Harper and his successor, John Shillitoe, had collaborated in the development of the Harper–Shillito Flood Alarm Patrol Check II System, designed to assist railway authorities in tropical regions prone to seasonal flooding. This system was granted Indian Patent No. 11068/25, with a general description published by the Siemens and General Electric Company Ltd., London WC2, in May 1928.[8]

Upon Harper's and Penman's retirement, the position of Chief Engineer of Telegraphs and Telephones and Controller of Broadcasting was assigned to the next most senior officer, the Divisional Engineer for Railway Signalling. At that time, railway signalling responsibilities fell under the purview of the Posts and Telegraph Department (P&T) and Telephone Department, and the newly appointed Chief Engineer, John Shillitoe, assumed oversight of these operations.[9]

Footnotes:

1. D. M. Colombage, Guwan Viduli Vanshaya (Colombo: M.D. Gunasena & Company, 1989), 22.
2. Ibid.
3. Annual Administrative Report of the Postmaster General, Ceylon, 1931, 23–24.
4. C. P. L. Gunawardana, This is Colombo Calling (Colombo: Perali Publications, 1990), 35- 36.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid., 118; Siemens & General Electric Co. Ltd., Description of the Harper–Shillito Flood Alarm Patrol Check II System, London, May 1928.
9. Annual Administrative Report of the Postmaster General, Ceylon, 1931, 25.

November 1931

Following the appointment of Chief Engineer Mr. John Shillitoe, Organisational Restructuring of the Posts and Telegraphs Department

In November 1931, following the appointment of Mr. John Shillitoe as Chief Engineer of Posts and Telegraphs Department, several senior positions within the department underwent significant reorganization. A few months after Shillitoe's assumption of office, three of the most senior officers Mr. A. T. Kingston (Radio), Mr. H. S. Bryant (Lines and Cables), and Mr. R. P. Amarasingha (Telegraphs and Power) all of whom had played integral roles alongside Mr. Edward Harper in the establishment of broadcasting in Ceylon, tendered their resignations.[1] Their retirement facilitated the promotion of Mr. J. M. Baxter, A.M.I.E.E., who had joined the department in 1929 as Divisional Engineer (Telephones), to the post of Assistant Chief Engineer.[2]



Mr. A. Nadarasa
Devisional Engineer (Redio)



Mr. D. P. Jayasekera
Devisional Engineer (Telephone)

Subsequently, Mr. D. Lusk, A.M.I.E.E., was appointed Divisional Engineer (Radio), while Mr. Ayampillai Nadarasa, A.M.I.E.E., formerly Engineer (Lines and Cables), was promoted to Divisional Engineer (Telegraphs and Power).[3] Upon the retirement of Mr. Baxter in April 1936, Mr. Lusk succeeded him as Assistant Chief Engineer, and Mr. A. Nadarasa, who had undergone specialized training in Radio Engineering at the British Post Office during 1925–1926, assumed duties as Divisional Engineer (Radio).[4]

Mr. S. Rajanayagam, who had pursued advanced studies in Telecommunications Engineering in the United Kingdom under a government scholarship and returned to Ceylon in 1934, was initially appointed as Engineer (Radio) in the Radio Division, though he was later transferred to the Lines and Cables Division.[5] In 1936, Messrs. D. P. Jayasekera and C. A. R. Ankettel also returned to the island after completing their telecommunications engineering training in the United Kingdom. Mr. Jayasekera was first assigned to the Telephone Division as Engineer before being transferred to the Radio Division in 1937.[6] Similarly, Mr. W. E. de Silva, after receiving training in Radio Engineering at the British Post Office, also joined the Radio Division.[7]

Collectively, **Messrs. Nadarasa, Jayasekera, and de Silva played a decisive role in expanding the operational capacity of the Colombo Broadcasting Service to meet the demands of its steadily growing audience.[8]**

Footnotes:

1. C. P. L. Gunawardana, This is Colombo Calling (Colombo: Perali Publications, 1990), 34 -35.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. Annual Administrative Report of the Postmaster General, Ceylon, 1934, 27.
6. Gunawardana, This is Colombo Calling, 36.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid.

November 1931

The Colombo Broadcasting Service had gradually gained considerable popularity

In November 1931, the Radio Journal published a message by the Honourable John Lionel Kotalawala, then Member of the state council in which he observed that the programmes of the Colombo Broadcasting Station had already gained "considerable popularity" among listeners.[1] Mr. Kotalawala underscored the necessity of introducing low-cost medium-wave radio receivers to the Ceylonese market, emphasizing that such an initiative would significantly enhance public accessibility to broadcasting. He further expressed confidence that the emerging radio societies in Ceylon and South India would take the lead in ensuring the availability of affordable receivers, thereby contributing to the expansion and consolidation of broadcasting services for the general public.[2]

The ministerial remarks are corroborated by official licensing statistics. According to the Annual Administrative Reports of the Postmaster General, 924 radio licenses were issued by December 1927, rising to 1,290 in 1928, 1,380 in 1929, and 1,480 in 1930.[3] By 1931, the number had reached approximately 1,236 representing about twice as much increase within just four years.[4] This rapid growth substantiates Kotelawala's claim of the service's popularity while also highlighting the practical barrier to expansion namely, the high cost of imported radio receivers.

This ministerial statement is therefore significant for two reasons. First, it demonstrates the government's recognition of broadcasting as a rising social force in early 1930s Ceylon. Second, by stressing the need for cheaper receivers, it underscores an early attempt to democratize radio access, marking the transition of broadcasting from an elite pastime to a medium with mass cultural and socio-political impact.

Footnotes:

1. John Lionel Kotelawala, "Ministerial Message," Radio Journal, November 1931, 15.
2. Ibid.
3. Report of the Postmaster General, Ceylon, for the Year 1928 (Colombo: Government Printer, 1929), 7; Report of the Postmaster General, Ceylon, for the Year 1929 (Colombo: Government Printer, 1930), 6; Report of the Postmaster General, Ceylon, for the Year 1930 (Colombo: Government Printer, 1931), 5.
4. Report of the Postmaster General, Ceylon, for the Year 1931 (Colombo: Government Printer, 1932), 5.

December 1931

Experiments in Short Wave Broadcasting

In December 1931, further modifications were carried out on the existing transmitter of the Colombo Broadcasting Station to facilitate the simultaneous operation of broadcasting and ship-to-shore communication services.[1] At the same time, a proposal was advanced to augment the transmitter's overall power output. As part of these technical adjustments, experimental short-wave broadcasting was undertaken using the station's earlier ship-to-shore apparatus, which had been superseded by more modern equipment.[2] These short-wave experiments were particularly aimed at extending the reach of broadcasting beyond Colombo, thereby improving reception quality for listeners in outstation areas.[3]

This development illustrates the engineering ingenuity of the early 1930s, when resource limitations required the adaptive re-use of available telecommunication equipment. It also underscores the gradual recognition that effective broadcasting in Ceylon depended not only on content but also on reliable technical infrastructure capable of reaching a geographically dispersed audience.

Footnotes:

1. Report of the Postmaster General, Ceylon, for the Year 1931 (Colombo: Government Printer, 1932), 6.
2. Ibid.
3. C. P. L. Gunawardana, This is Colombo Calling (Colombo: Perali Publications, 1990), 35.

16 December 1931

Sixth Anniversary of the Colombo Broadcasting Service

On 16 December 1931, the sixth anniversary of the Colombo Broadcasting Service was marked by a successful exchange of goodwill messages between the Colombo and Bombay radio stations.[1]

The reply to the message of goodwill received from the Bombay Broadcasting Station was broadcast over the airwaves by the Honourable Mohamed Maacan Markar, then Minister of Coumunications and Public Works.[2]



Mr. Mohammed Maacan Markar
Minister of Communication and Public Works
1931 - 1936

The event was more than ceremonial; it highlighted the regional and imperial significance of broadcasting during the interwar years. Goodwill greetings exchanged between Colombo and Bombay underscored the growing technical and cultural interconnectedness of the colonial broadcasting services across South Asia. Such exchanges also reinforced the imperial communication network established under British authority, in which colonial broadcasters both shared and symbolically affirmed their role within a larger broadcasting community.

From a South Asian perspective, the greetings illustrate the early recognition of radio as a diplomatic and cultural bridge between Ceylon and India.[3] By participating in reciprocal broadcasts, colonial administrations demonstrated the symbolic capacity of radio to transcend geography, foster goodwill, and project a sense of shared identity among the colonies. This practice, while rooted in imperial structures, foreshadowed the later use of radio in the region as a tool for international cultural diplomacy and postcolonial cooperation.

Footnotes:

1. Report of the Postmaster General, Ceylon, for the Year 1931 (Colombo: Government Printer, 1932), 7.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.

December 1931

Radio Diplomacy and Regional Exchanges

From the early 1930s, the Colombo Broadcasting Service actively participated in cross-regional broadcasting initiatives, signaling the emergence of radio as a tool for both cultural exchange and colonial diplomacy. Notable among these early efforts were the reciprocal goodwill messages exchanged with the Bombay Broadcasting Station, particularly on the sixth anniversary of the Colombo Broadcasting Service in December 1931.[1] The reply from Bombay was broadcast over Colombo's airwaves by the Honourable Mohamed Maacan Markar, Minister of communications and Public Works, symbolizing official recognition of radio's capacity to forge communication links between colonies.[2]

These exchanges were emblematic of a broader regional network that included other South Asian stations and, indirectly, the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) in London. Short-wave and medium-wave transmissions allowed colonial administrations to maintain cultural, political, and technical ties across vast distances.[3] Goodwill greetings from India and other colonial territories reflected not only cordiality but also a subtle assertion of imperial cohesion. Through radio, the colonies projected a shared identity, while simultaneously showcasing technical proficiency and modernity in communications.

The period also saw experimental collaborations, such as short-wave testing aimed at extending service to remote areas, illustrating the dual purpose of broadcasting: technological innovation and regional engagement.[4] In the broader context, these regional exchanges laid the groundwork for postwar broadcasting diplomacy, demonstrating that radio could function as both a public service medium and a symbolic instrument of inter-colonial communication.

Footnotes:

1. Report of the Postmaster General, Ceylon, for the Year 1931 (Colombo: Government Printer, 1932), 7.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.

20 December 1931

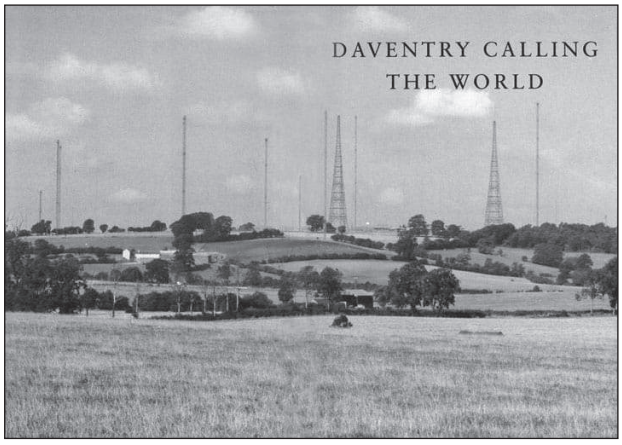
Rebroadcast of the Empire Radio Service via Colombo

On 19 December 1931, at 8:00 p.m., the Colombo Broadcasting Service commenced a rebroadcast of the Empire Radio Service, which originated from Barrow Hill in Northamptonshire, England.[1] This retransmission exemplified the growing technical and institutional capacity of the Colombo station to relay international broadcasts to local audiences.

In preparation for this service, the Executive Committee allocated a sum of Rs. 11,000 for the procurement of the necessary equipment, an expenditure formally approved by the Financial Secretary.[2]

The rebroadcast of the Empire Radio Service highlights the close ties between colonial Ceylon and the metropolitan broadcasting network of the British Empire. Through these retransmissions, Colombo listeners gained access to news, cultural programming, and educational content from England, thereby integrating Ceylon into the broader imperial information framework.[3] The decision to invest significant funds in the required technical infrastructure reflects both the administrative prioritization of modern communications and the symbolic importance of broadcasting as a vehicle for reinforcing imperial unity.

Moreover, these retransmissions contributed to the professionalization of radio in Ceylon, exposing local engineers and technicians to advanced transmission standards and operational practices. By serving as a relay point for the Empire Radio Service, Colombo not only amplified its local broadcasting reach but also positioned itself as a regional hub in the broader imperial broadcasting network.[4]



BBC Calls the World from Daventry in the rolling green fields of England



The main transmitter mast at Daventry

Analytical Background

The rebroadcast reflects several key dynamics of early colonial broadcasting:

1. Imperial Integration:

The retransmission of content from Barrow Hill enabled Ceylonese audiences to access the same information and cultural programming circulating in the metropole, reinforcing the ideological and administrative connections of the British Empire.



Daventry transmitting station on Borough Hill, Northamptonshire, England (1931).

This site was historically significant for several reasons:

It was the oldest former BBC transmission site still in use for some time and was central to early national radio broadcasting in the UK.

The station, known as 5XX, opened on July 27, 1925, and was the world's first high-power, long-wave transmitting station, providing coverage to 94% of the UK population.

The site was also instrumental in the development of radar, with a key experiment conducted nearby in 1935 to test the feasibility of aircraft detection by radio methods.

By 1990, the station had 43 masts, but it closed in 1992, and most were subsequently taken down

The land has since been turned into a country park.

2. Technical Advancement:

Funding for equipment demonstrates an early investment in the technological infrastructure necessary for medium- and long-wave retransmissions, laying the groundwork for future local innovations.

3. Professionalization of Local Staff:

By handling the reception and rebroadcast of international transmissions, Colombo engineers gained hands-on experience with sophisticated transmission standards, contributing to the evolution of technical expertise in the colony.

4. Strategic Communication:

Rebroadcasts served both informational and symbolic purposes, projecting an image of Ceylon as a connected and modern colony within the imperial network.

Footnotes:

1. The Times of Ceylon, 19–20 December 1931.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.

December 1931

Decline in the Acquisition of Radio Licenses

In 1931, the Colombo Broadcasting Service issued a total of 1,236 radio licences, marking a decline from the 1,408 licences issued in the previous year, a decrease of 172.[1] This downturn in license acquisition is notable given the growing popularity of the station and ongoing efforts by the government and emerging radio societies to promote radio accessibility.[2]

Several factors may help explain this decline. Economically, the global repercussions of the Great Depression were beginning to affect colonial Ceylon, constraining household expenditures and limiting the ability of the public to purchase radio receivers.[3]

Socially, while radio was gaining in popularity, the high cost of receivers and limited availability of affordable models likely restricted new subscriptions. Politically, regulatory frameworks and licensing procedures may have imposed additional barriers to entry for prospective listeners.[4]

This decrease in licenses, therefore, does not necessarily reflect a diminished interest in broadcasting, but rather highlights the structural and economic obstacles faced by the general public in accessing radio services during the early 1930s. It underscores the importance of government initiatives, such as the promotion of low-cost receivers, to expand the reach of broadcasting to a wider audience.

Analytical Note:

The reduction in radio licences in 1931 illustrates the interplay of economic, social, and regulatory factors affecting early broadcasting uptake. While the service itself was gaining popularity and recognition, affordability and accessibility remained critical challenges. This decline reinforces the historical significance of subsequent government efforts to promote low-cost receivers and expand public engagement with radio.

Footnotes:

1. Report of the Postmaster General, Ceylon, for the Year 1931 (Colombo: Government Printer, 1932), 5.
2. John Lionel Kotelawala, "Ministerial Message," Radio Journal, November 1931, 15.
3. Nandana Karunanayake, Sixty Six Years of Radio Broadcasting in Sri Lanka (Moratuwa: The Centre for Media and Policy Studies, 1990), 45.
4. Ibid.

1932

28 January 1932

Postmaster General's Proposal to Appoint a Radio Advisory Board

On 28 January 1932, the Executive Committee approved a proposal submitted by the Postmaster General for the establishment of a Radio Advisory Board.[1] The creation of this board represented an important step in the institutionalization of broadcasting in Ceylon, formalizing advisory mechanisms to guide policy, technical development, and programme content.

The establishment of a dedicated advisory body was likely to offer multiple future benefits.

First, it would provide expert oversight in technical matters, ensuring that transmitter operations, frequency allocations, and equipment acquisitions were aligned with best practices.

Second, by incorporating diverse perspectives, the board could enhance programming quality and cultural relevance, balancing educational, entertainment, and informational needs of a growing audience.

Third, the existence of such a committee could foster public confidence in broadcasting as a professional and accountable service, facilitating the expansion of radio licenses and wider community engagement.[2]

Overall, the formation of a Radio Advisory Board marked a key institutional innovation, demonstrating early recognition that the successful development of broadcasting required both technical expertise and structured policy guidance.

Analytical Note:

The creation of the Radio Advisory Board provided a framework for expert consultation, policy guidance, and public accountability in Ceylon's early broadcasting infrastructure. Its anticipated benefits included improved technical operations, higher programming standards, and broader public engagement, laying the groundwork for the professional growth of the Colombo Broadcasting Service.

Footnotes:

1. Report of the Postmaster General, Ceylon, for the Year 1932 (Colombo: Government Printer, 1933), 6.
2. C. P. L. Gunawardana, This is Colombo Calling (Colombo: Perali Publications, 1990), 37.

February 1932

B.B.C. Recorded Programmes – A Notable Development in 1932

In 1932, a significant advancement in the broadcasting landscape of Ceylon occurred with the acquisition of recorded programmes from the British Broadcasting Corporation (B.B.C.) by the Radio Club of Ceylon and South India. Subsequent arrangements were made with the B.B.C. to permit the Colombo Broadcasting Service to transmit these recordings.[1]

It was stipulated that running commentaries accompanying these programmes were strictly protected under copyright law and were intended solely for the private use of licensed listeners. Public dissemination, whether through loudspeakers, lantern slides, written notices, or any other medium, was strictly prohibited.

Furthermore, even recorded music broadcasts were subject to licensing fees payable to the Performing Rights Society and the Phonographic Industry.[2]

In response to a violation of the Copyright Act, legal proceedings were initiated in the District Court of Colombo against a hotel proprietor in the Colombo Fort area. Mr. C. L. P. Gunawardana appeared as a prosecution witness on behalf of the Colombo Broadcasting Station. The proceedings concluded with a conviction. Mr. Gunawardana was also required to present to the court the full schedule of recorded music broadcast during the relevant period.[3]

Footnotes:

1. C. P. L. Gunawardana, This is Colombo Calling (Colombo: Perali Publications, 1990), 39.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.

21 November 1932

Establishment of the Radio Broadcasting Advisory Board

In 1932, the Ceylonese authorities resolved to establish an Advisory Board for Radio broadcasting, reflecting an early effort to institutionalize oversight and guidance of radio content in the colony. The inaugural meeting of the Board was convened on 21 November 1932 at the Colombo Broadcasting Service Station, Torrington Square, Colombo 7. Mr. John Shillitoe, Chief Engineer of Posts and Telegraph and Controller of Broadcasting, chaired the meeting in an ex officio capacity.

The Advisory Board comprised representatives from various stakeholder groups, including radio clubs, educational institutions, ethnic communities, and governmental departments. Its initial membership was as follows:

1. **Mr. J. S. Dinwiddie** – representing the Radio Club of Ceylon
2. **Mr. J. F. Ness** – representing the Radio Club of South India
3. **Mr. S. N. Godfrey** – Assistant Director of Education
4. **Mr. J. S. M. Paterson** – representing the Ceylon Amateur Dramatic Club
5. **Mr. Charles Dias** – representative of Sinhala listeners
6. **Mudaliyar C. Rasanayagam** – representative of Tamil listeners
7. **Mr. H. H. M. Gazzali** – representative of Muslim listeners
8. **Mr. E. C. Villiers** – representing the Ministry of Communications

9. **The Honourable H. L. de Mel** – representing the Ministry of Works, State Council
10. **Mr. D. Lusk** – Divisional Engineer, Radio
11. **Mr. R. R. Anderson** – Secretary to the Board

Following Mr. Anderson's tenure, the role of Secretary was successively held by **Mr. H. de S. Gunewardene, Mr. F. S. Wijesuriya, and Mr. D. E. Jayamaha,** all drawn from the Postal Clerical Service.

Notably, Ceylon's establishment of a Radio Broadcasting Advisory Board predates the formation of a similar body by All India Radio, which occurred only in 1936. This early initiative demonstrates Ceylon's relatively advanced approach to broadcasting governance, including attention to representative inclusivity, administrative oversight, and liaison with listener communities. By incorporating ethnic and cultural representation alongside institutional stakeholders, the Board exemplified an early model of participatory governance in colonial broadcasting a framework that arguably contributed to shaping radio programming and policy in a manner sensitive to diverse audiences.



First Wireless Broadcasting Advisory Board 1932

Analytical Note:

The creation of the Advisory Board in 1932 reflects several significant trends in early Ceylonese broadcasting:

Institutional foresight:
The government's early establishment of a regulatory and advisory mechanism demonstrates awareness of the social, cultural, and technical challenges of radio broadcasting.

Stakeholder representation:
The Board's composition indicates a conscious effort to include multiple perspectives, including community groups, technical experts, and government officials. This can be interpreted as a measure to balance control with public accountability.

Comparative advantage:
By preceding All India Radio's Advisory Board by four years, Ceylon positioned itself as a regional innovator in broadcasting governance.

Long-term implications:
The structure and function of this Board likely influenced subsequent radio policy, content regulation, and the integration of community feedback into broadcasting operations.

Footnotes:

1. C. P. L. Gunawardana, This is Colombo Calling (Colombo: Perali Publications, 1990), 37.
2. Ibid.
3. Annual Administrative Report of the Postmaster General, 1932, Government Printer, Colombo, 18–20.
4. Ibid.
5. H. L. de Mel, Memoirs of a State Council Member, Colombo: Ceylon Historical Society, 1975, 45.

December 1932

Installation of Equipment to Receive the B.B.C. Empire Service,

During December 1932, the Colombo Broadcasting Service undertook a significant technical initiative to receive and rebroadcast the British Broadcasting Corporation (B.B.C.) Empire Service, transmitted from Daventry, England. The Empire Service had gained widespread popularity among listeners in Ceylon, prompting the local station to arrange for the reception of these shortwave broadcasts for relay over the medium-wave network.[1]

The initial receiving installation was established at the Ship-to-Shore Station (CLO) located at Torrington Square. A superheterodyne receiver was connected to the broadcasting studio via overhead wiring. Reception quality was further enhanced by the installation of an inverted-V directional aerial, **designed by Mr. D. P. Jayasekera,** which delivered highly satisfactory results.[2]

Spatial constraints at the CLO facility, however, limited the installation of more advanced directional aerials. As a result, land vacated by the Infectious Diseases Hospital (IDH) on Bullers Road present day Bauddhaloka Mawatha was repurposed for the construction of a diamond-shaped directional aerial intended to improve reception of shortwave transmissions from the B.B.C. Empire Station. A sensitive communication receiver was housed within a wooden hut constructed on this site.



The BBC Empire Service transmitting station on Borough Hill, Daventry.

The BBC Empire Service was inaugurated on December 19, 1932, broadcasting from a specialized shortwave transmitting station on Borough Hill, Daventry.

Aimed at connecting the British Empire, it used directional aerials to reach zones like Africa, India, and Canada. Borough Hill was crucial for BBC radio, hosting the 5XX longwave transmitter from 1925, before becoming the hub for the Empire Service.

Key Aspects of the Daventry Borough Hill Site:

Establishment:

The site was chosen for its central location in the UK.

Development: In 1932, two twenty-kilowatt transmitters were installed to broadcast on shortwave.

Purpose:

The service initially broadcasted simple, experimental programs to English speakers across the British Empire.

Role Evolution:

It evolved into the BBC World Service, and during World War II, it became a crucial,, multilanguage, shortwave service.

Legacy:

The site operated until 1992, and Borough Hill remains a significant historical,, location for British broadcasting. The station at Borough Hill was vital for broadcasting to the British Empire during the 1930s and 1940s, paving the way for the BBC World Service.

When the government subsequently allocated this land to the Anglican Church authorities, alternative plans were considered. **Divisional Engineer (Radio) Mr. A. Nadarasa, in collaboration with Engineer (Radio) Mr. D. P. Jayasekera,** proposed the establishment of a new receiving station north of the Kelani River, beyond Hendala. Several potential sites were inspected, and a large coconut plantation was identified as most suitable. Reception tests of B.B.C. transmissions at this location yielded promising results.[3]

Despite the technical feasibility, the high costs associated with acquiring the land and installing high-grade circuits to connect the proposed facility to the Broadcasting Station at Torrington Square ultimately led to the abandonment of this plan. As a practical alternative, a system of double diamond aerials was erected on marshy land between Bullers Road and Thimbirigasyaya Road, with receiving equipment installed in a wooden hut in Manning Town. This configuration enabled the continued reception and relay of the B.B.C. Empire Service.[4]

Footnotes:

1. Annual Administrative Report of the Postmaster General, 1932 (Colombo: Government Printer, 1933), 22–24.
2. C. P. L. Gunawardana, This is Colombo Calling (Colombo: Perali Publications, 1990), 38.
3. Ibid.
4. Interview notes, Ceylon Broadcasting archival collection, National Archives of Sri Lanka, Colombo, 1932, Box 7, File 15.

16 December 1932

Seventh Anniversary of the Ceylon Broadcasting Service,

On 16 December 1932, the Ceylon Broadcasting Service commemorated its seventh anniversary. In marking this occasion, the Honourable Mohamed Maacan Markar, Minister of Transport and Public Works, Like last year exchanged messages of goodwill with All India Radio, reflecting a growing spirit of collaboration and camaraderie between broadcasting institutions in the region.

Over the course of its seven-year journey, the Colombo Broadcasting Service had navigated considerable economic and geopolitical challenges while achieving several significant milestones. These included the establishment of technical infrastructure for shortwave and medium-wave broadcasting, the introduction of recorded programme relays from the British Broadcasting Corporation (B.B.C.), and the creation of representative advisory mechanisms to guide programming policy. Despite the limited resources available in a colonial context, the Service's accomplishments underscored its resilience and the growing cultural significance of radio in Ceylonese society.

Analytical Note:

The seventh anniversary of the Ceylon Broadcasting Service highlights the strategic and symbolic role of radio in early Ceylon. By engaging with All India Radio, the Service not only acknowledged transnational broadcasting networks but also positioned itself as an active participant in regional communication and cultural exchange. The milestone illustrates how, even under economic and infrastructural constraints, Ceylon's broadcasting authorities pursued both technical innovation and institutional diplomacy, fostering the gradual integration of radio into the public sphere.



Headquarters for All India Radio (AIR)

The image shows the Broadcasting House building in New Delhi, ***which serves as the headquarters for All India Radio (AIR), ofvficially known as Akashvani.***

All India Radio is India's national public radio broadcaster and is one of two wings of the public service broadcasting corporation, Prasar Bharati.

The Indian State Broadcasting Service adopted the name All India Radio on June 8, 1936.

Broadcasting services in India began in 1927 with privately-owned transmitters in Bombay and Calcutta.

The Delhi station, housed in this building, was inaugurated on January 1st, 1936.

Footnotes:

1. Annual Administrative Report of the Postmaster General, 1932 (Colombo: Government Printer, 1933), 25–26.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid..
4. "Correspondence on Anniversary Communications between Ceylon Broadcasting Service and All India Radio," National Archives of Sri Lanka, Colombo, Box 8, File 4.

19 December 1932

Inauguration of the New Shortwave Transmission Facility of the B.B.C. Empire Service

On 19 December 1932, the British Broadcasting Corporation (B.B.C.) marked a milestone in global broadcasting with the inauguration of a new shortwave transmission facility for the Empire Service, situated at Daventry in Northamptonshire, England. The ceremony was formally presided over by Mr. J. H. Whitley, Chairman of the B.B.C., and represented the consolidation of Britain's ambition to extend its cultural and political influence through radio to the farthest reaches of the Empire.[1]

For radio listeners in Ceylon, this development was of particular importance. Until this point, the reception of British programmes had depended largely on experimental or ad hoc relays conducted by the Colombo Broadcasting Service. The new facility, however, provided a stable, high-powered shortwave link to South Asia, enabling the island's listeners to access the B.B.C. Empire Service with unprecedented clarity and regularity.[2]

The inauguration ceremony itself was marked by an address from His Majesty King George V of the United Kingdom, which was relayed to audiences throughout the Empire.[3] For listeners in Ceylon, the event constituted



The buildings of the former Daventry transmitting station on Borough Hill, a historically significant site for British and world radio broadcasting.

The site was the location of the world's first national radio transmitter, known as 5XX, which began operating in 1925.

From 1932 to 1992, the station carried the BBC World Service to audiences across the globe.

Due to the strength of the signal, local residents in Daventry were reportedly able to pick up the World Service on appliances such as toasters and vacuum cleaners.

The site is also known as the birthplace of radar, with a key experiment conducted in a nearby field in 1935.

The site is now occupied by telecommunications firm Arqiva, and a single mast remains in use for digital radio transmission.

both a technical and symbolic triumph: it reinforced the authority of the imperial centre while simultaneously embedding broadcasting more deeply into the rhythms of colonial society. Radio thus became not merely a source of entertainment but also a powerful tool of cultural diplomacy and imperial cohesion.

The establishment of the Daventry facility also had practical consequences for Ceylon's broadcasting authorities. It provided a dependable source of high-quality international programming that could be rebroadcast over the Colombo medium-wave transmitter, enhancing both the prestige and the content diversity of the Ceylon Broadcasting Service.[4] The reception of royal messages, particularly the King's inaugural address, further elevated the sense of participation in a shared imperial community, reinforcing colonial loyalties through the immediacy of sound.



Plaque commemorating the first transmission of the BBC Empire Service, which began broadcasting on December 19, 1932.

This service was the precursor to the modern-day BBC World Service.

Service Name:

BBC Empire Service

First Transmission Date:

December 19, 1932

Location:

The building where the plaque is mounted

Current Status:

The service evolved into the BBC World Service



King George V of the United Kingdom.

He reigned as King of the United Kingdom and the British Dominions, and Emperor of India, from May 6, 1910, until his death in 1936.

Born third in line to the throne, he succeeded his father, King Edward VII, after his elder brother's death.

His reign included the period of the First World War, during which the monarchies of Britain, Germany, and Russia were all held by Queen Victoria's descendants.

Analytical Note:

The inauguration of the Daventry shortwave station represents a crucial intersection between technology, empire, and culture. For Ceylon, the ability to relay the B.B.C. Empire Service not only expanded listening horizons but also integrated the colony more fully into the informational and ideological circuits of the British Empire. The broadcast of King George V's message in particular symbolized the capacity of radio to transcend geographical boundaries and to cultivate a sense of belonging to a wider imperial identity.

This event can therefore be read as part of the broader strategy of "imperial broadcasting," wherein the B.B.C. sought to bind distant colonies through shared cultural programming, royal addresses, and news bulletins that reinforced Britain's global stature. Ceylon's enthusiastic adoption and relay of these transmissions highlight both the technological adaptability of its broadcasting authorities and the colonial state's willingness to harness radio as a vehicle of political symbolism and social influence.

Footnotes:

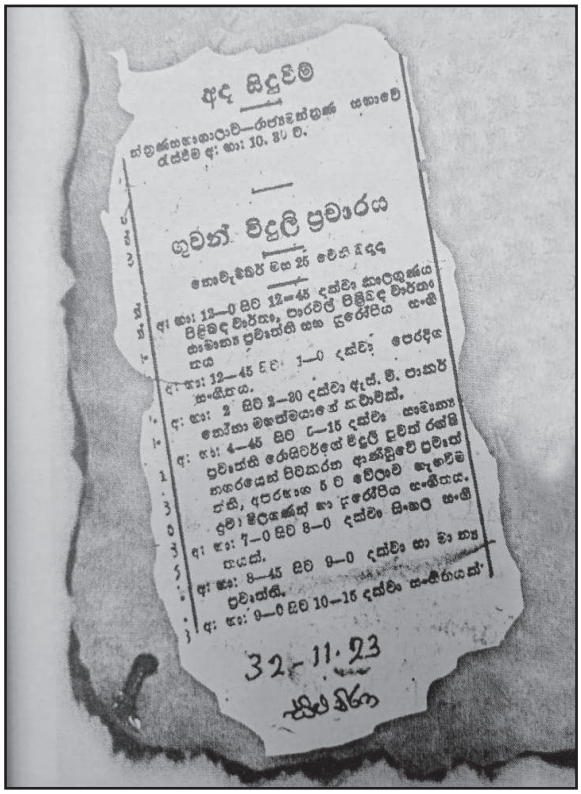
1. Asa Briggs, The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom, Vol. II: The Golden Age of Wireless (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965), 166–168.
2. C. P. L. Gunawardana, This is Colombo Calling (Colombo: Perali Publications, 1990), 37.
3. Ibid.
4. Annual Administrative Report of the Postmaster General, 1932 (Colombo: Government Printer, 1933), 27–29.

December 1932

Radio License Issuance and Its Growth as of December 1932

According to the Annual Administrative Report of the Postmaster General for the Year 1932, a total of 1,348 radio licenses had been issued in Ceylon by the end of that year.[1] This figure represents a modest increase from the 1,236 licenses recorded in December 1931, amounting to an additional 112 licenses over the twelve-month period.[2]

The increase, though comparatively moderate, is notable in the context of the broader economic challenges of the early 1930s. The effects of the global economic depression had constrained consumer purchasing power and limited the expansion of discretionary spending.[3] Nevertheless, the upward trajectory in license issuances indicates that radio retained its appeal as a cultural and informational medium in Ceylonese society. The steady, if slowed, growth demonstrates continued public engagement with broadcasting and underscores the consolidation of radio as a fixture in urban middle-class households during this period.[4]


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32-11-23

An advertisement for radio broadcasting published in the Silumina newspaper on 23rd November 1932

Footnotes:

1. Government of Ceylon, Annual Administrative Report of the Postmaster General for the Year 1932 (Colombo: Government Printer, 1933), 30.
2. Ibid., 28.
3. D. M. Colombage, Guwan Viduli Vanshaya (Colombo: M. D. Gunasena & Company, 1989), 34.
4. C. P. L. Gunawardana, This is Colombo Calling (Colombo: Perali Publications, 1990), 40.

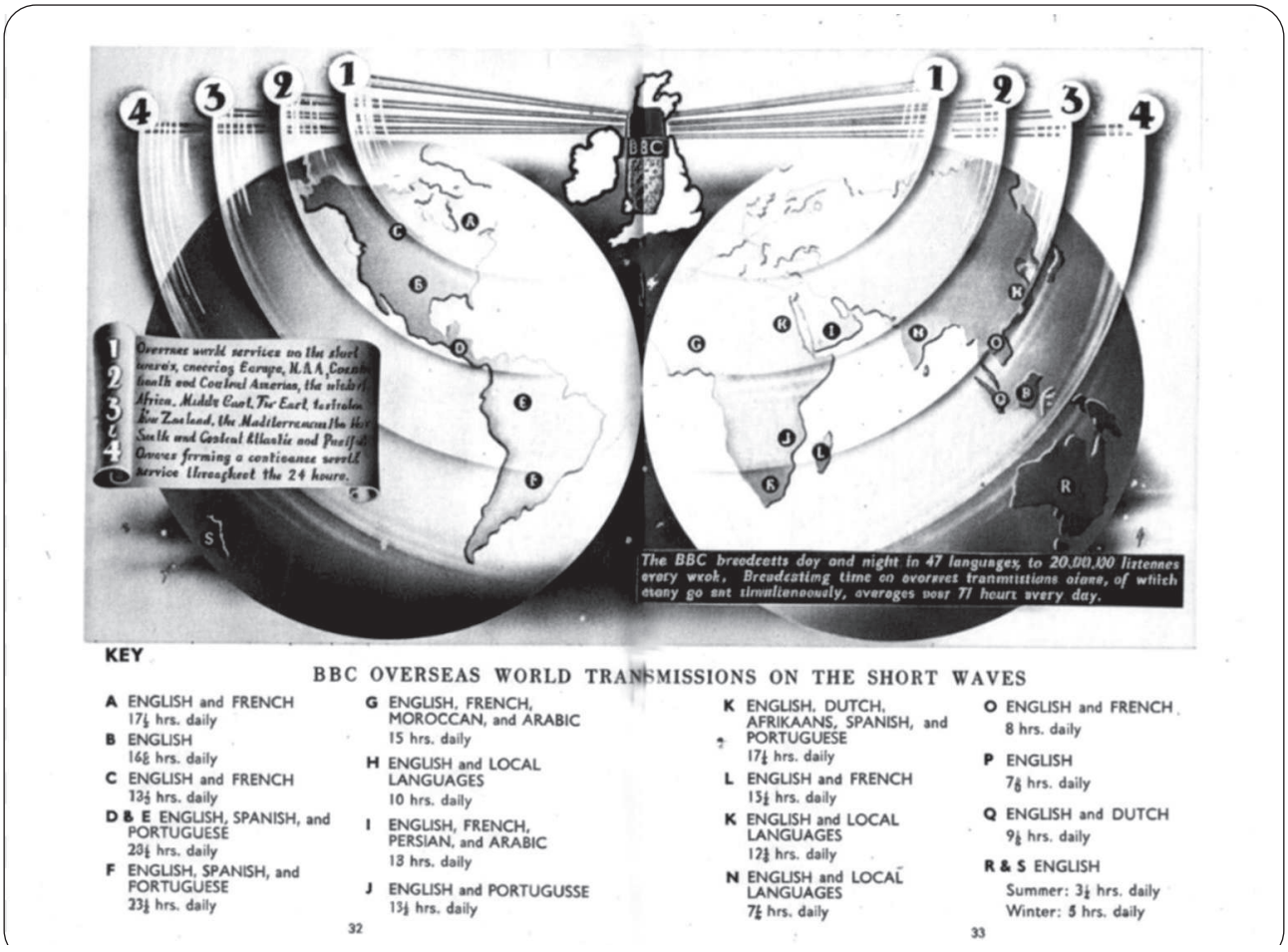
1933

January 1933

Rebroadcast of B.B.C. Empire Service and the Visit of Mr. Malcolm Frost

In January 1933, the Colombo Broadcasting Service inaugurated the systematic rebroadcast of programmes from the British Broadcasting Corporation (B.B.C.) Empire Service. This was facilitated by the installation of specialized reception equipment at the Golf Links premises on Bullers Road (now Bauddhaloka Mawatha), which enabled the relay of shortwave transmissions over medium-wave frequencies to local audiences.[1]

This technological improvement coincided with the visit to Ceylon of Mr. Malcolm Frost, a senior representative of the B.B.C. then undertaking a world tour. His principal mission was to conduct an empirical assessment of the reception quality of B.B.C. transmissions in the island, with particular attention to the Christmas Greetings broadcast, a programme in which various territories of the British Empire participated.[2]



BBC Overseas World Transmissions on the Short waves

The BBC overseas world transmissions began on 19 December 1932 as the BBC Empire Service, marking the first regular, intentional, long-distance broadcasting service in the world. Emitted from the Daventry transmitting station, this shortwave service was designed to connect the British Empire's far-flung territories "cut off by the snow, the desert, or the sea" with "voices out of the air".

Key Aspects of the 1930s Service

Launch & Reception:

Despite early, low expectations from Director-General Sir John Reith who famously told listeners, "The programmes will neither be very interesting nor very good" the service became a crucial link, boosted by the first Royal Christmas message by King George V in 1932.

Transmission Technology:

The service used high-frequency shortwave signals, which bounced off the ionosphere, to travel thousands of miles. This often resulted in "noisy, crackly" signals that were, however, best heard at sunrise or sunset.

Target Areas:

Initial, scheduled transmissions were tailored to five specific time zones to ensure "evening listening" for different parts of the Empire.

Australia & New Zealand: *09:30–11:30 GMT*

India: *14:30–16:30 GMT*

East & Southern Africa: *18:00–20:00 GMT*

Canada & West Indies: *01:00–03:00 GMT*

Content & Format:

Because of a low initial budget (approx. £10 a week initially), the early content was largely re-broadcasted domestic material, including music, variety, and sports like Test cricket and Wimbledon.

Big Ben:

The sound of Big Ben, which became a staple for connecting British subjects to "home," was introduced as an aural signature to signify the start of transmissions.

Evolution and Expansion in the Late 1930s

Foreign Languages:

The first foreign-language service, Arabic, was launched on 3 January 1938 to combat anti-British propaganda in the Middle East.

European Services:

In response to rising political tensions, German, Italian, and French language services were introduced in September 1938 to deliver news during the Munich crisis.

Renaming:

The service was officially renamed the BBC Overseas Service in November 1939, right at the onset of World War II, transitioning from a service focusing on the "Empire" to a global voice.

Propaganda & News: Unlike some rivals, the BBC established a reputation for ***"truthful, objective news,"*** *though it was used to counter Nazi propaganda by the end of the decade.*

By the end of the 1930s, the BBC was broadcasting in multiple languages, including Spanish, Portuguese, and Afrikaans.

BBC Sandeshaya:

The BBC Sinhala service, known as Sandeshaya, was reinstated and rebranded to focus on news in 1990. ***While the service initially began in 1942 and was discontinued in 1976,*** *it was relaunched in 1990 and later established a strong online presence as bbcsinhala.com (Sandeshaya).*

Frost's presence was of both symbolic and practical importance: symbolically, it demonstrated the B.B.C.'s concern for its global listenership, and practically, it offered direct feedback to Ceylonese engineers and administrators on the technical feasibility of relaying the Empire Service with fidelity.



Mr. Malcolm Frost
Senior Representative of the BBC

During this period, a total of sixty-six B.B.C. programmes including the Christmas Greetings broadcast were successfully relayed through the Colombo Broadcasting Service.[3] For the first time, gramophone-recorded B.B.C. programmes were officially acquired for rebroadcast, formalizing the practice of international programme exchange and embedding imperial content within the listening culture of Ceylon.[4]

Press coverage in Colombo at the time underscored the significance of Frost's visit. Both the Ceylon Daily News and the Times of Ceylon reported on the technical arrangements undertaken by the Broadcasting Service and highlighted Frost's statements commending the "remarkably clear reception" of the Daventry transmissions.[5] Letters to the editor reflected a keen interest among urban listeners in these new relays. One correspondent from Kandy described the thrill of hearing Christmas messages from Britain "as though from next door," while another from Jaffna remarked that such broadcasts "link us more closely with the Empire than the post or press ever could."[6]

This blend of official endorsement and enthusiastic listener response demonstrates the layered impact of Frost's visit. At the institutional level, it affirmed Colombo's role as a reliable relay point in the imperial broadcasting network; at the cultural level, it reinforced a sense of belonging to a global community, mediated through the immediacy of sound.

Footnotes:

1. C. P. L. Gunawardana, This is Colombo Calling (Colombo: Perali Publications, 1990), 38.
2. Ibid.
3. Government of Ceylon, Annual Administrative Report of the Postmaster General for the Year 1933 (Colombo: Government Printer, 1934), 22.
4. Ibid., 24.
5. "B.B.C. Delegate in Colombo: Mr. Malcolm Frost's Tour," Ceylon Daily News, January 7, 1933; "Empire Broadcasts and Their Reception in Ceylon," Times of Ceylon, January 9, 1933.
6. "Letters to the Editor: Empire Broadcasts," Ceylon Daily News, January 12, 1933.

January 1933

A Series of New Measures for the Enhancement of Broadcasting Service Quality

In January 1933, a number of significant regulatory and programmatic measures were instituted with the express purpose of improving the quality and legitimacy of broadcasting in Ceylon. Foremost among these was the enforcement of licensing regulations. Legal action was instituted against eight individuals who were found to be listening to broadcasts without possessing the required radio licenses.[1] Such prosecutions underscored the government's determination to maintain financial control over a medium that was rapidly gaining public popularity. Radio license fees had been the principal source of revenue for sustaining the Colombo Broadcasting Service since its inception, and any erosion of this financial base was regarded as a direct threat to its sustainability.

At the institutional level, the role of the Radio Advisory Board was reinforced. It was resolved that meetings of the Board should henceforth be convened at least once a month as a mandatory measure.[2] This decision represented a move away from ad hoc consultations toward a more formalized system of policy deliberation. The Advisory Board thus became an essential forum for guiding programme selection, addressing technical and cultural concerns, and ensuring that broadcasting policy remained attuned both to governmental priorities and to public reception.

Equally important was the recognition of the need for quality and cultural relevance in local-language broadcasts. To this end, the services of Mr. T. M. Rabeiro and Mr. K. Vinayagamoorthy, the Sinhala and Tamil announcers respectively, were enlisted to provide specialized guidance in programme preparation.[3] This measure illustrates an early awareness within the Colombo Broadcasting Service of the socio-linguistic realities of Ceylonese society and the necessity of tailoring broadcasts to reflect its pluralistic cultural identity. By empowering vernacular announcers, the Service not only improved the quality of content but also elevated their role as cultural mediators who could bridge the divide between a colonial broadcasting institution and its diverse listening audience.

Taken together, these measures of January 1933 illuminate the broader trajectory of broadcasting policy in colonial Ceylon. On one hand, the state sought to exercise control both financial and regulatory over the listening public. On the other, it made tentative but important moves toward professionalization and inclusivity in programming. The dual emphasis on enforcement and cultural responsiveness reveals the tension inherent in early broadcasting: while it was conceived as a colonial technology of governance and revenue generation, it was increasingly compelled to adapt to the cultural expectations of a local audience. These developments foreshadowed later debates over the role of broadcasting in nation-building, cultural preservation, and the negotiation of identity in mid-twentieth-century Ceylon.

Footnotes:

1. Government of Ceylon, Annual Administrative Report of the Postmaster General for the Year 1933 (Colombo: Government Printer, 1934), 18.
2. Ibid., 19.
3. D. M. Colombage, Guwan Viduli Vanshaya (Colombo: M. D. Gunasena & Company, 1989), 15.

April 1933

Organizational and Staff Development

By 1933, the Colombo Broadcasting Service (CBS) had reached a decisive stage in its institutional evolution. Recognizing the limitations of ad hoc arrangements that had characterized its early years, the Service introduced structured staff training programmes designed to ensure that broadcasting operations were conducted in a systematic and constitutionally compliant manner.[1] This initiative reflected an important shift from experimental and improvisational broadcasting toward the professionalization of radio as a cultural and administrative institution in colonial Ceylon.

For the first time, archival records indicate the formal training of personnel in three distinct professional capacities: announcers, technical assistants, and programme planners.[2] Announcers were trained not merely in diction and microphone technique but also in the performance of a public role, cultivating what was then understood as a voice of authority, clarity, and neutrality. Technical assistants were prepared to handle the increasingly complex demands of transmission technology, particularly with the growing use of short-wave relays and the integration of foreign programming. Meanwhile, programme planners were instructed in methods of content organization, audience engagement, and adherence to guidelines issued by both the Radio Advisory Board and the Postmaster General's Department.

This reorientation marked the embryonic formation of a professional framework within the Ceylonese broadcasting sector.[3] Whereas the first years of radio had been shaped by the contributions of amateur experimenters and imported models from Britain and India, the early 1930s saw the beginnings of a trained cadre of local broadcasting personnel. Their presence was essential for sustaining operations in a context where radio was expected to serve not only as an entertainment medium but also as a tool of education, public communication, and cultural dissemination.

The introduction of training programmes also carried broader implications for the colonial administration's engagement with the medium. On one hand, it represented the state's recognition that broadcasting could no longer be regarded as a peripheral experiment but had to be institutionalized as part of its modern governance apparatus. On the other, it offered new opportunities for Ceylonese participation in a domain previously dominated by expatriate engineers and administrators.[4]

In this sense, the staff development initiatives of 1933 can be seen as laying the foundation for later debates about indigenization and local cultural autonomy within broadcasting.

Footnotes:

1. Government of Ceylon, Annual Administrative Report of the Postmaster General for the Year 1933 (Colombo: Government Printer, 1934), 20–21.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.

April 1933

Improvement of Local Programme Quality

By 1933, the Colombo Broadcasting Service (CBS) had begun to enhance the quality and cultural relevance of its programming through the increased participation of local artists, vocalists, and literary figures.[1] Despite the limitations imposed by restricted broadcasting hours, records indicate that a growing proportion of the station's output was devoted to performances that reflected indigenous traditions. These included live music recitals, poetry readings, and the narration of folk tales, which were gradually incorporated into scheduled broadcasts.[2]

This shift represented an important stage in the evolution of broadcasting in Ceylon. Whereas the earliest years of CBS programming had largely relied on Western classical music, gramophone records, and relays of foreign content, the incorporation of local performers provided a platform for the recognition and dissemination of native cultural expressions.[3] Moreover, the deliberate inclusion of Sinhala and Tamil oral traditions contributed to the creation of a distinct broadcasting identity, affirming the medium's role as not merely a technical import from Britain but as an instrument capable of articulating the cultural voice of Ceylon.

The promotion of local content also carried broader socio-political implications. On one hand, it reflected the colonial administration's recognition of the value of vernacular programming in broadening the appeal of radio beyond an elite, English-speaking audience. On the other, it provided an early institutional space for the cultivation of a national radio culture that would, in later decades, serve as a foundation for the post-independence project of cultural nation-building.[4] In this respect, the developments of 1933 marked a turning point in the long-term trajectory of radio in the island.

Footnotes:

1. Government of Ceylon, Annual Administrative Report of the Postmaster General for the Year 1933 (Colombo: Government Printer, 1934), 22.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.

16 December 1933

The Eighth Anniversary of the Colombo Broadcasting Service

On 16 December 1933, the Colombo Broadcasting Service (CBS) marked the eighth anniversary of its establishment.[1] This occasion offered an opportunity not only for reflection upon the experimental beginnings of wireless broadcasting in Ceylon in 1925 but also for an assessment of the remarkable progress achieved over the intervening years.

By this juncture, CBS had undergone significant institutional, technical, and cultural transformation. The year 1933 in particular represented a pivotal phase of advancement in several dimensions. Professionally, the service had initiated systematic training programmes for announcers, technical staff, and programme planners, thereby laying the groundwork for a more professionalized broadcasting corps.[2] Technically, improvements had been made to enhance both transmission quality and the scope of reception, enabling more effective relays of foreign content such as the British Broadcasting Corporation's Empire Service.[3] Organizationally, measures were implemented to strengthen governance, including the establishment of more regular meetings of the Radio Advisory Board and the imposition of licensing enforcement policies.[4] Internationally, collaboration with the B.B.C., symbolized most notably by the visit of Malcolm Frost in January 1933 and the subsequent rebroadcasting of B.B.C. programmes, reflected the deepening integration of Ceylonese broadcasting within a broader imperial communications framework.[5]

Taken together, these developments demonstrate that the year 1933 represented a watershed in the institutional evolution of radio in Ceylon. The commemoration of the eighth anniversary of CBS was therefore not merely a ceremonial event but also a marker of the service's growing maturity, signalling its emergence as a permanent and increasingly indispensable cultural institution in colonial society.

Footnotes:

1. Government of Ceylon, Annual Administrative Report of the Postmaster General for the Year 1933 (Colombo: Government Printer, 1934), 3.
2. Ibid., 21–22.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. C. P. L. Gunawardana, This is Colombo Calling (Colombo: Perali Publications, 1990), 38.

December 1933

Radio License Issuance and Broadcasting Growth

By the end of 1933, the Colombo Broadcasting Service (CBS) had recorded a total of 1,665 licensed radio receivers in operation across the island.[1] This figure represents a net increase of 317 licenses compared with the total issued in 1932, reflecting steady growth in the adoption of radio as a medium of communication and entertainment in colonial Ceylon.[2] The cumulative total of broadcasting hours for the year amounted to 1,766, a significant indicator of the service's expansion both in scope and in regularity.[3]

This upward trajectory in license acquisition and programming hours demonstrates the growing social penetration of radio within Ceylonese society, even amidst the economic constraints of the early 1930s, a period still marked by the aftereffects of the Great Depression. The increase of over 300 licenses within a single year may be interpreted as evidence of the medium's rising cultural value, as well as a measure of confidence in the improved quality and variety of local programming. Furthermore, the steady expansion of broadcasting hours underscores the institutional commitment of CBS to move beyond experimental or limited transmission, positioning itself as a permanent public utility and cultural platform. Taken together, these developments illustrate that 1933 was not only a year of technical and organizational consolidation but also one of widening public engagement with radio broadcasting in Ceylon.

Footnotes:

1. Government of Ceylon, Annual Administrative Report of the Postmaster General for the Year 1933 (Colombo: Government Printer, 1934), 6.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid., 12.

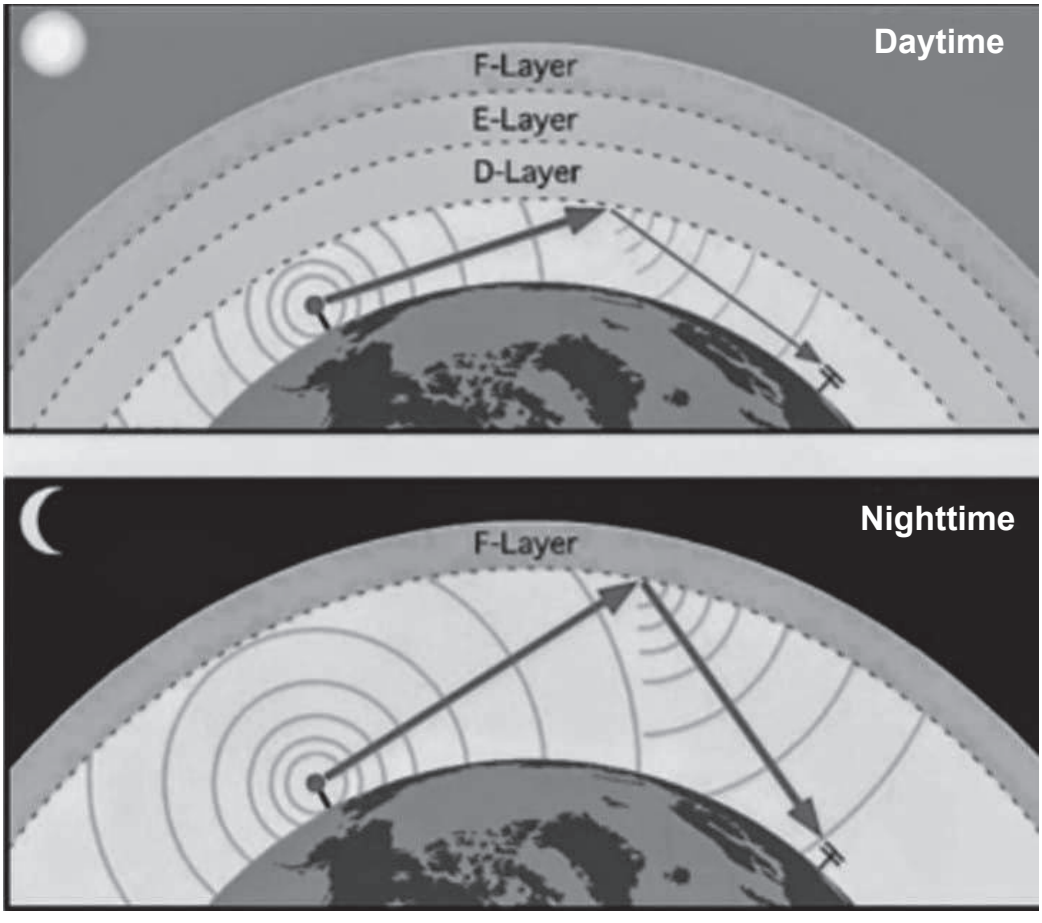
1934

January 1934

Initiation of Shortwave Experimental Broadcasting

In January 1934, the Ceylon Telecommunications Department commenced experimental shortwave broadcasting with the objective of improving reception for listeners in the hill country, as well as in the northern and southern provinces of the island.[1] These trials represented a strategic response to the technical limitations of medium-wave transmission, particularly in regions where mountainous terrain and atmospheric conditions hindered reliable reception.

The experimental shortwave broadcasts were intended to supplement the existing medium-wave transmissions of the Colombo Broadcasting Service (CBS) by providing a higher-quality signal capable of covering greater distances with reduced interference.[2]



Shortwave Signals

Shortwave signals travel long distances by bouncing off the ionosphere (skywave propagation), allowing for global reach beyond line-of-sight, but they also use ground waves for shorter distances; to receive them, you need a shortwave radio (HF receiver) and a decent external antenna, tuning for the right time of day (higher frequencies for day, lower for night), as conditions vary, with some signals fading or static present.

How Shortwave Signals Travel

Skywave:

The primary method for long-distance (DX) communication, where radio waves travel up, reflect off the ionosphere (a layer of charged particles in the upper atmosphere), and return to Earth far away.

Groundwave:

Signals travel along the Earth's surface, best at lower frequencies, providing reliable but shorter-range communication (hundreds of kilometers).

Ionospheric Changes:

The ionosphere's state changes with the sun, time of day, and season, affecting which frequencies work best (e.g., higher frequencies for daytime, lower for night).

How to Receive Shortwave Signals

Get a Shortwave Radio:

Look for radios covering the 3-30 MHz (HF) band, including standalone receivers or Software Defined Radios (SDRs).

Set Up a Good Antenna:

A long wire antenna (20-40+ feet) strung outdoors away from noise sources (like your house) significantly improves reception.

Tune at the Right Time: *Daytime:*

Higher frequencies (e.g., 10-30 MHz) for closer/regional broadcasts.

Nighttime:

Lower frequencies (e.g., 3-10 MHz) for intercontinental signals.

Find Frequencies:

Use online resources like ***ShortwaveSchedule.com*** *to find current stations, schedules, and frequencies.*

Listen for Propagation:

Expect signals to fade, change, or be interrupted by static, as atmospheric conditions constantly shift.

This initiative reflected a growing recognition within the colonial administration of the importance of equitable access to radio services across geographically diverse areas, and the potential of shortwave technology to overcome topographical and infrastructural challenges.

The shortwave experiments continued for slightly over four years, concluding on 1 June 1938.[3] During this period, the Telecommunications Department systematically evaluated transmission ranges, signal clarity, and listener reception reports, laying the groundwork for the subsequent establishment of more permanent shortwave relay facilities. These experimental operations not only enhanced the technical capacity of Ceylonese broadcasting but also underscored the strategic value of radio as a medium capable of bridging regional and linguistic divides within the island.

In addition to technical advancement, the introduction of shortwave experimentation reflects the broader trajectory of CBS toward professionalization and institutional sophistication. By investing in experimental technologies and collecting empirical data on reception quality, the Colombo Broadcasting Service and the Telecommunications Department demonstrated an early commitment to evidence-based improvement of broadcasting services, signaling a transition from provisional to systematic approaches in both engineering and programme delivery.

Footnotes:

1. Government of Ceylon, Annual Administrative Report of the Postmaster General for the Year 1934 (Colombo: Government Printer, 1935), 15.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.

March 1934

Mr. W. R. Watson: Chairman of the School Radio Advisory Board

In March 1934, Mr. W. R. Watson was appointed Chairman of the School Radio Advisory Board in Ceylon.[1] At the time of his appointment, he was serving as the Assistant Director of Education, a role that positioned him to provide expert guidance on the integration of radio into the educational system.[2]

In his capacity as Chairman, Mr. Watson was responsible for overseeing the development of educational broadcasting content and for advising the Colombo Broadcasting Service on programmes suitable for school audiences. His involvement exemplifies the early collaboration between colonial educational authorities and the nascent broadcasting service, reflecting an awareness of radio as a tool for both instruction and cultural dissemination.[3]

Footnotes:

1. C. P. L. Gunawardana, This is Colombo Calling (Colombo: Perali Publications, 1990), 44.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.

March 1934

Establishment and Activities of the School Radio Advisory Board

In March 1934, Mr. W. R. Watson, then Assistant Director of Education in Ceylon, was appointed Chairman of the newly constituted School Radio Advisory Board.[1] The board was established to oversee and guide the integration of radio into the educational system, reflecting a growing recognition of the medium's potential as an instructional tool.[2]

Under Mr. Watson's leadership, the Board focused on several key areas:

1. Curriculum Development:
Collaborating with educators to design radio programmes that complemented the school curriculum, aiming to enhance the learning experience through auditory means.[3]

2. Content Evaluation:
Establishing criteria to assess the quality and educational value of broadcast content, ensuring programmes met pedagogical standards.[4]

3. Teacher Training:
Advocating for teacher training initiatives to equip educators with the skills necessary to incorporate radio broadcasts into classroom teaching.[5]

4. Feedback Mechanisms:
Implementing systems to gather feedback from schools and listeners, facilitating continuous improvement of radio programmes.[6]

The establishment of the School Radio Advisory Board marked a significant step in the professionalization of educational broadcasting in Ceylon. It demonstrated a commitment to using emerging technologies to enhance education and reflected a broader trend in colonial administrations to harness media for developmental and cultural purposes.[7]

Footnotes:

1. C. P. L. Gunawardana, This is Colombo Calling (Colombo: Perali Publications, 1990), 44.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Government of Ceylon, Annual Administrative Report of the Postmaster General for the Year 1934 (Colombo: Government Printer, 1935), 15.
5. Ibid., 16.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid.

01 October 1934

Appointment of Mr. E. Y. G. Rankine as English Announcer



Mr. E. Y. G. Rankine

Mr. Rankine holds the distinction of being the first English announcer to be made permanent and pensionable within the CBS a testament both to his professional competence and to the institutional recognition of the announcer's role in the service's organizational hierarchy.

On 1 October 1934, Mr. E. Y. G. Rankine was appointed as an English announcer of the Colombo Broadcasting Service (CBS), succeeding Mr. R. Anderson, who declined to continue announcing duties and was reassigned exclusively to programme work. **Rankine brought with him both technical and military experience, having served actively in the Royal Navy during the First World War, after which he was attached to the Naval Wireless Station at Yatiyana, Matara.**[1] Later, he joined the CBS as a technical officer, demonstrating perseverance and a keen interest in all responsibilities entrusted to him.

With the outbreak of the Second World War, Rankine was released on 15 February 1940 to serve with the Ceylon Naval Volunteer Force. Following the cessation of hostilities, he returned to the CBS on 1 April 1946.[2]

He subsequently retired on 21 July 1948, after which he migrated to Australia, where he later passed away.**Notably, Rankine holds the distinction of being the first English announcer to be made permanent and pensionable within the CBS a testament both to his professional competence and to the institutional recognition of the announcer's role in the service's organizational hierarchy.**[3]

Footnotes:

1. Government of Ceylon, Annual Administrative Report of the Postmaster General, 1934.
2. D. M. Colombage, Guwan Viduli Vanshaya (Colombo: M. D. Gunasena & Company, 1989), 13.
3. C. P. L. Gunawardana, This is Colombo Calling (Colombo: Perali Publications, 1990), 39.

01 October 1934

Appointment of Mrs. I. B. de Kretser as Second English Announcer (1934)

Simultaneously with the appointment of Mr. E. Y. G. Rankine as English announcer on 1 October 1934, the Colombo Broadcasting Service (CBS) appointed a second English announcer, Mrs. I. B. de Kretser.[1] **The decision to appoint a female announcer was precipitated by an unfortunate incident in which the spouse of a senior European government official collapsed and died within the broadcasting studio; at that time, no female staff member was available to provide assistance.**[2] In response, the department sought to ensure that female representation was present within the announcer cadre, and Mrs. de Kretser, a European national, was selected for this role.**Her appointment reflects both the operational necessity and the department's early efforts to include women in professional broadcasting roles.**[3]

Footnotes:

1. Government of Ceylon, Annual Administrative Report of the Postmaster General, 1934.
2. D. M. Colombage, Guwan Viduli Vanshaya (Colombo: M. D. Gunasena & Company, 1989), 14.
3. C. P. L. Gunawardana, This is Colombo Calling (Colombo: Perali Publications, 1990), 40.

October 1934

Brief analysis of the appointment of Mr. E.Y.G Rankin and Mrs. I.B.De Kretser as announcers

The appointment of Mr. Rankin and Mrs. de Kretser reflects the CBS's strategy in the mid-1930s to expand its professional announcing cadre and to diversify its linguistic and cultural appeal. Rankin's popularity and his later technical wartime service underscore the value of professionally trained announcers capable of bridging civilian broadcasting with national communications in times of crisis. His eventual return after the war further reinforced the continuity of CBS's English-language output. In contrast, Mrs. de Kretser's short-term engagement indicates the service's openness to drawing upon expatriate and European voices to sustain broadcasting operations at a time when female representation in the medium was limited. Collectively, these appointments helped to consolidate the credibility, professionalism, and international orientation of the CBS during a formative decade in its development.

October 1934

Legal Enforcement Against Unlicensed Radio Use

In October 1934, eight individuals were prosecuted for operating wireless radio sets without the requisite licenses. The District Court imposed fines ranging from Rs. 25 to Rs. 100 on all convicted persons.[1]

This case exemplifies the application of the rule of law under British colonial administration, demonstrating that regulatory measures were enforced uniformly, irrespective of social status.[2] During the 1930s, wireless broadcasting was emerging as a popular medium, and the authorities sought to maintain strict control over its use both to ensure adherence to licensing requirements and to uphold public order in a period of technological expansion. The prosecution and fines reflect the colonial government's broader strategy of institutionalizing broadcasting regulation while simultaneously educating the public about lawful compliance.[3]

Footnotes:

1. Government of Ceylon, Annual Administrative Report of the Postmaster General, 1934.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.

October 1934

Comparative Analysis of Wireless Radio Licensing Fines in the 1930s

Region Offence Penalty Regulatory Context:

The imposition of fines for unlicensed wireless radio operation in Ceylon in 1934 reflects a broader pattern of regulatory practices across the British Empire during the 1930s. The penalties, ranging from Rs. 25 to Rs. 100, were part of a concerted effort to control and standardize the use of wireless technology, which was rapidly gaining popularity.[1]

In British India, the Indian Wireless Telegraphy Act of 1933 stipulated fines of up to £100 for operating wireless sets without a license. This stringent measure underscored the colonial administration's intent to maintain control over communication channels and prevent unauthorized transmissions.[2]

Similarly, in Malaya, the Wireless Telegraphy Ordinance imposed fines up to £100 for unlicensed radio activities. This legislation aimed to regulate the burgeoning radio industry and ensure that all broadcasting adhered to colonial standards.

Hong Kong also enacted the Wireless Telegraphy Ordinance, under which individuals found operating unlicensed radio equipment could face fines and, in some cases, imprisonment. This approach highlighted the importance placed on controlling communication technologies within the colony.[3]

The consistent application of fines across these regions indicates a deliberate strategy by the British colonial administration to standardize broadcasting laws and ensure that all wireless communication was subject to imperial oversight. This not only facilitated control over information dissemination but also reinforced the colonial power structure by regulating a medium that was becoming increasingly influential in shaping public opinion.

Footnotes:

1. Annual Administrative Report of the Postmaster General, Ceylon, 1934 (Colombo: Government Printer, 1935), 12.
2. Government of India, The Indian Wireless Telegraphy Act, 1933 (Act XVII of 1933).
3. "Wireless Telegraphy Ordinance," The Straits Settlements Government Gazette (Singapore), 1933;
   "Wireless Telegraphy Ordinance," Hong Kong Government Gazette, 1932.

December 1934

Radio License Issuance and Broadcasting Hours in December 1934

By the end of 1934, a total of 2,342 radio licenses had been issued in Ceylon. The total number of broadcasting hours for the year amounted to 2,108.[1]

When compared to the previous year, 1933, which recorded 1,665 licenses and 1,766 broadcasting hours, this represents an increase of 677 licenses and 342 additional broadcasting hours.[2] This upward trend demonstrates a continuing public engagement with radio broadcasting, despite broader economic and social challenges of the early 1930s. The increase in both licensed receivers and total broadcasting hours reflects the growth of the Colombo Broadcasting Service's infrastructure, programming capacity, and audience reach during this period.

Footnotes:

1. Government of Ceylon, Annual Administrative Report of the Postmaster General, 1934 (Colombo: Government Press, 1935), 12.
2. Government of Ceylon, Annual Administrative Report of the Postmaster General, 1933 (Colombo: Government Press, 1934), 11.

1935

06 – 07 May 1935

Silver Jubilee Celebrations of King George V – Broadcast Coverage in Ceylon

The Silver Jubilee of His Majesty King George V of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, marking the twenty-fifth anniversary of his accession to the throne, was commemorated through a series of elaborate radio broadcasts transmitted both locally and internationally. Between 6 and 7 May 1935, a total of 178 Jubilee-related programmes were broadcast via the British Broadcasting Corporation (B.B.C.) Empire Station. Key highlights included the Thanksgiving Service at St. Paul's Cathedral in London and the King's Christmas message.[1]

The Colombo Radio Station played an active role in these celebrations, dedicating a full day of broadcasts to the Jubilee on 6 May 1935. The official schedule was as follows:

8:00 a.m. - Ceremonial Thanksgiving Service conducted by the Lord Bishop of Colombo, relayed from St. Peter's Garrison Church, Colombo Fort.
9:45 a.m. - Proceedings of the Special Meeting of the State Council, featuring an address by His Excellency the Governor.
3:35 p.m. - Relay from the B.B.C. Empire Station of the Thanksgiving Service held at St. Paul's Cathedral, London, attended by Their Majesties the King and Queen.
6:00 p.m. - Special Jubilee Oriental Concert performed by Mr. M. G. Perera.
7:30 p.m. - Electric recording of the Thanksgiving Service, relayed from the B.B.C. Empire Station.
9:45 p.m. - An eye-witness account of the Jubilee celebrations delivered by Mr. Phillip Thornton, relayed from the B.B.C. Empire Station.
10:00 p.m. - A special Jubilee feature titled "Twenty-Five Years", offering a retrospective review of the reign of King George V, along with congratulatory messages and excerpts from the King's speeches from Buckingham Palace.[2]

The celebrations continued on 7 May 1935, with the highlight:

7:35 a.m. - onwards Review of the Troops at Galle Face Green, featuring live commentary by Colonel L. Mac D. Robison.[3]

These broadcasts were instrumental in fostering colonial unity and reinforcing symbolic ties between Ceylon and the British Empire, allowing local listeners to participate in a momentous imperial occasion through the medium of radio. They also illustrate the early use of broadcasting as a tool for civic and ceremonial engagement, enhancing public access to events of international significance.[4]



The BBC provided extensive radio coverage for King George V's 1935 Silver Jubilee, broadcasting events across the Empire, including to Ceylon (Sri Lanka), featuring the King's address, procession, and Thanksgiving Service, allowing Ceylonese people to experience the pageantry despite the time difference, with local events like Colombo presenting gifts such as a carved elephant casket to the King.

BBC's Role & Coverage:

Extensive Broadcasts:

The BBC planned extensive programming for the Jubilee on May 6, 1935, including a Sunday preparation service, a radio drama about the King's reign, and live coverage of the main events.

Empire-Wide Reach:

Broadcasts included round-ups from the UK and the Empire, the King's own speech, and a variety performance, creating a shared imperial experience.

Key Events Covered:

The centerpiece was the carriage procession to St Paul's Cathedral and the Service of Thanksgiving, relayed via radio.

Experience in Ceylon (Sri Lanka):

Time Difference:

While it was evening in the UK, the celebrations occurred around 8 p.m. in Ceylon, making it a significant evening event.

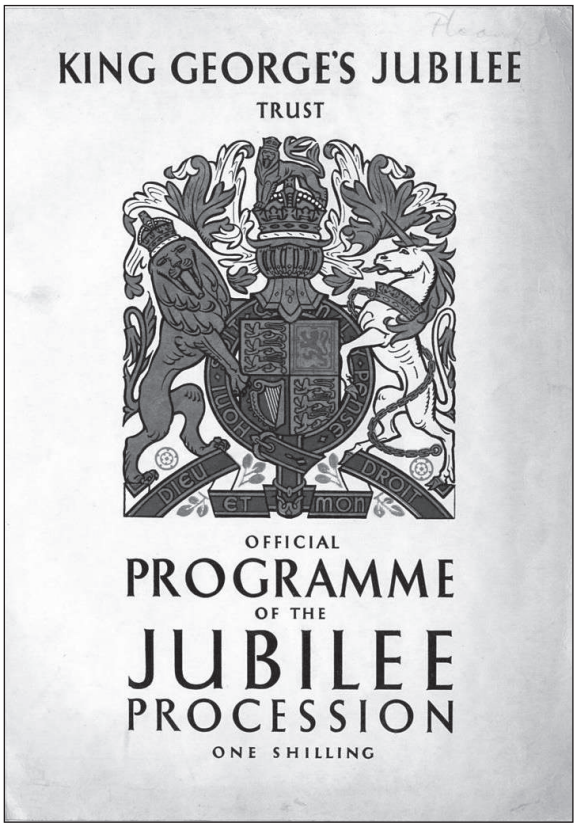
Local Celebrations:

Ceylon participated actively, with local councils like the ***Colombo Municipal Council presenting commemorative gifts, such as a detailed wooden elephant casket, to the King.***

Imperial Connection:

These broadcasts helped unite the Empire, allowing people in distant colonies like Ceylon to feel connected to the central celebrations in London.

In essence, BBC radio brought the grandeur of the Silver Jubilee to Ceylon, allowing locals to participate vicariously in this major imperial milestone through live broadcasts and local acknowledgments.



This is an original Official Programme of the Jubilee Procession for King George V's Silver Jubilee, published in 1935 by the King George's Jubilee Trust.

The procession took place on May 6, 1935, marking 25 years of George V as King.

The programme is a softcover brochure, typically 32 pages long, and was sold as a special edition for 2/6. It contains illustrations, a map of the route, and the order of the procession and service.



Silver Jubilee of King George V and Queen Mary in 1935

The postcard features portraits of King George V and Queen Mary. It commemorates the twenty-fifth anniversary of the King's accession to the throne, from May 6th, 1910, to May 6th, 1935.

The image also shows St. Paul's Cathedral in London, where a Service of Thanksgiving was held for the occasion.

The postcard is considered a collectible item related to the 1935 celebrations.

Footnotes:

1. C. P. L. Gunawardana, This is Colombo Calling (Colombo: Perali Publications, 1990), 40-41.
2. Ibid.
3. Government of Ceylon, Annual Administrative Report of the Postmaster General, 1935 (Colombo: Government Press, 1936), 18.
4. Ibid., 19.

15 May 1935

The Introduction and Development of the English-Language Children's Radio Programme in 1935

A notable innovation in Ceylon's radio broadcasting during 1935 was the establishment of a dedicated English-language segment for children under the age of fourteen, titled Children's Half Hour. This initiative represented the first systematic inclusion of children's programming in the broadcasting schedule **The programme was broadcast weekly, every Wednesday evening from 6:30 to 7:00 p.m. The segment was first presented by "Aunty Kirk" (popularly known as "Kirk Nenda"), and subsequently hosted by a succession of European presenters, including "Aunty Jenny," "Aunty Peggy," "Uncle Peter," "Aunty Joy," "Uncle Nick," "Uncle Ted," and "Aunty Lorna."**[1]

At a time when English was the principal medium of radio transmission, Children's Half Hour was conducted exclusively in English, appealing primarily to children from English-speaking or English-educated households. European women in particular played a formative role in administering these early programmes, shaping their ethos, tone, and pedagogical orientation.[2]

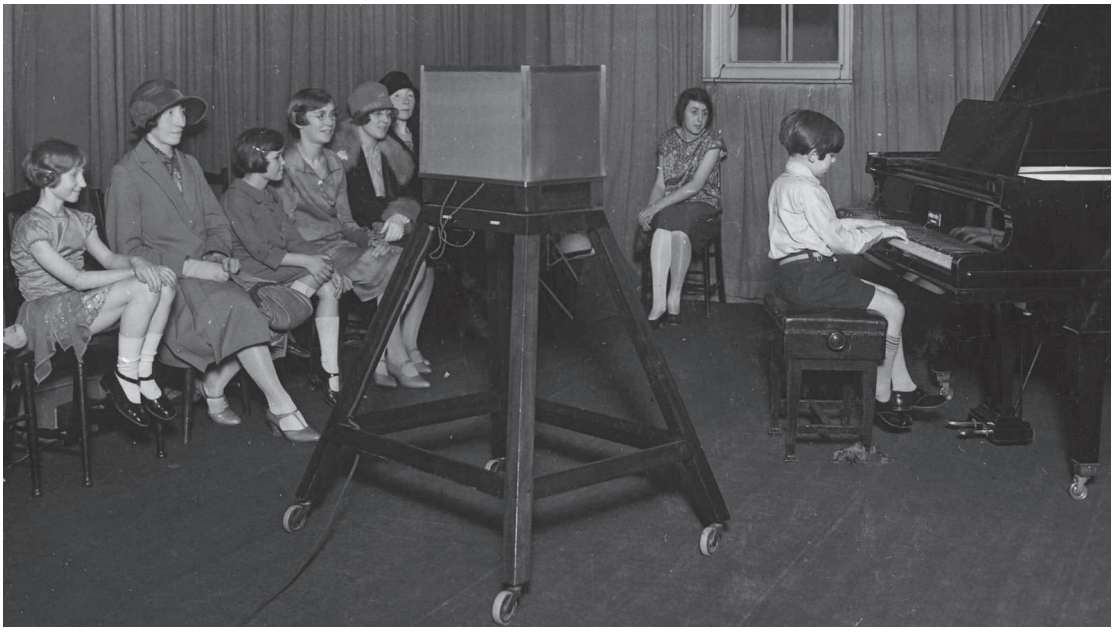


Children's Radio Programmes

This image captures a moment of early educational broadcasting, possibly the first school radio broadcast in the UK, where students gathered around a lar ge central radio to listen to a program.
The image likely dates from the 1930s, when communal listening to radio was common in schools before individual devices became widespread.
The first broadcast specifically aimed at schools may have occurred as early as 1924, arranged by the Sheffield Wireless Society.
Educational programs were designed to support the curriculum, featuring dramas and other content in lesson-sized chunks.

The scheduled programme for Wednesday, 15 May 1935, provides a representative example of the segment's character:

6:30 p.m. to 7:00 p.m. – Children's Half Hour, presented by "Aunty Kirk."



Children's Hour Once Upon A Time
Running from 1922 to 1964, ***children's hour*** *was a staple part of Britain's diet of programming for children.*

On this occasion, "Aunty Kirk" introduced a creative activity, inviting children to submit original written compositions. Selected contributions were rewarded with books as prizes, thereby incentivizing participation and encouraging literary expression.[3] The programme also allowed children to appear before the microphone, particularly on birthdays, to present items or short performances. This format cultivated a sense of direct involvement among young listeners, establishing an early tradition of interactive broadcasting in Ceylon.

The growing popularity of Children's Half Hour highlighted the importance of children's broadcasting within the colonial media framework. It not only reflected the linguistic and cultural dominance of English during this period but also demonstrated the capacity of radio to foster creative engagement and nurture a participatory relationship between the broadcaster and its youthful audience.[4]

Footnotes:

1. Annual Administrative Report of the Postmaster General, 1935 (Colombo: Government Press, 1936).
2. D. M. Colombage, Guwan Viduli Vanshaya (Colombo: M. D. Gunasena & Company, 1989), 72.
3. C. P. L. Gunawardana, This is Colombo Calling (Colombo: Perali Publications, 1990), 41.
4. James R. Brennan, "Radio Culture and Colonial Publics: Listening to the Voice of the Empire in Interwar Ceylon," Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History 37, no. 4 (2009): 587–88.

May 1935

Commencement of Commentary from the Colombo Racecourse

In May 1935, radio broadcasting in Ceylon witnessed a novel development with the inaugural live commentary from the Colombo Racecourse, located in Torrington, Colombo. From this point onwards, English-language commentaries of horse races were broadcast regularly on Saturdays coinciding with scheduled race meetings. The initiative marked a significant innovation in local broadcasting, offering audiences the opportunity to experience real-time coverage of a popular colonial sporting event.

The initial commentaries were delivered by Mr. M. G. Saunders, who may be regarded as a pioneer in this field. His role was instrumental in shaping the format and style of sports commentary in Ceylon, which would become an enduring feature of broadcasting. To enhance the listening experience, the Radio Times magazine published seating arrangements and details of the racecourse for each race day, thereby providing listeners with supplementary contextual information.





Epsom Derby

Epsom Downs Racecourse in Surrey, England, is a historic venue with horse racing roots tracing back to the 1640s and an official, recorded start in 1661. Known as the home of the world-famous ***Epsom Derby (established 1780) and Oaks (1779),*** *it is a cornerstone of British racing, operated by Jockey Club Racecourses and renowned for its challenging, undulating track.*

Key Historical Milestones:

17th Century Origins: Racing became popular in the 1640s, with Samuel Pepys noting events in 1663 and the first official meeting occurring in 1661 in the presence of Charles II.

The Classics:

The Oaks Stakes was established in 1779 by the 12th Earl of Derby for three-year-old fillies. The inaugural Derby Stakes, one of the world's most prestigious horse races, followed in 1780.

Iconic Moments & Challenges:

In 1913, suffragette Emily Davison was fatally injured after stepping in front of King George V's horse.

World War Impact:

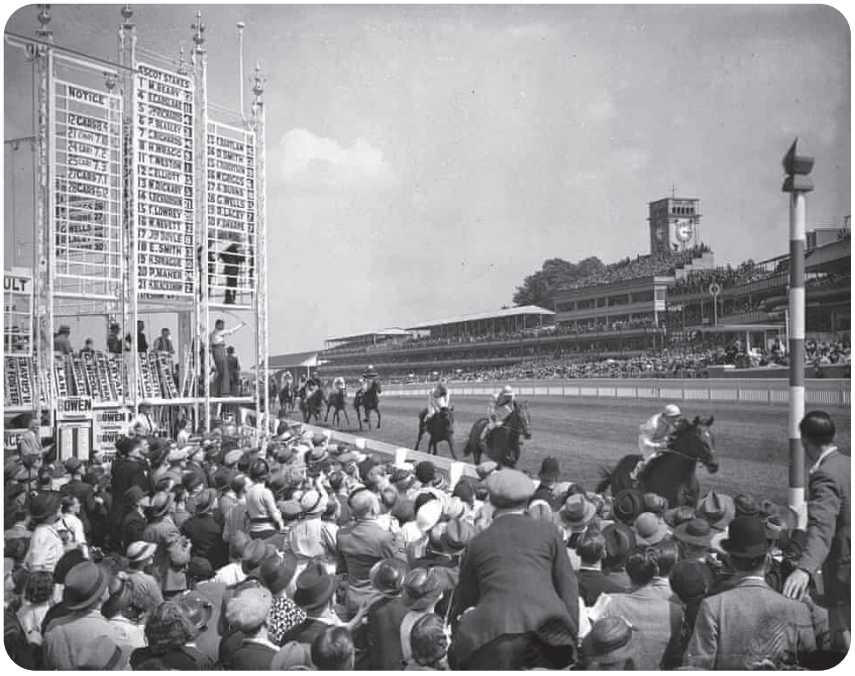
The Derby was moved to Newmarket during both World Wars (1915–1918 and 1940–1945).

Modern Era:

Today, it remains a premier venue hosting the annual Derby Festival in early June.

The course is famous for its unique layout, which includes the notoriously steep "Tattenham Corner".

Horse racing, as a sport, had deep roots within the British Empire. In Britain, race meetings had long been a central feature of elite leisure culture, with events such as the Epsom Derby and Royal Ascot attracting large audiences and royal patronage. By the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, racing had expanded to many colonies, where racecourses were established as social spaces tied closely to the colonial administration and expatriate communities. In India, Malaya, Australia, and Ceylon, racing was not only a sport but also a form of social gathering that symbolized the transplantation of British leisure practices.[1] The broadcasting of horse races from Colombo in 1935 thus aligned Ceylon with wider imperial traditions, where sport and radio converged to foster both colonial identity and mass entertainment.



Royal Ascot

Founded in 1711 by Queen Anne, Royal Ascot is a premier British horse racing event held annually in Berkshire, blending top-tier sport with royal tradition. Queen Anne identified the land as ideal for racing, leading to the inaugural "Her Majesty's Plate". It grew into a 5-day, prestigious social event featuring the daily Royal Procession, introduced in 1825.

Key historical highlights include:

1711: *Queen Anne established the racecourse, later known as Ascot Racecourse.*

1807: *The first Gold Cup was introduced, marking the evolution of the event.*

1825: *King George IV introduced the first Royal Procession, a staple of the event.*

1911: *The event was officially designated as Royal Ascot.*

Tradition:

Queen Victoria introduced the use of Windsor Greys for the carriages.

Modern Era:

The event continues to be a major highlight of the British summer, known for high fashion, strict dress codes (including hats), and royal attendance, with over £6 million in prize money.

Footnotes:

1. Mike Huggins, Flat Racing and British Society, 1790–1914: A Social and Economic History (London: Frank Cass, 2000), 12–18;
2. Wray Vamplew, Pay Up and Play the Game: Professional Sport in Britain, 1875–1914 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 45–50;
3. Richard Cashman, Patrons, Players and the Crowd: The Phenomenon of Indian Cricket (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 1980), 22–23.

May 1935

Evolution of Horse Racing Commentary in Britain and Australia

Comparative Note:

The introduction of live horse racing commentary in Colombo in 1935 was not an isolated development but part of a wider broadcasting trajectory within the British Empire. **In Britain, the first radio commentary of a horse race occurred in 1927, when the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) transmitted the Derby from Epsom Downs.[1]** This event marked a turning point, demonstrating how wireless technology could extend the excitement of the racecourse to audiences beyond the track. The immediacy of live description quickly became popular, transforming racing from an elite, site-specific activity into a shared public experience.



This image captures a horse race in progress at Ascot Racecourse in England.

Australia, another dominion with a strong racing culture, followed soon after. By the late 1920s, local radio stations were broadcasting commentaries of horse races, which gained immense popularity due to the entrenched social significance of racing in Australian society.[2] The Australian experiment also revealed how sports commentary could serve commercial and cultural purposes, strengthening the appeal of radio as a mass medium.

Ceylon's inaugural horse racing commentary in 1935 thus reflected both a technological and cultural transfer from the metropole and dominions. It aligned local broadcasting practices with imperial precedents, situating Colombo within the global evolution of live sports coverage and underscoring radio's capacity to democratize access to elite sporting events.



Sir Peter O'Sullevan

BBC's leading horse racing commentator from 1947 to 1997

Horse racing radio commentary began in the mid-1920s, featuring iconic, rapid-fire calls of major events like the Kentucky Derby (first broadcast in 1925) and the Grand National. Early pioneers and long-term broadcasters like Ted Husing and Babe Rubenstein established the art of live, play-by-play description, which influenced future television commentary.

Key Milestones in Horse Racing Radio History:

1925: *The first Kentucky Derby was broadcast on radio by stations WGN and WHAS.*

1920s-1930s: *Prominent early broadcasters included Ted Husing, Bill Stern, and Marty Glickman.*

1930s-1950s: *Babe Rubenstein became a notable figure in New England, calling races for decades.*

1938: *A famous moment occurred when a radio booth was blown off a grandstand during a hurricane while an announcer was working.*

Influence: *Radio commentary, known for its descriptive, fast-paced nature, shaped the style of later, iconic television commentators such as Sir Peter O'Sullevan.*

Footnotes:

1. Asa Briggs, The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom: Volume II, The Golden Age of Wireless (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965), 210–12.
2. Richard Fotheringham, Sport and the Stage: The Theatrical Representation of Sport in Australia (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 145–47; Bridget Griffen-Foley, Changing Stations: The Story of Australian Commercial Radio (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2009), 34–36.

June 1935

Experimental Shortwave Transmissions

By mid-1935, the Colombo Broadcasting Station commenced experimental shortwave transmissions on a frequency of 6160 kHz (48.7 metres), with the primary objective of improving reception quality for listeners in outstation areas.[1] This initiative arose from the persistent technical challenges posed by the southwest monsoon season, during which medium-wave transmissions were frequently disrupted by static interference, making reliable reception increasingly difficult.[2]

The trial broadcasts were scheduled between 8:30 p.m. and 10:00 p.m. and operated with an aerial transmission power of 300 watts.[3] Though limited in scope, these experiments represented a significant step in the technical evolution of broadcasting in Ceylon, laying the groundwork for extending the geographical reach of programming and enhancing the resilience of transmission infrastructure.[4]

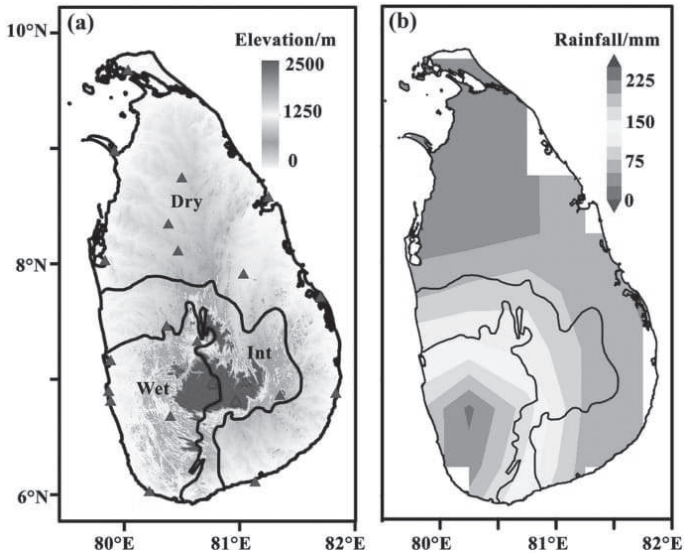
Footnotes:

1. Annual Administrative Report of the Postmaster General, 1935 (Colombo: Government Printer, 1936), 14.
2. Ibid.
3. C. P. L. Gunawardana, This is Colombo Calling (Colombo: Perali Publications, 1990), 41.
4. Asa Briggs, The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom: Volume II, The Golden Age of Wireless (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965), 218–19, for comparative developments in shortwave experimentation within the Empire.

June 1935

The Impact of the Southwest Monsoon on Radio Broadcasting in Sri Lanka

Radio broadcasting in early twentieth-century Sri Lanka was significantly influenced by seasonal climatic conditions, particularly the southwest monsoon (May–September). During this period, atmospheric disturbances generated by heavy rainfall, thunder, and electrical storms created high levels of static interference, which was especially disruptive to medium-wave (MW) transmissions.[1] Static, caused by natural atmospheric electrical discharges, was amplified during the monsoon months and often rendered reception unreliable for listeners across the island.[2]



Southwest Monsoon

The effects of the southwest monsoon highlight the environmental vulnerability of early broadcasting technology, as heavy rainfall, high humidity, and associated electrical storms caused significant disruptions to communication infrastructure.

Signal Disruption and Interference:

During the monsoon, intense rainfall and stormy conditions, including thunder and lightning, created substantial radio noise and static, which interfered with transmission quality.

Physical Infrastructure Damage:

The torrential rains of the southwest monsoon (which provides about 75% of India's total rainfall) caused flooding, soil erosion, and landslides, damaging physical broadcasting infrastructure.

Environmental Corrosion:

High humidity levels and consistent moisture during the monsoon season put stress on early electronic equipment, leading to corrosion and component failure, limiting the longevity and reliability of broadcast hardware.

Operational Challenges:

The seasonal, high-intensity, and sometimes erratic nature of the monsoon required robust, well-protected systems, which were often absent in the early stages of radio technology adoption, highlighting the need for specialized, resilient engineering.

Consequently, the monsoon necessitated the adaptation of radio technology to withstand, and operate within, high-moisture and high-static environments.

Medium-wave signals, though generally effective over relatively short distances, were highly susceptible to such meteorological disruptions.[3] This meant that large parts of the listening public, particularly those in coastal and rural districts, experienced degraded audio clarity or complete loss of signal during monsoon periods. **In response, the Colombo Broadcasting Station initiated shortwave (SW) experiments in 1935, as SW frequencies were less vulnerable to atmospheric static and could travel greater distances with improved clarity, particularly at night.[4]**

The effects of the southwest monsoon thus underscored the environmental vulnerability of early broadcasting technology in Ceylon and prompted technical adaptations that helped shape the evolution of the country's broadcasting infrastructure.

Footnotes:

1. Annual Administrative Report of the Postmaster General, 1935 (Colombo: Government Printer, 1936), 14.
2. Ibid.
3. Asa Briggs, The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom: Volume II, The Golden Age of Wireless (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965), 217.
4. C. P. L. Gunawardana, This is Colombo Calling (Colombo: Perali Publications, 1990), 41.

16 May 1935

Folk Music Broadcast by Devar Suriyasena and Nelum Devi

On 16 May 1935, a half-hour folk music programme was broadcast from Colombo between 9:15 p.m. and 9:45 p.m., featuring Mr. Devar Suriyasena and Mrs. Nelum Devi.[1] Suriyasena was a pioneering figure in Sri Lanka's musical and cultural history, particularly known for his efforts to popularise Sinhala folk songs both domestically and abroad.[2] In addition to his work with indigenous Sinhala traditions, he introduced to audiences Sinhala adaptations of Hindustani, Bengali, and other South Asian musical repertoires, thereby situating Ceylonese music within a wider transnational cultural dialogue.[3]

The broadcast of May 1935 reflected this cosmopolitan orientation. The programme included a diverse range of selections, such as the Sinhala folk song "Bhramana Tharuṇa" (The Wandering Youth), as well as songs in Telugu and Bengali. Among the Bengali works performed was a composition by Rabindranath Tagore, the Nobel laureate whose songs exerted profound influence on South Asian modernist music.[4] Instrumental accompaniment was provided by a combination of traditional South Asian instruments, including the sitar, esraj, tampura, rabana, and tabla, producing a musical texture that was both authentically indigenous and regionally eclectic.[5]

The broadcast not only exemplifies early attempts to bring folk and art music into the medium of radio but also underscores the role of figures like Devar Suriyasena in cultivating a cultural modernity that was at once national and international, thus expanding the scope of what was possible within the emerging Ceylonese broadcasting tradition.



Mr. Devar Suryasena and Mrs. Nelum Devi.

Mr. Suryasena was a pioneering figure in Sri Lanka's musical and cultural history, particularly known for his efforts to popularise Sinhala folk songs both domestically and abroad.

Footnotes:

1. Annual Administrative Report of the Postmaster General, 1935 (Colombo: Government Printer, 1936), 18.
2. D. M. Colombage, Guwan Viduli Vanshaya (Colombo: M. D. Gunasena & Company, 1989), 29-30
3. C. P. L. Gunawardana, This is Colombo Calling (Colombo: Perali Publications, 1990), 42.
4. E. A. Abeysekara, "Sinhala Music and the Radio," in Journal of the Ceylon Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society 42, no. 1 (1944): 67–69.
5. S. N. Chandrasekera, The Evolution of Sinhala Music: A Cultural History (Colombo: Sarasavi, 2001), 102.

24 May 1935

Guidelines for the Children's Composition Competition

On 24 May 1935, the Colombo Broadcasting Station issued detailed guidelines for entries to the Children's Composition Competition. Applicants were instructed to provide their name, age, and address, as well as the name of the license holder of the radio set through which the Children's Half Hour programme was being heard.[1] Each entry had to be handwritten by the child competitor and enclosed in an envelope clearly marked "Children's Radio Competition." Submissions were to be addressed to:

Aunty Kirk
Radio Office
Torrington Square
Colombo.

Entries were to arrive no later than 12:00 noon on Friday, 24 May 1935; those received after the deadline were automatically disqualified. The final decision regarding the competition rested solely with "Aunty Kirk," whose rulings were regarded as conclusive.[2]

Following the tenure of "Aunty Kirk," the English Children's Half Hour segment was later presented by "Aunty Jenny."[3] The programme proved to be influential for a generation of listeners, among them the noted broadcaster Sujatha Jayawardena, who later acknowledged the inspiration she drew from "Aunty Jenny's" presentations during her formative years.[4]

The Importance of Children's Programmes in the 1930s

The establishment of children's broadcasting segments in Ceylon during the mid 1930s reflected a broader global broadcasting trend wherein radio was conceived as a medium for both education and entertainment.[5] Much like the BBC's "Children's Hour" in Britain, Ceylon's Children's Half Hour sought to engage young listeners through storytelling, music, and competitions, fostering both literacy and cultural participation.[6]

These programmes carried a dual social function: they promoted the domestic integration of radio into family life by creating listening events suitable for younger audiences, and they cultivated early cultural citizenship by encouraging children to contribute actively through competitions and performances.[7] **In this sense, initiatives such as the 1935 competition helped shape radio into not merely a technical innovation but also a social institution that nurtured communal identity and generational continuity.**

Footnotes:

1. Annual Administrative Report of the Postmaster General, 1935 (Colombo: Government Printer, 1936), 21.
2. D. M. Colombage, Guwan Viduli Vanshaya (Colombo: M. D. Gunasena & Company, 1989), 72.
3. C. P. L. Gunawardana, This is Colombo Calling (Colombo: Perali Publications, 1990), 41.
4. Sujatha Jayawardena, Memories of Radio Days (Colombo: Lake House Publications, 1978), 15.
5. Asa Briggs, The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom, Vol. II: The Golden Age of Wireless (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965), 231.
6. Kate Lacey, Feminine Frequencies: Gender, German Radio, and the Public Sphere, 1923–1945 (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996), 102.
7. Chandrika Niraula, "Children, Radio, and Early Broadcasting Cultures in South Asia," South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies 42, no. 3 (2019): 512–13.

22 June 1935

Broadcast by Mrs. Lalitha Venkataraman

On 22 June 1935, the Ceylon Broadcasting Service featured a one-hour musical programme by the renowned Indian vocalist Mrs. Lalitha Venkataraman. The broadcast, which took place between 8:15 p.m. and 9:15 p.m., constituted a significant cultural event in Colombo's developing radio schedule.[1] Mrs. Venkataraman was widely acclaimed for her exceptional vocal artistry, and she was also recognized as an accomplished veena player, a skill which further consolidated her reputation as a versatile musician of the period.[2]

By early 1935, the Colombo station had revised its programming schedule to include regular live performances of Eastern music, with one-hour-and-thirty-minute segments broadcast every Thursday and Saturday evening.[3] This policy shift reflected the station's commitment to diversifying its output and offering a platform to regional musicians, thereby fostering cultural exchange across South Asia through the new medium of radio.[4]



Lalita Venkatram
A renowned Carnatic musician and vocalist

Born in 1909, she was a prominent figure in the field of Carnatic music.

She is listed among other notable vocalists from the early to mid-20th century.

Her contributions are recognized within the history and lists of classical musicians from South India.

She was the first woman to perform on All India Radio and the first playback singer in Tamil cinema.

She was an accomplished musician who accompanied herself on the veena.

Lalita Venkatram lived from 1909 to 1992.

She was a modest housewife from Bombay who became a celebrated musician during her time.

Mrs. Lalitha Venkataraman: A Brief Biography

Mrs. Lalitha Venkataraman (sometimes recorded as Lalita Venkata Raman) emerged during the 1930s as one of the most popular female classical vocalists in India.[5] Trained in the Carnatic tradition, she combined her vocal artistry with veena performance, a combination that was relatively rare among women musicians of her time.[6] Her prominence coincided with a broader renaissance of South Indian music in the interwar period, when female vocalists such as **M. S. Subbulakshmi, D. K. Pattammal, and M. L. Vasanthakumari** were reshaping both the public presence of women in classical music and its dissemination through new media.[7]



Madurai Shanmukhavadivu Subbulakshmi

M. S. Subbulakshmi, *a renowned Indian Carnatic singer, posing with a tanpura, a traditional Indian string instrument used to provide a drone base for vocalists.*

She was the first musician ever to be awarded the Bharat Ratna, India's highest civilian honour.

Subbulakshmi was known for music steeped in Bhakthi (devotion), with famous renditions including the Venkateswara Suprabhatam and Bhaja Govindam.

She was the first Indian musician to receive the Ramon Magsaysay award in 1974.

She was also the first Indian to perform at the United Nations General Assembly in 1966.



Damal Krishnaswamy Pattammal

This image shows the legendary Carnatic musician ***D. K. Pattammal*** *during a performance or recording session.*

D. K. Pattammal was one of the earliest Brahmin women to perform Carnatic music publicly, defying societal norms of her time.

She was known for her traditional approach while also introducing revolutionary trends, such as singing patriotic and devotional songs in films.

She was a recipient of the Padma Vibhushan, India's second-highest civilian award.

Along with M.S. Subbulakshmi and M.L. Vasanthakumari, she formed the female trinity of Carnatic music.



Madras Lalitangi Vasanthakumari

M. L. Vasanthakumari , *an Indian Carnatic musician and playback singer. She was a prominent figure in 20th-century Carnatic music.*

MLV, as she was commonly known, was part of the "female Trinity of Carnatic Music" along with M.S. Subbulakshmi and D.K. Pattammal.

She was a disciple of G.N. Balasubramaniam (GNB) and a respected guru in her own right, with notable students like Sudha Ragunathan.

Vasanthakumari was honored with the Padma Bhushan, a high civilian award, in 1967.

She was known for her open-hearted nature, ever-smiling countenance, and unique style.

Venkataraman performed extensively in concert halls across Madras and other South Indian centres, and her appearances on All India Radio during the late 1930s and 1940s further expanded her reach.[8] Contemporary press accounts describe her as a versatile artiste, equally admired for her expressive interpretation of kritis and her technical mastery of the veena.[9] Her invitation to perform on the Colombo Broadcasting Service in 1935 demonstrates both her cross-regional popularity and the role of radio in consolidating a shared Indo-Ceylonese musical sphere during the interwar years.[10]

Footnotes:

1. Annual Administrative Report of the Postmaster General, 1935 (Colombo: Government Printer, 1936), 22.
2. D. M. Colombage, Guwan Viduli Vanshaya (Colombo: M. D. Gunasena & Company, 1989), 91.
3. C. P. L. Gunawardana, This is Colombo Calling (Colombo: Perali Publications, 1990), 42.
4. Chandrika Niraula, "Music, Radio, and Cross-Cultural Flows in South Asia, 1925–1945," South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies 43, no. 2 (2020): 278–79.
5. Lakshmi Subramanian, From the Tanjore Court to the Madras Music Academy: A Social History of Music in South India (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2006), 163.
6. Amanda Weidman, Singing the Classical, Voicing the Modern: The Postcolonial Politics of Music in South India (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 97.
7. Vidya Rao, "Women in South Indian Classical Music: The Interwar Era," Indian Economic and Social History Review 41, no. 4 (2004): 456–57.
8. All India Radio Programme Schedules, Madras Station, 1937–1941 (Madras: Government of India Press, 1942).
9. "Concert Reviews," The Hindu, 14 February 1938, 6.
10. Niraula, "Music, Radio, and Cross-Cultural Flows," 280.

July 1935

Broadcasting of Personal Messages via Radio

In July 1935, the Radio Times, the official broadcasting journal, published a set of five regulations under the heading "By Post" concerning the transmission of personal messages via the Colombo Broadcasting Service, which operated under the Department of Posts and Telegraphs.[1] These regulations formalized procedures for message submission, approval, and fee payment, reflecting an early institutional effort to employ radio for public service communication.

1. **The Colombo Broadcasting Service was authorized to transmit the following categories of messages:**
   - **(a) Obituary notices.**
   - **(b) Messages summoning a relative to the bedside of a seriously ill patient, when deemed necessary by hospital authorities or the attending physician.**
   - **(c) Urgent official notices issued by the police, including matters such as missing persons.**

   Messages under category (c) were broadcast only if considered to be of public interest and approved by the Chief Wireless Engineer. In the absence of approval, the message would be withheld and the broadcast fee refunded.[2]

2. Messages could be submitted at any post office and were addressed to "Broadcast, Colombo". The sender's name need not appear in the message itself; however, the prescribed form had to be signed and include the sender's postal address.[3]

3. The fee for broadcast was established at four cents per word, with no additional charge for including the address. Messages under the police notification category were exempted from fees.[4]

4. Broadcasts were scheduled twice daily, at 12:00 noon and between 7:00 p.m. and 8:30 p.m. The sender was required to specify a preferred broadcast time; if no preference was indicated, the message would be aired at the earliest available slot following receipt. Should the sender wish the message to be broadcast twice, an additional fee of two cents per word was levied for the second airing.[5]

5. The Department assumed no responsibility beyond the actual transmission of the message.[6]

Comparative Context:

Similar personal message services existed in Britain and other parts of the British Empire during the early 1930s. In Britain, the British Broadcasting Corporation (B.B.C.) had introduced a "By Post" service as early as 1924, allowing messages of urgent personal or public interest to be broadcast over the airwaves.[7] Likewise, All India Radio (AIR) initiated structured personal message services in the early 1930s, primarily to enable communication with family members across vast geographic distances and to provide updates during emergencies.[8]

The Colombo Broadcasting Service's system, therefore, represents a localized adaptation of an Empire-wide practice, tailored to the social and administrative realities of Ceylon. The codification of message types, deadlines, and fees demonstrates a conscious effort to maintain professional standards and to extend the social utility of radio. This service not only reinforced the public relevance of broadcasting but also positioned radio as a civic medium capable of addressing personal, health-related, and public safety needs.[9]

Footnotes:

1. Radio Times, July 1935, 5.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.
7. Asa Briggs, The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom: Volume I: The Birth of Broadcasting (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961), 112–114.
8. K. S. Srinivasan, All India Radio and the Early Broadcasting Era (New Delhi: National Archives, 1987), 37–39.
9. D. M. Colombage, Guwan Viduli Vanshaya (Colombo: M. D. Gunasena & Co., 1989), 81.

August 1935

Empire Parliamentary Association Conference: Broadcast Address by Sir Baron Jayatilaka

In August 1935, Sir Baron Jayatilaka, a distinguished Ceylonese statesman and patriot, delivered a broadcast address through the National and Empire Service of the British Broadcasting Corporation (B.B.C.) reflecting upon the significance of the Empire Parliamentary Association Conference.[1] In his remarks, he emphasized the symbolic and practical importance of fostering unity and cooperation among member nations of the British Commonwealth.



Sir Don Baron Jayatilaka (1868-1944),

A prominent Sri Lankan educationalist, statesman, and diplomat.

He was a key figure in Sri Lanka's independence movement.

He served as the first Principal of Dharmaraja College, Kandy, and later Ananda College in Colombo.

He was a Member of the Legislative Council of Ceylon and later served as the Leader of the House.

He was the first and only Ceylonese to be the President of the Indian Students Association while at the University of Oxford.

Sir Baron Jayatilaka observed that the cordial reception extended to representatives of the Overseas Parliamentary Associations by both governmental authorities and civic institutions exemplified the evolving conception of the British Empire as "not merely a colonial structure but as a family of free nations."[2] He further noted that the Assembly, comprising over fifty delegates from diverse racial, religious, linguistic, and cultural backgrounds, was nevertheless unified by shared principles and ideals, particularly allegiance to the Crown and commitment to the parliamentary system of governance.[3]

Highlighting the delegates' dedication to representative government grounded in democratic principles, Sir Baron Jayatilaka acknowledged that many participants had laboured or suffered in pursuit of national freedom.[4] He affirmed that the realization of the ideals of the British Commonwealth would contribute not only to the integrity and welfare of the Empire and its constituent units but also to the promotion of global peace and progress.[5]

The address underscored the role of the Empire Parliamentary Association as a forum for dialogue and mutual understanding among nations, illustrating the potential of broadcasting as a medium for disseminating messages of political and civic significance to a wider imperial audience.[6]

Footnotes:

1. Radio Times, August 1935, 3.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. C. P. L. Gunawardana, This is Colombo Calling (Colombo: Perali Publications, 1990), 42–43.

August 1935

Appointment of Mr. T. Monis Ruberu as Sinhala Announcer, 1935

In 1935, the Colombo Broadcasting Service faced the loss of Mr. O. Y. Perera, a member of the clerical service who had been serving as the Sinhala Announcer.[1] Following his untimely death, the position was filled by Mr. T. Monis Ruberu, a technical officer attached to the Broadcasting Station.[2] Mr. Ruberu subsequently held the role of Sinhala Announcer until the end of 1937, contributing to the continuity of vernacular broadcasting and the development of Sinhala radio programmes during this formative period.[3]

Footnotes:

1. Annual Administrative Report of the Postmaster General, 1935, Colombo: Government Printer, 1936, 22.
2. D. M. Colombage, Guwan Viduli Vanshaya (Colombo: M. D. Gunasena & Co., 1989), 14.
3. C. P. L. Gunawardana, This is Colombo Calling (Colombo: Perali Publications, 1990), 42.

October 1935

Limited Allocation of Airtime for Oriental Programmes

By 1935, the Colombo Broadcasting Service (CBS) exhibited a marked imbalance in the allocation of airtime between Oriental and Western programmes, as evidenced in the schedule published in the October issue of Radio Times.[1] Apart from Sundays, the weekly schedule typically featured the following recurring segments:

11:00 a.m. – 12:00 noon: Oriental music and news
12:00 noon – 1:00 p.m. and 5:00 p.m. – 6:00 p.m.: Western music and news

The broadcast schedule for Tuesday, 1 October 1935, provides a representative illustration of programming priorities:

6:30 p.m. – 8:00 p.m.: Sinhala variety entertainment presented by the Drama Circle of the Department of Posts and Telecommunications

8:00 p.m. – 8:15 p.m.: Western mixed music (gramophone recordings)

8:15 p.m. – 8:30 p.m.: News bulletin (in English)

8:30 p.m. – 10:00 p.m.: Western music by request, featuring gramophone recordings selected and presented by Mr. A. J. Mohamed Ariff

This schedule demonstrates the relatively limited allocation of airtime to Eastern content, particularly in comparison with Western music and English-language programming. Such a distribution reflects the prevailing trends of colonial-era broadcasting policy, which prioritized Western cultural forms and English-language news, while Eastern musical and cultural content was largely confined to morning hours or specific, shorter segments.[2]

Footnotes:

1. Radio Times, October 1935, 7.
2. C. P. L. Gunawardana, This is Colombo Calling (Colombo: Perali Publications, 1990), 42.

05 October 1935

Royal College, Colombo Centenary Celebrations Broadcast

On 5 October 1935, the Colombo Broadcasting Service transmitted a special broadcast to commemorate the centenary of Royal College, Colombo.[1] The transmission, broadcast from the Galle Face Hotel between 9:00 p.m. and 10:00 p.m., coincided with the formal centenary dinner, attended by His Excellency the Officer Administering the Government.[2] This programme formed a central component of the official celebrations marking one hundred years of distinguished educational service by Royal College, one of the preeminent academic institutions in Ceylon.[3]

Footnotes:

1. Radio Times, October 1935, 14.
2. Annual Administrative Report of the Postmaster General, 1935, Colombo: Government Printer, 1936, 38.
3. C. P. L. Gunawardana, This is Colombo Calling (Colombo: Perali Publications, 1990), 43.



Royal College celebrated its centenary in 1935 marking 100 years since its founding as the Colombo Academy in 1835.

The celebrations, organized under Principal L.H.W. Sampson, featured a formal dinner at the Galle Face Hotel on October 5, a, carnival, and a, cricket tour.

Key highlights of the 1935 centenary included:

Historical Milestone:

The celebrations honored the establishment of the school by1835 by British Governor Sir Robert Wilmot-Horton.

Centenary Events:

The festivities included a formal dinner held at the Galle Face Hotel on Saturday October 5, 1935.

*Sports Commem**oration**:*

As part of the celebrations, Principal L.H.W. Sampson arranged for the Royal College cricket team to tour.

Documentation:

Excerpts from the Royal College Magazine of 1935 detail the, events and speeches, according to the Royal College Archives.

01 December 1935

Limited Sinhala Broadcasts

According to the programme schedule published in the Radio Times (December 1935 issue), only two Sinhala-language broadcasts were scheduled for Sunday, 1 December 1935.[1] These included:

9:00 a.m. to 10:00 a.m.: A Buddhist sermon delivered by the Venerable Kotahene Pannakitti Thero.

12:30 p.m. to 1:00 p.m.: A Sinhala music programme presented via gramophone recordings.

All other broadcasts for the day were conducted in English, demonstrating the predominance of English-language programming even during weekends.[2]

Analytical Note:

This programming schedule highlights the marginal allocation of airtime to Sinhala-language content during the mid-1930s. The dominance of English-language broadcasts reflects the broader colonial broadcasting policy, which prioritized Western audiences and cultural frameworks. It also underscores early struggles for linguistic representation within the national broadcasting service an issue that would gain greater prominence in subsequent media and cultural reforms.[3]

Footnotes:

1. Radio Times, December 1935, 12.
2. Annual Administrative Report of the Postmaster General, 1935, Colombo: Government Printer, 1936, 45.
3. Ibid.

16 December 1935

Commemoration of the Tenth Anniversary of Broadcasting in Ceylon: Social Event at Torrington Square

On 16 December 1935, a commemorative social event was organized at the Broadcasting Station in Torrington Square to mark what was officially regarded as the tenth anniversary of broadcasting in Ceylon.[1] **The occasion also served as a farewell to Mr. W. E. de Silva, one of the three Inspectors who had assisted Mr. Edward Harper in the design, construction, and installation of the original half-kilowatt transmitter at the Central Telegraph Office (C.T.O.), which facilitated the inaugural broadcast of the Colombo Broadcasting Station in December 1925.[2]**

At the time of this gathering, Mr. W. E. de Silva was preparing to depart for the United Kingdom to undertake a professional training course in radio engineering under the auspices of the British Post Office.[3] The social gathering was attended exclusively by the staff of the Torrington Square broadcasting facility and by officers attached to the Radio Division.

A group photograph was taken to commemorate the event, with Mr. W. E. de Silva seated prominently at the center, flanked by the Chief Engineer, the Assistant Chief Engineer, and two Radio Engineers. Notably, however, Mr. R. R. Anderson, Clerk of Broadcasting (C.B.C.) and one of the key figures in the administrative development of the Colombo Broadcasting Service, was absent from the occasion.[4]

Following the departure of senior officials from the event, the organizers improvised by broadcasting live segments from the party venue itself. This act, however, was conducted without prior authorization and subsequently drew a formal reprimand from the Chief Engineer, Mr. J. Shillitoe, on the following day.[5] The episode underscores both the evolving culture of experimentation within early broadcasting practices in Ceylon and the simultaneous enforcement of strict disciplinary norms by colonial engineering administrators.

Commemorative group photograph taken at the Torrington Square Broadcasting Station on 16 December 1935, marking the tenth anniversary of broadcasting in Ceylon and the farewell of Mr. W. E. de Silva (centre). Flanking him are the Chief Engineer, the Assistant Chief Engineer, and two Radio Engineers.



Engineer Mr. W. A. de Silva (centre)

Commemorative group photograph taken at the Torrington Square Colombo Broadcasting Service Station on 16 December 1935, marking the tenth anniversary of broadcasting in Ceylon and the farewell of ***Mr. W. E. de Silva (centre).*** *Flanking him are the Chief Engineer, the Assistant Chief Engineer, and two Radio Engineers.*

Footnotes:

1. Radio Times (Colombo Edition), December 1935, Programme Schedules and Notices.
2. C. P. L. Gunawardana, This is Colombo Calling (Colombo: Perali Publications, 1990), 43.
3. Ibid.
4. Annual Administrative Report of the Postmaster General, Ceylon, 1935, 112.
5. National Archives of Sri Lanka, Department of Posts and Telecommunications, "Broadcasting Division Records, 1935," File No. BC/1935/12.

December 1935

Capital Account Statement as of 31 December 1935

The capital account of the broadcasting station at the conclusion of the financial year 1935 is summarized as follows:

Particulars	**Amount (Rs. Cts.)**
Total cost of plant, including all capitalised amounts since initial erection	105,138.00
Less: Accumulated depreciation	44,447.00
Net book value of plant	60,691.00
Add: Total additional expenditure on renewals	20,684.00
Total value of plant as at 31 December 1935	81,375.00

This statement reflects the adjusted value of the broadcasting station's assets after accounting for depreciation and the expenditure on renewals incurred to date. The original capital investment of Rs. 105,138.00 represents the cumulative costs associated with establishing the station, inclusive of all capitalized expenditures since its inception. Over time, accumulated depreciation of Rs. 44,447.00 was charged against these assets, yielding a net book value of Rs. 60,691.00.

The addition of Rs.20,684.00 under "expenditure on renewals" indicates sustained investment in the maintenance and upgrading of the station's infrastructure. Such reinvestment demonstrates a deliberate administrative strategy to preserve operational efficiency and technical reliability, particularly significant during the developmental phase of broadcasting in Ceylon.

Consequently, the final valuation of Rs. 81,375.00 as of 31 December 1935 represents a balance between capital preservation and proactive reinvestment. The proportion of reinvestment approximately 34% of the net book value underscores the administration's recognition of the strategic importance of technological infrastructure. Detailed financial reporting of this nature supports transparency and provides a robust basis for future budgetary planning and policy formulation regarding the broadcasting service.

Analytical Note:

From a historical and administrative perspective, the capital account demonstrates early attempts to institutionalize financial accountability within the broadcasting sector. The careful documentation of asset costs, depreciation, and renewal expenditures reveals an awareness of the strategic value of radio infrastructure in Ceylon. Furthermore, the relative magnitude of reinvestment suggests that the station's management prioritized operational sustainability over mere cost containment, a notable consideration given the nascent stage of radio broadcasting in the 1930s. Such financial prudence likely contributed to the station's ability to maintain consistent service delivery and technical standards during a period of technological uncertainty.

Footnotes:

1. Annual Administrative Report of the Department of Posts and Telegraphs, Ceylon, 1935, 42–43.
2. Ibid.
3. C.P.L. Gunawardana, This is Colombo Calling (Colombo: Perali Publications, 1990), 16.

December 1935

Radio Licence Issuance and Its Growth as of December 1935

According to the Annual Administrative Report of the Postmaster General for 1935, a total of 3,053 radio licences were issued during the year. This figure represents a substantial increase of 711 licences compared to the preceding year, 1934, reflecting the growing popularity and accessibility of radio broadcasting in Ceylon.[1]

Moreover, the cumulative number of broadcasting hours recorded for 1935 amounted to 2,489, indicative of both an expansion in programming capacity and a consistent effort to meet public demand for radio content.[2] The growth in licence issuance, combined with increased broadcasting hours, underscores the progressive institutional development of the Colombo Broadcasting Station and its role in fostering mass communication during the mid-1930s.[3]

Footnotes:

1. Annual Administrative Report of the Postmaster General, Ceylon, 1935, 56–57.
2. D. M. Colombage, Guwan Viduli Vanshaya (Colombo: M.D. Gunasena & Company, 1989), 34.
3. C. P. L. Gunawardana, This is Colombo Calling (Colombo: Perali Publications, 1990), 44.

December 1935

Ten years of Socio-Political, Economic, and Cultural Development of the Colombo Broadcasting Service (1925–1935)

The decade spanning 1925 to 1935 marked a formative period in the development of the Colombo Broadcasting Service, reflecting significant socio-political, economic, and cultural transformations in Ceylon.

Economic Development

Financial records from this period, particularly the capital account statements for 1935, demonstrate a deliberate strategy of infrastructure investment and reinvestment. The original capital outlay of Rs. 105,138, combined with cumulative depreciation and Rs. 20,684 allocated for renewals, resulted in a net plant value of Rs. 81,375 by the end of 1935. This reinvestment, representing approximately 34% of the net book value, indicates a careful balancing of capital preservation with technological upgrading, ensuring operational efficiency in an era when broadcasting technology was still in its developmental stage.[1]

Socio-Political Development

The expansion of radio licences from 2,342 in 1934 to 3,053 in 1935 exemplifies the station's growing reach and influence within Ceylonese society.[2] The increased number of licences, alongside rising broadcasting hours (2,489 hours in 1935), underscores the government's recognition of radio as a vital tool for mass communication. Broadcasting became a medium through which public information, education, and cultural programming could be disseminated widely, thereby fostering social cohesion and contributing to the gradual shaping of a shared colonial and post-colonial identity.

Cultural Development

Culturally, the Colombo Broadcasting Service facilitated the transmission and promotion of local music, oral traditions, and linguistic heritage. The station's reinvestment in infrastructure allowed for higher-quality transmission and more diverse programming, contributing to the creation of a national auditory culture. By enabling wider access to music and spoken-word programmes in Sinhala, Tamil, and English, the station supported both cultural preservation and the dissemination of contemporary artistic expressions.[3]

Conclusion

Between 1925 and 1935, the Colombo Broadcasting Service evolved from a nascent experimental facility into a strategically significant institution with socio-political, economic, and cultural influence. Its growth in technical infrastructure, licence issuance, and broadcasting output reflects a carefully managed development trajectory. Economically prudent investment, coupled with a commitment to social and cultural programming, positioned the service as a cornerstone of modern communication in Ceylon, providing the foundation for subsequent expansions in the postwar era.

Footnotes:

1. Annual Administrative Report of the Department of Posts and Telegraphs, Ceylon, 1935, 42–43;
2. Ibid., 56–57.
3. C.P.L. Gunawardana, This is Colombo Calling (Colombo: Perali Publications, 1990), 44.

December 1935

Timeline of Key Milestones of the Colombo Broadcasting Service (1925–1935)

Year,
Economic Technical Developments,
Socio-Political Developments,
Cultural Programming Developments:

1925
Establishment of Colombo Broadcasting Station; initial capital outlay Rs. 50,000; basic transmitter installation
Experimental public broadcasts begin, introducing Ceylonese society to wireless communication
Early programming includes English music, announcements, and community messages

1926
Expansion of plant and minor technical upgrades
Increased public awareness of radio; limited licence issuance
Occasional cultural programming featuring Western and local music

1927
Continued reinvestment in equipment to improve transmission reliability
Growing recognition of radio's potential for mass communication
Introduction of local music segments

1930
Total plant cost Rs. 80,000; accumulated depreciation Rs. 25,000; net book value Rs. 55,000
Radio licensing formalized; early regulatory oversight
Increased variety in programmes; cultural and educational content begins

1932
Technical improvements allow for extended broadcasting hours
Public engagement grows, with listener correspondence beginning
Enhanced music programming, including Sinhala songs

1934
Plant valuation Rs. 60,000; modest reinvestment
Total licences issued: 2,342
Gradual inclusion of Tamil-language programmes

1935
Plant valuation Rs. 81,375; reinvestment of Rs. 20,684 (34% of net book value)
Total licences issued: 3,053; cumulative broadcasting hours: 2,489
Expansion of local music, cultural talks, and multilingual content; improved programme quality and transmission reliability.[1]

Analytical Note:

The timeline demonstrates that economic investment, social engagement, and cultural output developed in parallel. Technical and financial improvements ensured the station's operational reliability, which in turn allowed for wider public access and participation. Socio-political impact is reflected in the growing number of radio licences and hours broadcast, indicating both public interest and administrative recognition of radio's societal importance.[2] Culturally, the station increasingly became a vehicle for preserving and promoting Ceylonese music, language, and traditions, while simultaneously introducing Western influences, creating a unique auditory landscape.

Footnotes:

1. Annual Administrative Report of the Department of Posts and Telegraphs, Ceylon, 1925–1935.
2. Annual Administrative Report of the Postmaster General, Ceylon, 1935.

December 1935

Expansion of Sinhala Programming on the Colombo Broadcasting Service

(First Decade 1925 -1935)

Looking retrospectively upon the first decade of wireless in Ceylon, one may discern the pioneering steps through which the Sinhala language secured its place in broadcasting. Pandit P. T. Gunawardena's seminal address, Lankāvē Taruṇaya ("The Youth of Ceylon"), delivered on 28 February 1928, represented the opening of the airwaves to secular Sinhala intellectual discourse. Soon thereafter, the sermon by the Most Venerable Pelene Sri Vajiragnana Maha Nayaka Thero in March 1928 established religious broadcasting as an integral dimension of radio, directly linking the medium to Buddhist culture and national life.[1]

Equally significant was the introduction of Sinhala music in 1928, attributed to early vocalists including Ananda Samarakoon. This milestone expanded the artistic and cultural reach of the new technology, creating a public platform for national music traditions.[2]

By 1929–1930, Sinhala news bulletins were incorporated into the regular schedule, signifying the recognition of Sinhala as a language of information as well as culture. The broadcast of the first Sinhala playlet in 1931 further diversified programming by integrating drama into the repertoire, enhancing popular appeal.[3]

By the tenth anniversary of Ceylonese broadcasting in 1935, Sinhala had moved from isolated experimental broadcasts to becoming a daily and central feature of the service. This development symbolized both the cultural adaptation of wireless technology and the consolidation of Sinhala as a modern medium of mass communication.

Footnotes:

1. Annual Administrative Report of the Postmaster General, Ceylon, 1928, 45–46;
2. C.P.L. Gunawardana, This is Colombo Calling (Colombo: Perali Publications, 1990),
3. D. M. Colombage, Guwan Viduli Vanshaya (Colombo: M. D. Gunasena & Co., 1989),

December 1935

Colombo Broadcasting Service: Progress and Milestones 1935

I. Institutional and Historical Milestones

1. Tenth Anniversary of Broadcasting in Ceylon

The year 1935 marked the formal commemoration of a decade of radio broadcasting in Ceylon. The anniversary was observed through organised social events held at the Torrington Square broadcasting station, attended by senior colonial officials, station personnel, and invited members of the public. This occasion underscored the growing institutional maturity of the Colombo Broadcasting Service and signified its increasing public visibility and cultural importance.

II. Programme Development and Scheduling

2. Consolidation of Programme Output

By 1935, broadcast operations had reached a phase of consolidation, with daily transmission hours averaging between eight and ten hours. Programme schedules encompassed news bulletins, musical performances, educational talks, and religious broadcasts. Efforts to diversify content reflected a conscious transition from experimental broadcasting toward a more structured model consistent with public service broadcasting ideals.

III. Technical and Operational Advancements

3. Technical Improvements and Transmission Reliability

Notable technical upgrades were undertaken at the medium-wave transmitter facility in Welikada. Emphasis was placed on systematic maintenance and the enhancement of staff technical competence. These measures resulted in improved transmission reliability and a reduction in service interruptions, thereby strengthening the station's operational stability and audience confidence.

IV. Audience Interaction and Public Response

4. Growth in Listener Engagement

The Colombo Broadcasting Service experienced a measurable increase in listener correspondence during the year. Audiences actively contributed through letters, programme feedback, and musical requests.

This growing interaction reflected heightened public interest in radio broadcasting and affirmed the station's emerging role in shaping the social and cultural life of urban Ceylon.

Setbacks and Challenges

V. Structural and Resource Constraints

1. Limitations in Broadcasting Infrastructure

Despite technical improvements to transmission facilities, signal coverage remained limited, particularly in rural and peripheral regions. This infrastructural constraint restricted the Service's capacity to extend its reach and fully integrate geographically remote communities into the broadcasting network.

2. Dependence on Imported and Recorded Content

The development of original local programming continued to face constraints due to a shortage of trained announcers, musicians, and performers. Consequently, the station relied heavily on gramophone records, imported music, and sporadic live performances, primarily sourced from Colombo-based artistes.

3. Staffing and Administrative Limitations

Both administrative and technical staffing levels remained modest. Personnel were frequently required to undertake multiple responsibilities across operational, programming, and technical domains. While this reflected institutional adaptability, it also posed challenges for efficiency and long-term programme planning.

Concluding Assessment

The year 1935 represents a decisive phase of consolidation in the evolution of the Colombo Broadcasting Service. Institutionally, the tenth-anniversary commemoration reinforced public confidence and symbolic legitimacy. Technologically, improvements enhanced transmission reliability within existing constraints. Culturally and socially, the Service strengthened its engagement with listeners and laid the groundwork for more diverse and multilingual programming in subsequent years. Despite ongoing infrastructural and staffing limitations, 1935 may be regarded as a pivotal moment in the institutionalization of radio broadcasting in Ceylon

1936

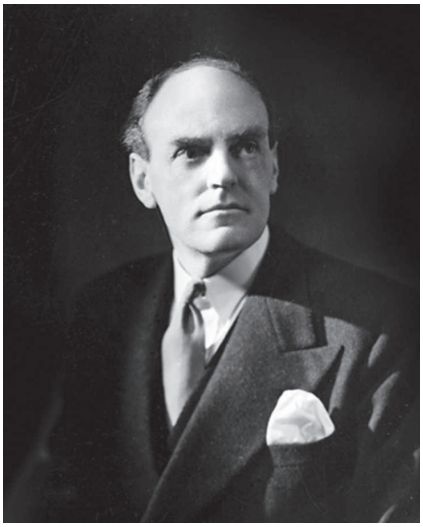
January 1936

B.B.C. Observations on Colombo's New Year Broadcast

In his New Year address for 1936, the Director of the B.B.C. Empire Service Sir John Reith reflected upon the remarkable experience of conducting a post-midnight listening tour across the European and Asian radio spectrum. He observed that a striking number of continental transmitters had joined in the festivities, enthusiastically ushering in the New Year with celebratory broadcasts, each of which could be received clearly on modern radio sets in the United Kingdom.[1]

Amidst this diversity of programming, the Colombo Broadcasting Station distinguished itself by the distinctive character of its transmission. Rather than relying solely upon conventional musical performances or spoken addresses, Colombo elected to welcome the New Year by relaying the ambient sounds of the harbour. Listeners were treated to the blaring sirens and piercing whistles of ships and tugboats stationed in Colombo Harbour. These evocative sounds, carried by wireless across the island, reached into distant hills, plains, and jungles, producing a vivid and atmospheric impression of communal celebration that departed significantly from contemporary broadcasting practice elsewhere.[2]

This innovative approach not only underscored the resourcefulness of Colombo's programme staff but also reflected a uniquely local interpretation of the radio medium transforming environmental soundscapes into symbols of modernity and shared festivity.



Sir. John Reith,
the first general manager and
later first director-general of the BBC.

Sir. John Reith, the first general manager and later first director-general of the BBC.

He is known for establishing the tradition of independent public service broadcasting in the United Kingdom.

He joined the BBC in October 1922 as its first general manager and became its first director-general in 1927.

Reith established the BBC's core values to "inform, educate, entertain"

He was a Scottish broadcasting executive who shaped the early days of British public radio.

He famously wrote in his diary when applying for the job: ***"I know nothing whatsoever about broadcasting".***



Mrs. Margery Helen Wace (later Margery Wilson) OBE

Margery Helen Wace (later Margery Wilson) OBE

Margery Wace was a key figure in the development of the BBC Empire Service, moving to the department in August 1936 to become the Empire Talks Organiser. An Oxford graduate and former secretary to Prof. Gilbert Murray, she was instrumental in professionalizing and expanding the BBC's overseas broadcasting, eventually becoming the Empire Talks Director in 1941.

Key Details regarding Margery Wace (1936–1940s):

Role in 1936:

She was appointed as the Empire Talks Organiser in August 1936, focusing on developing content for the Empire Service, particularly popularizing news and topical talks for audiences across the British Empire.

Background:

Born in 1904, Wace was an Oxford graduate (St Hugh's College) and joined the BBC in 1930 as a junior assistant in the Talks Department.

Career Advancement:

Due to her success, she was promoted to Empire Talks Director by 1941, managing significantly increased output during the war.

Personal Life & Recognition:

She married George Hamish Ormond Wilson in 1940 and was awarded the OBE in 1942 for her work in the Empire Service.

Later Years:

She resigned due to ill health but continued part-time work, later dying in 1944.

Wace is recognized as one of the key women who excelled at the BBC in the 1930s, helping to shape the corporation's international, English-language broadcasting during a critical, pre-war period.

Footnotes:

1. "B.B.C. Empire Service Director's New Year Address," B.B.C. Empire Service Review, January 1936, 12.
2. Annual Administrative Report of the Postmaster General, Ceylon, 1936, 48–49; C. P. L. Gunawardana, This is Colombo Calling (Colombo: Perali Publications, 1990), 44.

January 1936

Acquisition of a Disc Recording Machine

In January 1936, the Department of Posts and Telegraphs in Ceylon introduced an important technological innovation to the Colombo Broadcasting Station with the acquisition of a disc recording machine from Great Britain. This procurement marked a decisive step in the technical evolution of broadcasting infrastructure on the island, aligning local practices with broader imperial broadcasting trends.[1]

Prior to this development, all radio programmes in Ceylon were transmitted live, necessitating that content be delivered in real time without the benefit of retakes, editing, or preservation. The introduction of recording



Disc Recording Machine 1936

Disc Recording Machine

In 1936, disc recording technology was primarily dominated by professional, heavy-duty electrical lathes and early, smalcler consumer direct-to-disc recorders. These machines allowed for the immediate playback of recordings, often used for radio broadcasting or personal "home" recording.

Key examples and technologies from 1936 include:

RCA Master Reference Book for Disc Recording (1936-1943):

This documentation indicates that by 1936, high-fidelity, electrically cut discs (often lacquer or lacquer-coated metal) were standard for professional use.

Scully Lathes:

Scully dominated the professional, industrial, and studio market in the US during the 1930s, producing high-quality lacquers and masters, frequently equipped with Western Electric or similar cutter heads.

Direct-to-Disc Recorders (Home/Portable Use):

In 1936, companies like Parmeko released, or were developing, portable, "home" recording machines that cut directly onto discs. These were used to record radio broadcasts or private voice messages.

Presto 75A/Similar Lathes:

While the Presto 75A was introduced around 1938, similar, earlier models from companies like Presto were already widely used to cut 78 RPM records from radio broadcasts in the mid-1930s.

1936 Berlin Olympics:

Disc recording machines were used to capture audio for the 1936 Berlin Olympics.

Philips-Miller Film Recorder (1936):

Although not technically a disc, this machine used mechanical recording techniques similar to disc cutters, cutting a sound track onto a special film, representing a major alternative to tape or disc in 1936.

Pathéphone and Early 1930s Phonographs:

While the "Pathéphone" era was in decline, manufacturers like Latvian producer Jānis Viesturs still produced record players and discs until 1936.

Key 1936 Technical Aspects:

Recording Method:

Electrical, using a cutter head (stylus) to etch grooves onto aluminum or, increasingly, lacquer-coated blanks.

Speed:

78 RPM (revolutions per minute) was the industry standard for 78s, though 33 1/3 RPM was starting to be used for longer-duration transcription discs.

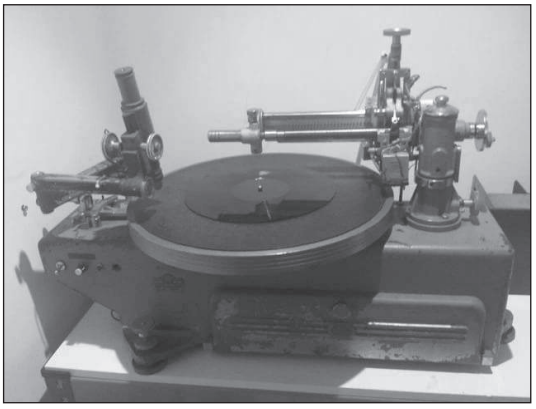
Media:

Aluminum discs were often used, but "lacquer" or "acetate" discs were gaining popularity for better sound quality, as aluminum was often harsh.

Note:

While 1936 saw the introduction of the first magnetic tape recorder (the AEG Magnetophon) in Germany, the question specifically refers to disc recording technology.

technology fundamentally altered this limitation. Although early disc machines were constrained by their capacity typically a maximum of three minutes per side their arrival represented a significant advancement. The station was now capable of producing recorded messages, storing important broadcasts, and rebroadcasting content for wider distribution, including to rural areas where reception of live transmissions could be unreliable. [2]



Presto Disc Cutting Lathe

This is a vintage Presto disc cutting lathe, likely a Model 8D or similar, used for creating phonograph records.

It is a precision machine that cuts a modulated spiral groove into a coated aluminum or lacquer disc.

These devices were historically used to produce master discs for vinyl production, as well as broadcast transcription discs and direct-to-disc recordings.

The cutting head uses a moving-coil assembly to drive a cutting stylus (chisel) into the disc material.

Various models existed, with some operating at different speeds (e.g., 78 rpm, 33 rpm, 16 rpm) for different recording durations and purposes.

The benefits of this technology extended beyond mere technical efficiency. The ability to pre-record programmes enhanced programme diversity by permitting contributions from individuals unable to appear at the station during live broadcasts. Public figures, artists, and educators could now pre-record their messages or performances, which could then be incorporated into the broadcast schedule with greater flexibility.[3] This capacity not only enriched the station's cultural offerings but also strengthened its function as a national hub for information and cultural expression.

Moreover, the introduction of sound recording provided the potential for archival preservation of significant cultural performances and official announcements. In this respect, the Colombo Broadcasting Station was moving toward professionalization, ensuring that the island's broadcasting practices reflected contemporary international standards. Such technological modernization further reinforced Ceylon's position within the global framework of British imperial broadcasting, which increasingly emphasized recording, quality control, and continuity in programming.[4]

In sum, the acquisition of the disc recording machine in 1936 represented a landmark in the history of broadcasting in Sri Lanka. It provided immediate practical benefits flexibility, programme diversity, and wider dissemination while also laying the groundwork for the archival preservation of the nation's cultural and political memory.

Footnotes:

1. Annual Administrative Report of the Postmaster General, Ceylon, 1936, 51.
2. D. M. Colombage, Guwan Viduli Vanshaya (Colombo: M.D. Gunasena & Company, 1989), 45.
3. C.P.L. Gunawardana, This is Colombo Calling (Colombo: Perali Publications, 1990), 46.
4. Asa Briggs, The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom, Vol. II: The Golden Age of Wireless (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965), 114–16.

January 1936

The Emergence of English Children's Programming in Ceylon

The early development of radio broadcasting in Ceylon during the 1920s and 1930s reflected both local experimentation and metropolitan influences. Among the significant innovations of this period was the emergence of children's programming in English, a genre which gradually became a regular feature of the broadcasting schedule.

The earliest identifiable figure in this field was **"Aunty Kirk,"** who pioneered English-language programmes aimed at younger listeners. Her broadcasts often featuring stories, songs, and interactive exchanges represented the first attempts to treat children as a distinct listening audience.**Following her initial tenure, the programme briefly came under the stewardship of "Aunty Jenny," whose role, though transitional, maintained continuity in the provision of children's entertainment and education.**

By January 1936, however, children's programming entered a new phase with the introduction of "Aunty Peggy" and "Uncle Peter" as principal presenters of the weekly English broadcast. Allocated a one-hour slot every Thursday evening between 6:00 p.m. and 7:00 p.m., this programme received institutional recognition within the Colombo Broadcasting Station's schedule.**"Uncle Peter" was in fact Mr. Peter Baton, a prominent local journalist, whose professional background lent credibility and a measure of journalistic rigor to the programme's content.**[1]



Mrs. Kathleen Garscadden

Kathleen Garscadden (1897–1991)

The first "Aunt" to appear on the BBC airwaves She was known as 'Auntie Kathleen' and her popularity turned her into a celebrity.

The Aunties and Uncles *who formed the cohort of presenters for* ***Children's Hour, the first BBC radio programme*** *for children, have passed into British popular memory to the extent that the programme continues to be epitomised by its presenters.*

Characterised by a relatively informal style of presentation, the personalities of ***these Aunties and Uncles helped to delineate the special terrain of children's broadcasting.*** *Their purchase within popular imagination is not simply one of nostalgia in that their popularity was also a major characteristic of early children's broadcasting. Yet, BBC policy documents of the early years suggest both a marked disapproval of these personalities, and a commensurate concern to rid the service of the overly familiar nicknames.*

No doubt, such concerns were linked to fears that such familiarity would undermine the Corporation's image of institutionalised authority.

However, through analysis of what BBC documents term the 'matter and manner' of children's broadcasting, this brief note argues that other issues were at stake in that both Children's Hour and its Aunties and Uncles constitute a liminal terrain that problematised the certainties of the adult/child dichotomy in children's broadcasting.

The format of children's programming in Ceylon during this period was not limited to local production. The Colombo station also relayed children's programmes supplied by the British Empire Broadcasting Station, operating under the B.B.C.'s Empire Service.[2] This dual approach local originality complemented by metropolitan imports illustrates the hybrid cultural dynamics of colonial broadcasting.

Meanwhile, "Aunty Kirk" resumed her role with a dedicated half-hour programme on Wednesday evenings from 6:30 p.m. to 7:00 p.m.[3] Her continued presence reflected both her enduring popularity and the station's recognition of the value of experienced broadcasters in fostering audience loyalty. These initiatives represented the first systematic acknowledgement of children as a distinct radio audience in Ceylon, paving the way for later developments, including bilingual strategies that incorporated Sinhala-language programming for younger listeners.

In retrospect, the children's broadcasts of the 1930s not only entertained but also functioned as tools of cultural orientation, introducing colonial-era youth to both British traditions and emergent Ceylonese broadcasting practices. They laid the foundation for a genre of programming that would become a central component of the island's broadcasting culture in subsequent decades.

Footnotes:

1. C. P. L. Gunawardana, This is Colombo Calling (Colombo: Perali Publications, 1990), 41.
2. Annual Administrative Report of the Postmaster General, 1936 (Colombo: Government Printer, 1937), 21.
3. D. M. Colombage, Guwan Viduli Vanshaya (Colombo: M. D. Gunasena & Company, 1989), 72.

February 1936

"Siri Aiya" and the Development of Sinhala Children's Broadcasting

In 1936, a pioneering radio programme specifically designed for Sinhala-speaking children was introduced by Sirilatha Nanda (Mrs. D. N. Hapugala).[1] This initiative is recorded as the first sustained effort to provide children's broadcasting in the Sinhala language. The programme was subsequently carried forward by several presenters, including "Ariyaratna Mama" (Mr. G. P. Ariyaratna), "Damayanthi Akka" (Miss Chandra Ranhotty), and, most prominently, "Siri Aiya" (Mr. U. A. S. Perera), whose enduring contributions profoundly shaped its development.[2]

Initially transmitted once a week with a thirty-minute duration, the programme soon achieved remarkable popularity under the stewardship of Siri Aiya. His eloquence in Sinhala oratory and his mastery of poetic improvisation revitalized the format, expanding its listener base across the island.[3] **In response to this growing engagement, official reports of the Department of Posts and Telegraphs note the extension of children's programming in the later 1930s to fifty-five minutes.[4]**

Siri Aiya was initially assisted by "Somi Akka" (Miss Eva de Silva), and following her departure, successive co-presenters included Miss Nanda Kevitigala, Miss Dhanawathie Munasinghe, and Miss Trelicia Abeykoon (later Mrs. Trelicia Gunewardene).[5]



Mr. U. A. S. Perera
"Siri Aiya"

Demonstrating both innovation and a commitment to cultivating communal identity among young listeners, Siri Aiya established a Children's Club affiliated with the programme. Membership was divided into four groups **Chandra, Surya, Nanda, and Maurya** creating an organized sense of belonging and competition among participants.[6] According to contemporaneous administrative reports, this initiative significantly increased listener correspondence and programme participation, which were identified as indices of broadcasting success in the 1930s.[7]

The programme featured a wide range of content: entertainment items, moral and religious instruction, short historical narratives, and musical performances.[8] A distinctive and widely celebrated feature was its interactive element: children were encouraged to submit their own verses and compositions, which Siri Aiya would answer with impromptu poetry of his own, composed extemporaneously.[9] This format not only entertained but also strengthened the educational and literary dimension of Sinhala broadcasting.

Over time, Siri Aiya's reputation transcended the boundaries of the studio. His work was praised in official circles, with Annual Administrative Reports acknowledging the increasing influence of children's programmes on audience cultivation.[10] Religious dignitaries, government ministers, educators, literary figures, and the general public alike admired his pioneering contributions.[11] **For thirteen consecutive years, Siri Aiya directed this cherished programme, making it one of the most enduring and culturally formative features of early Sinhala-language broadcasting in Ceylon.**

Footnotes:

1. D. M. Colombage, Guwan Viduli Vanshaya (Colombo: M. D. Gunasena & Company, 1989), 74-75.
2. C. P. L. Gunawardana, This is Colombo Calling (Colombo: Perali Publications, 1990), 44-45.
3. Ibid., 45.
4. Government of Ceylon, Annual Administrative Report of the Postmaster General, 1937 (Colombo: Government Printer, 1938),
5. Colombage, Guwan Viduli Vanshaya, 75.
6. Gunawardana, This is Colombo Calling, 45.
7. Government of Ceylon, Annual Administrative Report of the Postmaster General, 1939 (Colombo: Government Printer, 1940),
8. Colombage, Guwan Viduli Vanshaya, 75.
9. Gunawardana, This is Colombo Calling, 45.
10. Government of Ceylon, Annual Administrative Report of the Postmaster General, 1940 (Colombo: Government Printer, 1941),
11. Colombage, Guwan Viduli Vanshaya, 75.

February 1936

The Introduction of Tamil-Language Children's Broadcasting

In parallel with the development of English- and Sinhala-language children's programmes, the year 1936 marked a further milestone in the evolution of broadcasting in Ceylon with the introduction of a dedicated Tamil-language children's broadcast.[1] This initiative represented a deliberate effort by the Colombo Broadcasting Station to provide inclusive content reflective of the island's multilingual and multicultural society.

The Tamil children's programme followed a format broadly comparable to its English and Sinhala counterparts and was presented on a rotational basis by several pioneering Tamil-speaking broadcasters.**Among the earliest of these was "Granny" (Mrs. Chelliah), whose affectionate and maternal tone quickly endeared her to young listeners.[2] She was succeeded by "Somasarma" (Mr. A. M. K. Cumaraswamy), a respected announcer widely admired for his clarity of speech and narrative skill.[3]**

Subsequent contributors included "Chinna Mami" (Mrs. J. A. Gnanapragasam), whose warm and engaging presentation style consolidated the programme's popularity, and "Balar Sangham" (Miss Gnanatheepam Moses), who introduced a distinctly educational orientation to the broadcast.[4] The very title Balar Sangham literally "Children's Association" evoked an early vision of community-building and cultural enrichment through the medium of radio.

This Tamil-language children's broadcast not only expanded the linguistic scope of early Ceylonese broadcasting but also functioned as an important platform for preserving and transmitting Tamil culture, folktales, songs, and moral values to younger generations.[5] Much like its Sinhala and English counterparts, it incorporated a blend of entertainment, moral instruction, and traditional narratives, carefully tailored to the sensibilities of youthful audiences.

The establishment of children's programming in all three national languages by the mid-1930s demonstrates the Colombo Broadcasting Station's early recognition of the importance of inclusivity in public communication.[6]
At the same time, it illustrates how colonial-era broadcasting in Ceylon gradually began to reflect indigenous cultural identities while continuing to operate within the institutional framework of British broadcasting standards.

Taken together, these multilingual children's programmes played a foundational role in fostering linguistic diversity, cultural pride, and educational engagement among young listeners. They remain a significant legacy of the formative years of public broadcasting in Sri Lanka.

Footnotes:

1. Government of Ceylon, Annual Administrative Report of the Postmaster General, 1936 (Colombo: Government Printer, 1937), 12.
2. D. M. Colombage, Guwan Viduli Vanshaya (Colombo: M. D. Gunasena & Company, 1989), 74-75.
3. C. P. L. Gunawardana, This is Colombo Calling (Colombo: Perali Publications, 1990), 45.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. Government of Ceylon, Annual Administrative Report of the Postmaster General, 1937 (Colombo: Government Printer, 1938), 15.

February 1936

Recording of Udarata Wannam and the Introduction of Folk Music to Broadcasting

In February 1936, the Colombo Broadcasting Station achieved a notable milestone in its cultural programming with the recording of a selection of Udarata Wannam (traditional up-country melodies).**These were performed by the Venerable Rambukwelle Siddhartha Thero, a respected scholar at Ceylon University College, together with Mr. Urapola Kiribanda, an accomplished folk musician.[1] This initiative constituted one of the earliest documented attempts to preserve and disseminate traditional Sri Lankan folk music through the medium of broadcasting.**

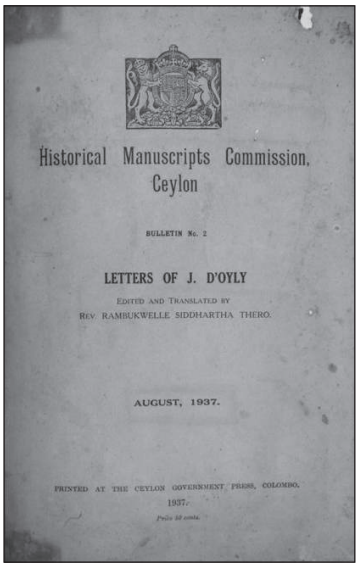
The Venerable Siddhartha Thero's contribution was particularly significant in that it extended beyond performance. He played a pivotal role in introducing jana gee (folk songs) into the national broadcasting repertoire, while also championing the recognition of other folk artists such as Mr. Kiribanda.[2] Their music, once limited to regional or communal spaces, gained a new audience through the airwaves of the Colombo Broadcasting Station, later restructured as the Lanka Broadcasting Service.



Venerable Rambukwelle Siddhartha Thero
A respected scholar at
Ceylon University College, in 1930s

This development heralded a broader cultural movement within the service, wherein musicians from diverse parts of the island were systematically incorporated into national programming. The results were both profound and enduring: not only was a new platform created for the appreciation of indigenous musical traditions, but radio also served as an instrument of cultural revival during a period of colonial dominance.[3] **In subsequent years, figures such as Edwin Kottagoda adapted these traditional melodies to a more contemporary style, thus broadening their appeal among listeners who might otherwise have gravitated toward Westernized musical forms.[4]**

The foresight of early broadcasting pioneers was evident in their recognition of the urgency to preserve oral traditions at risk of decline.


Historical Manuscripts Commission, Ceylon

BULLETIN No. 2

LETTERS OF J. D'OYLY

EDITED AND TRANSLATED BY REV. RAMBUKWELLE SIDDHARTHA THERO.

AUGUST, 1937.

PRINTED AT THE CEYLON GOVERNMENT PRESS, COLOMBO.
1937.

LETTERS OF JOHN D'OYLY
Edited and Translated by Rev, Rabukwelle Siddhartha Thero
Publish by Historical Manuscripts Commission of Ceylon
August 1937
Printed at the Ceylon Government Press, Colombo, 1937.



Mr. Urapola Kiribanda and the Dance troupe

Urapola Kiribanda was a renowned traditional Udarata (Kandyan) dancer in Ceylon.
Background:
He hailed from a traditional dance parampara (lineage)
Contribution:
He was introduced to the Gandharva Sabha by Ven. Rambukwelle Siddhartha Thero.
Legacy:
He started a dance class at the university on Sunday mornings, which was attended by scholars such as Ediriweera Sarachchandra to learn dance moves.

A committee was accordingly appointed to oversee the systematic recording and archiving of folk music. The secretary to this body, Mr. C. L. P. Gunawardena, a central figure in the institutional development of Ceylonese broadcasting, rendered exceptional service in ensuring that such initiatives were carried out in an organized and scholarly manner.[5]

Analytical Note:

The recording of Udarata Wannam in 1936 represented more than a cultural experiment; it was an early institutional recognition of intangible cultural heritage as a national resource. By elevating folk traditions from the margins to the airwaves, the Colombo Broadcasting Station effectively positioned itself as both a cultural conservator and a modernizing agent. This dual role reflected a growing awareness, even within a colonial broadcasting framework, of the necessity to cultivate and preserve local identity through indigenous music. **The project anticipated later systematic archival missions of the late 1940s and 1950s, demonstrating how broadcasting in Ceylon moved gradually from mere entertainment to the documentation and safeguarding of heritage.**

Footnotes:

1. Annual Administrative Report of the Director of Posts and Telegraphs, Ceylon, 1936.
2. D. M. Colombage, Guwan Viduli Vanshaya (Colombo: M. D. Gunasena & Co., 1989), 45–47.
3. Ibid
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.

06 April 1936

Ten-Year Review Report by the Postmaster General

On 6 April 1936, Mr. John Redly Walters, the Postmaster General of Ceylon, submitted a comprehensive review report entitled Progress Over Ten Years to the Minister of Communications and Works.[1] This document represents one of the earliest official evaluations of the development and operation of the Ceylon Broadcasting Service during its first decade.

At the outset, the report addressed three principal aspects:

(a) the budget allocated for broadcasting services over the past decade,
(b) the total expenditure incurred following the installation of equipment, and
(c) the operational expenses for the year ending 31 December 1935.[2]

Although salary allocations for broadcasting personnel were included, the report excluded building rentals and depreciation costs. This omission was justified on the grounds that broadcasting equipment had been installed within the Wireless Telegraphy Building, originally intended for maritime wireless communication. Furthermore, since the same staff operated both telegraphy and broadcasting services, salaries were accounted for under both categories of service, reflecting the overlapping administrative structure.[3]

The report also separately detailed customs duties paid on the importation of wireless equipment and revenues obtained from merchants' licensing fees. Most notably, it recorded a government revenue of Rs. 39,704, while broadcasting, for the first time in its history, yielded a modest profit of Rs. 6,000 in the year 1935.[4]

Up until that point, broadcasting in Ceylon had consistently operated at a financial loss. However, as the report itself emphasized, such losses were not unusual but rather a common characteristic of the early stages of broadcasting in British colonial territories.[5]

Analytical Observations

1. Financial Maturity of Public Broadcastin

The reported Rs. 6,000 profit in 1935 marks a turning point, demonstrating that infrastructure investment and staff allocations had begun to generate measurable returns. This profit signifies an early stage of institutional sustainability.

2. Shared Infrastructure and Staff

The dual use of telegraphy infrastructure and staff highlights administrative efficiency and resourcefulness. At the same time, it complicated financial transparency, as reflected in the overlapping salary entries.

3. Exclusion of Building Costs

The deliberate omission of building rental and depreciation costs casts the financial position in a more favorable light. This reveals an early bureaucratic strategy aimed at portraying broadcasting as increasingly self-sufficient within the colonial administrative framework.

4. Colonial Broadcasting Norms

The report's acknowledgment that losses were typical across British colonies situates Ceylon's experience within a broader imperial pattern. This rhetorical alignment implicitly legitimized local financial struggles.

5. Economic Impact on Government Revenue

The Rs. 39,704 in government revenue underscores the emerging role of broadcasting within the colonial economy. Customs and licensing fees became increasingly significant, marking the beginnings of state-controlled media economics in Ceylon.

Analytical Note:

The 1936 ten-year review report constitutes a landmark administrative document in the evolution of broadcasting in Ceylon. Beyond summarizing financial performance, it illustrates how fiscal policy, colonial governance, and technological adoption intersected in shaping the institutional character of public radio. The transition from chronic financial deficit to modest profitability reflected both a local adaptation of global broadcasting trends and an emerging recognition of radio as a viable cultural and economic enterprise.

Footnotes:

1. Annual Administrative Report of the Postmaster General, Ceylon, 1936, Sri Lanka National Archives (Colombo).
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. Edward Harper, Report on the Progress of Wireless Broadcasting in Ceylon (Colombo: Government Press, 1932), 11.

06 April 1936

Report of the Chief Wireless (Radio) Engineer

(Part one)

On 6 April 1936, **Mr. C. H. Braisel, M.C., serving as Chief Wireless Engineer of the Ceylon Broadcasting Service,** submitted a detailed report on the technical and operational challenges confronting early broadcasting in the island. Braisel emphasized the inherent difficulty of meeting the cultural and linguistic demands of a multilingual society:

"In a multilingual country, it is a challenging task to satisfy the listening preferences of all communities. The programmes broadcast by the Colombo Radio Station have been structured to meet the needs of English, Sinhala, Tamil, and Hindustani-speaking audiences. Surveys have revealed that approximately 50% of listeners prefer Oriental language content, while the remaining 50% favour English-language broadcasts. However, it must be noted that, at present, 60% of our programmes are prepared for English-speaking audiences, with only 40% allocated to Sinhala, Tamil, and Hindustani audiences."[1]

The service operated through a single transmitter of 1 kilowatt power on medium wave at 428.5 metres.[2] Programmes were scheduled daily from 11:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m., with limited breaks on non-school broadcast days: from 1:30 p.m. to 4:30 p.m., and again from 6:10 p.m. to 6:30 p.m. Maintenance was restricted to the brief off-air interval between 8:00 a.m. and 11:00 a.m., reflecting both the technical limitations and the pressure to maximize available broadcast hours.[3]

Radio licences were priced at Rs. 10.00 per annum. By 31 December 1935, the number of licence holders stood at 3,053, a modest figure considering a decade of operation. Braisel attributed this to four key factors:

1. **the economic depression prevailing in Ceylon,**
2. **the limited provision of Oriental-language content,**
3. **the absence of affordable, high-quality receivers, and**
4. **the difficulty of maintaining radio equipment.[4]**

Despite these challenges, Braisel's report highlighted a gradual increase in licence uptake during the year 1935, suggesting the beginnings of public adaptation and growth potential for the service.

Analytical Observations

This report provides critical insight into the structural and cultural dynamics of broadcasting in colonial Ceylon:

1. Language Disparity and Colonial Bias:

Although surveys revealed equal preference for Oriental and English-language programming, broadcast schedules disproportionately favored anglophone audiences. This imbalance reflects a colonial hierarchy of cultural value, with European linguistic preferences placed above those of local communities.

2. Technical Limitations:

The dependence on a single 1-kilowatt transmitter placed natural limits on coverage, scheduling, and technical flexibility, while also underscoring the experimental nature of the service in its first decade.

3. Socio-Economic Barriers:

The relatively low listener base underscores the economic and technological constraints of the 1930s. The cost of licences, compounded by the global depression and the lack of inexpensive receivers, limited widespread adoption of radio listening.

4. Early Signs of Growth:

The noted increase in licence registrations during 1935 indicates a slow but positive trajectory of listener engagement. This growth was, however, conditional upon reforms in content provision, accessibility of receivers, and investment in technical expansion.

Footnotes:

1. C. H. Braisel, Report of the Chief Wireless Engineer, submitted to the Postmaster General, 6 April 1936, National Archives of Sri Lanka (Colombo).
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.

06 April 1936

Report of the Chief Wireless (Radio) Engineer

(Part Two)

The Chief Wireless Engineer of Ceylon, in his 6 April 1936 submission, highlighted a notable development in the dissemination of Oriental music, linking this trend to the expanding reach of radio broadcasting.[1] He observed a steady increase in the number of performing artists from Oriental traditions. However, the report stressed that the limited financial resources available for programme development imposed serious constraints, rendering it unrealistic to expect voluntary contributions from artists on a regular basis.

Following the allocation of payments to organizations such as the Performing Rights Society and the gramophone record industry for copyright and related fees, only Rs. 600 per month remained for multilingual broadcasting.[2] For the fiscal year 1936–1937, this figure was projected to increase to Rs. 1,500, yet even this augmentation reflected continued budgetary limitations.

Technical and infrastructural factors also restricted the growth of radio listenership. The report detailed the lack of local facilities for the repair and maintenance of radio receivers. Radios in Ceylon were of two types:

(a) electrically powered and
(b) battery-operated.[3]

Rural areas largely relied on battery-powered sets due to the absence of electricity, while even households with access to power faced limitations in evening listening, compounded by poor reception and the difficulty of recharging batteries.

Demographic statistics underscored the inequality in access. With a population of approximately 5.5 million, there were only 3,053 licensed radio sets, equating to one set per 1,812 individuals.[4] The engineer projected that the number of licence holders could reasonably rise to 10,000. In the densely populated suburbs of Colombo, home to over 300,000 residents, the report suggested that at least 5,000–6,000 listeners could be reached if electricity were made available to smaller households, given that electricity tariffs were relatively modest.

In response to these infrastructural and economic challenges, the report advocated for the development of a wire-based Rediffusion service, to be initiated by the private sector.[5] Such a system would allow households unable or unwilling to manage the technical and financial responsibilities of radio ownership to access broadcasts for a nominal fee, effectively democratizing radio listening.

Analytical Observations

1. Financial Constraints on Content Creation

The report highlights chronic underfunding for multilingual cultural programming. While the projected increase from Rs. 600 to Rs. 1,500 per month in 1936–1937 represented an improvement, it remained insufficient to support a robust programme schedule.

2. Technological and Infrastructure Barriers

The absence of local maintenance facilities, coupled with limited rural electrification, constrained the operational effectiveness of radio broadcasting. Battery-powered radios dominated non-urban areas, but recharging difficulties and restricted electricity use further limited access.

3. Unequal Access and Low Penetration

The ratio of one licensed set per 1,812 people highlights stark inequities in access to radio. The engineer's projection of 10,000 potential licence holders illustrates both latent demand and the capacity for future growth, particularly in Colombo's suburban areas.

4. Rediffusion as an Inclusive Alternative

The proposed wire-based Rediffusion system represents a forward-looking solution to socio-technical limitations.

By centralizing reception and distributing broadcasts over wired connections, the system could significantly expand access for working-class households and those otherwise constrained by ownership costs or technical complexity.

Overall, this report segment provides a critical socio-technical perspective on broadcasting in 1930s Ceylon, illustrating how economic limitations, infrastructural deficits, and colonial priorities collectively shaped the reach, content, and inclusivity of public radio.

Footnotes:

1. C. H. Braisel, Report of the Chief Wireless Engineer, submitted to the Postmaster General, 6 April 1936, National Archives of Sri Lanka (Colombo).
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.

06 April 1936

Report of the Chief Wireless (Radio) Engineer

(Part Three)

In the third section of his 6 April 1936 submission, the Chief Wireless Engineer addressed both technical and socio-economic aspects of broadcasting in Ceylon.[1] **He observed that the existing transmitter, with limited power, permitted effective programme transmission only within a 25-mile radius. Plans were underway to upgrade the transmitter to 5 kilowatts within the year, a development expected to expand coverage across a larger portion of the island.[2]**

The report also proposed the installation of a radio receiver in a rural school or public institution, charging a nominal monthly fee for maintenance. This initiative aimed to introduce radio broadcasting to remote communities, providing both educational and entertainment opportunities. The engineer cautioned, however, that practical challenges such as battery maintenance in distant areas and the need for culturally sensitive content tailored to rural audiences would require careful consideration.[3]

A broader strategic observation emphasized the necessity of maintaining two distinct broadcasting streams. The report noted that audiences in many Eastern countries exhibit limited enthusiasm for content relayed from imperial broadcasting centres, expressing preference instead for programmes in their native languages.

Accordingly, the 1936–1937 budget included a proposal for the new 5 kW transmitter at an estimated cost of Rs. 75,000 to support simultaneous Eastern- and Western-oriented broadcasts.[4]

At present, programme planning was carried out by the Chief Wireless Engineer and his technical team. The report stressed that this arrangement was unusual, as engineers generally lack the professional expertise required for content development. **Therefore, the recruitment of a qualified broadcasting officer was proposed and included in the 1936–1937 budget.[5]**

The report identified four principal obstacles to the expansion of broadcasting in Ceylon:

1. **Limited electricity supply, common to tropical regions.**
2. **The mountainous central region, rising approximately 8,000 feet, which interferes with signal propagation.**
3. **The existence of four major ethnic groups, each demonstrating a preference for content in their own language.**
4. **The predominance of rural poor populations for whom radio remained a luxury.[6]**

Despite these challenges, the service demonstrated measurable progress over its first decade. The report emphasized that, in any colonial context, broadcasting typically operates at a loss during formative years but can eventually yield profitability. A key step in advancing broadcasting in Ceylon, it concluded, would be the production of simple, affordable radio receivers a field in which American manufacturers had shown greater initiative than their British counterparts.[7]

Analytical Observations

1. Infrastructure Expansion & Rural Inclusion

The proposed transmitter upgrade and community radio access via schools reflect an early commitment to expanding national coverage and democratizing access to broadcasting.

2. Cultural Sensitivity & Language Diversity

Acknowledging local audiences' preference for native-language content underscores the inadequacy of colonial, English-dominated programming. The proposal for dual-stream broadcasting anticipates a more pluralistic, listener-centered approach.

3. Administrative Limitations

Reliance on engineers for programme planning illustrates institutional immaturity. The proposed appointment of a dedicated broadcasting officer signals a shift toward professionalization and specialized management.

4. Structural & Geographical Challenges

The report systematically identifies real-world barriers including limited electricity, mountainous terrain, ethnic diversity, and poverty while offering practical solutions grounded in local realities.

5. Technological Nationalism & Global Comparison

The recommendation to develop low-cost local receivers, coupled with recognition of American industrial responsiveness, implicitly critiques British technological lag and highlights the need for localized innovation. Overall, the report presents a technically informed yet socially aware vision for broadcasting in Ceylon, combining strategic infrastructure planning with attention to cultural and linguistic inclusivity.

Footnotes:

1. C. H. Braisel, Report of the Chief Wireless Engineer, submitted to the Postmaster General, 6 April 1936, National Archives of Sri Lanka, Colombo.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. Braisel, Report of the Chief Wireless Engineer.
7. Ibid.

June 1936

Curtailment of Live Programmes

By the middle of 1936, the Colombo Broadcasting Service was compelled to significantly curtail its live programme production due to severe financial constraints. The limited budget allocated for the remuneration of artistes sharply reduced both the scope and the diversity of broadcast content. Administrators acknowledged that it was impractical and inequitable to expect performers to contribute their services without adequate financial compensation.[1]

After mandatory payments were made to the Performing Rights Society and the Phonographic Industry two institutions whose fees were unavoidable in order to utilize copyrighted musical works a mere Rs. 600 remained available each month for the planning and execution of programmes. This residual sum had to be divided across all four major linguistic and cultural constituencies served by the station: English, Sinhala, Tamil, and Muslim audiences.[2]

The fiscal predicament of 1936 underscores the fragility of early broadcasting in Ceylon, where the dependence on limited state resources constrained the cultural mission of radio. It also illustrates the tension between the economic sustainability of broadcasting and the expectation of equitable representation of diverse audiences.

Analytical Note:

The reduction in live programming during 1936 had several broader implications for the evolution of broadcasting in Ceylon. First, it weakened listener satisfaction, as audiences increasingly relied on live performances for localized cultural content, particularly in Sinhala and Tamil. Second, the financial limits curtailed experimentation with new programme formats, reinforcing dependence on imported gramophone records rather than the development of indigenous artistry. Third, this episode highlighted the imbalance between colonial fiscal priorities and the cultural aspirations of broadcasting, where revenue allocation to rights-collecting societies left minimal funds for actual production.

In the longer term, the 1936 crisis demonstrated the necessity of institutional reform in programme financing and foreshadowed subsequent calls for better investment in local talent and the creation of sustainable models of cultural broadcasting. It also revealed that, even within the colonial broadcasting framework, there was rising recognition of the need to balance fiscal prudence with cultural responsibility.

Footnotes:

1. Administration Report of the Director of Posts and Telegraphs, Ceylon, 1936 (Colombo: Government Press, 1937), 42;
2. D. M. Colombage, Guwan Viduli Vanshaya (Colombo: M. D. Gunasena & Company, 1989), 59, cf. C. P. L. Gunawardana, This is Colombo Calling (Colombo: Perali Publications, 1990), 45.

02 August 1936

“Entry Will Be Difficult Thereafter, As the Entire Programme Will Be Broadcast Live”

Program broadcast from Ananda College, Colombo

On 2 August 1936, a special live broadcast of a Sinhala variety performance was transmitted from Ananda College, Colombo, marking a notable milestone in the cultural programming of the Colombo Broadcasting Station. The programme brought together a number of prominent Sinhala performers of the period, reflecting the station’s increasing commitment to representing indigenous cultural expression in the national broadcasting schedule.

The Chief Guest for the occasion was the Honourable Sir Baron Jayatilaka, Leader of the State Council and Minister for Home Affairs, whose presence reinforced the importance attached to the event.[1] His participation not only lent official recognition but also reflected the State Council's growing awareness of the social and political potential of radio as a public medium.

The Radio Times published a special notice warning audience members that punctuality was imperative due to the live nature of the broadcast:

"Ticket holders must be seated before 9:00 a.m. As the entire programme will be broadcast live, entry will be difficult thereafter."[2]

This directive highlights several significant features of early live broadcasting in Ceylon. First, it demonstrates the logistical challenges involved in producing simultaneous stage and radio presentations in an era of limited technical flexibility. Once the broadcast commenced, any disturbance caused by latecomers risked interfering with microphone placement and sound balance. Secondly, it illustrates the prestige attached to live transmissions, which were promoted as events of national importance. By requiring punctuality and emphasizing the immediacy of the broadcast, the organizers underscored radio's unique ability to collapse the boundaries between the physical performance space and the dispersed listenership across Colombo and beyond.

Analytically, this broadcast reveals the Colombo Broadcasting Station's dual aspirations during the mid-1930s: to highlight Sinhala cultural production in formal settings such as Ananda College, and to demonstrate technical capacity in producing outside broadcasts with live audiences. Such events not only expanded the station's repertoire but also symbolized the negotiation



Ananda College Colombo.
The Ananda College Radio Club, founded in 1936, *began its legacy of providing audio support for school events that year, which coincided with the college's Golden Jubilee. While live broadcasting technology was in its infancy in 1936, the club established a foundation for managing sound systems, assemblies, and events at the school.*
Foundation Year:
The Radio Club was established in 1936.
Significance:
1936 was also the year of the Ananda College Golden Jubilee.
Role:
The club has managed audio support for school events for nearly 90 years, including, in later years, live broadcasts.



Sir Don Baron Jayatilaka
Sir D. B. Jayatilaka was the Leader of the House and Minister for Home Affairs in the Second State Council of Ceylon, *having been re-elected to this position in 1936. He held this leadership role from the inception of the State Council in 1931 until he resigned in November 1942.*

between colonial broadcasting structures and local cultural agency. The careful orchestration of the event, with Sir Baron Jayatilaka presiding, elevated it beyond entertainment, positioning radio as an instrument of cultural legitimation and political visibility in late-colonial Ceylon.

Footnotes:

1. Radio Times (London), August 2, 1936, 21.
2. D. M. Colombage, Guwan Viduli Vanshaya (Colombo: M. D. Gunasena & Co., 1989), 64.

August 1936

Sound Recording of the Kandy Esala Perahera for the B.B.C.

In August 1936, the Kandy Esala Perahera a central ritual and cultural spectacle of Ceylon was recorded on sound discs for the first time. The recording was accompanied by a descriptive commentary provided by Mr. F. A. E. Price, a European planter from the Elkaduwa estate.[1] These discs were subsequently dispatched to London, where on 23 August 1938, the British Broadcasting Corporation (B.B.C.) broadcast Price's descriptive narration of the Perahera to its British audience.[2]

The event holds considerable historical and cultural significance.

First, it represented one of the earliest instances in which a deeply rooted Sri Lankan religious and cultural tradition was presented internationally through modern broadcasting technology. The B.B.C. transmission functioned as a form of cultural diplomacy, projecting Ceylonese heritage beyond colonial stereotypes.[3]

Secondly, the mediation of the ritual through Mr. Price a European planter underscored the fact that colonial intermediaries continued to shape how local traditions were framed and validated in global contexts.[4]



Kandy Esala Perahera
Historical context indicates that during the British colonial period (1815–1948), the Kandy Esala Perahera continued to be held annually, often serving as a symbol of Sri Lankan identity and a fusion of traditional practices, despite initial restrictions imposed by the colonial government.
General Information on the Historic Perahera:
Purpose:
It is a 10-day pageant held in July or August to pay homage to the Sacred Tooth Relic and the four "guardian" gods (Natha, Vishnu, Kataragama, and Pattini) to invoke blessings for rain and prosperity.
Structure:
It consists of the Kumbal Perahera (first five days) and the, more grand, Randoli Perahera (final five days).
Key Elements:
The procession features whip-crackers, Kandyan dancers, drummers, fire-breathers, and heavily decorated tuskers, with the main Maligawa Tusker carrying the Sacred Tooth Relic casket.
Modern Tradition:
The modern format, which combines the Dalada Perahera with the four Devale processions, was established in the 18th century by King Keerthi Sri Rajasinghe.

While this facilitated exposure abroad, it simultaneously filtered the cultural experience through European sensibilities and interpretive frameworks.

Thirdly, the recording itself marked a pioneering use of emergent media technologies for the documentation and preservation of intangible cultural heritage.[5] By capturing the sounds of ritual chanting, drumming, and processional music, the initiative demonstrated the potential of radio and sound recording as tools for archiving traditions that were otherwise ephemeral.

Moreover, the inclusion of the Esala Perahera within the B.B.C. schedule constituted a subtle form of legitimization of Ceylonese rituals within imperial discourse.[6] Such acknowledgement signaled a growing recognition of the island's cultural complexity and an appreciation of non-Western traditions within the global broadcasting arena.

Finally, this moment of international recognition contributed to the long-term shaping of modern Sri Lankan identity. The Kandy Esala Perahera, already central to Sinhala-Buddhist consciousness, was elevated through international exposure to the status of a national cultural symbol, reinforcing its position as a cornerstone of Sri Lanka's heritage.[7]

Footnotes:

1. Radio Times (London), August 1936.
2. Radio Times (London), August 23, 1938.
3. C. P. L. Gunawardana, This is Colombo Calling (Colombo: Perali Publications, 1990), 43.
4. D. M. Colombage, Guwan Viduli Vanshaya (Colombo: M. D. Gunasena & Company, 1989), 45.
5. K. M. de Silva, A History of Sri Lanka (Colombo: Vijitha Yapa, 2005), 457.
6. Gunawardana, This is Colombo Calling, 44.
7. Colombage, Guwan Viduli Vanshaya, 45.



Raja (The Maligawa Tusker)

Based on historical records, the primary ceremonial tusker that carried the Sacred Tooth Relic casket during the Kandy Esala Perahera around the late 1930s and 1940s was known as Rbaja.

Raja (The Maligawa Tusker):

Often referred to in historical context, this tusker, known for its long, majestic tusks (approx. 7.5 ft), was a prominent figure in the Perahera during that era.

Significance:

The tusker that carries the Dalada Karanduwa (sacred casket) is deemed the highest honor, representing the Sri Dalada Maligawa (Temple of the Tooth).

The 1938 Context:

The Kandy Esala Perahera in the late 1930s continued the deeply established traditions of using magnificent tuskers, a practice dating back to the Kandyan Kingdom and further formalized by King Kirti Sri Rajasinha.

September 1936

Appointment of Mr. H. de S. Gunewardene as Chief Broadcasting Controller (CBC)

In February 1936, following the request of Mr. R. R. Anderson for a transfer from the Broadcasting Station, Mr. H. de S. Gunewardene of the Ceylon Postal and Telegraph Service was appointed Chief Broadcasting Controller (CBC).[1] Gunewardene thus succeeded Anderson as the administrative head of broadcasting in Ceylon. In addition to his primary responsibilities as CBC, he was simultaneously required to serve as Secretary to the Broadcasting Advisory Board, a dual role that he fulfilled until August 1942.[2]

The appointment of Mr. Gunewardene was significant in several respects. First, it demonstrated the continued practice of appointing officers from the Postal and Telegraph Service to broadcasting leadership, reinforcing the institutional ties between broadcasting and telecommunication services during its formative years.[3] Second, his long tenure, spanning over six years, provided an important element of administrative continuity at a time when the station was still consolidating its structures and experimenting with programming strategies.

Furthermore, his dual responsibility as CBC and Secretary to the Broadcasting Advisory Board illustrates the close integration between policy formulation and operational management.[4] This arrangement, while efficient, also meant that the independence of broadcasting policy was constrained, since advisory recommendations were filtered through the very office charged with implementing them. In retrospect, this administrative structure reflected the broader colonial governance model, which emphasized bureaucratic efficiency and centralized oversight rather than fostering independent institutional growth.

Gunewardene's appointment can therefore be seen as part of a transitional phase in the institutional evolution of Ceylonese broadcasting one where the framework of colonial administration still strongly shaped broadcasting practice, even as the service began to assume a more public character in the later 1930s and early 1940s.[5]

Footnotes:

1. Annual Report of the Postmaster General, Ceylon, 1936.
2. Report of the Broadcasting Advisory Board, 1936–42.
3. Ibid.
4. C. P. L. Gunawardana, This is Colombo Calling (Colombo: Perali Publications, 1990), 52.
5. K. M. de Silva, A History of Sri Lanka (Colombo: Vijitha Yapa, 2005), 463.

September 1936

Sir Baron Jayatilaka's Attempted Recording at the Colombo Broadcasting Station

By late 1936, the Colombo Broadcasting Station had acquired a disc-based recording machine equipped with a single turntable. The apparatus permitted the recording of material on discs, each of which was limited to a maximum duration of three minutes.[1] This technological constraint rendered it impossible to capture continuous programmes or speeches of extended length without interruption.

Within this context, Sir Baron Jayatilaka then Leader of the State Council and Minister for Home Affairs was invited to deliver a recorded address at the Broadcasting Station.[2] He accepted the invitation and arrived at the premises. However, upon being informed that he would be required to pause at three-minute intervals in order to facilitate the recording process, he declined to proceed.[3] In a gesture of dignified protest, Sir Baron silently took up his hat and departed the station without delivering the intended address.

This incident is emblematic of the technological and infrastructural limitations that confronted early broadcasting in Ceylon. The inability to reproduce the natural flow of oratory without artificial interruption proved incompatible with the expectations of distinguished public figures, for whom rhetorical continuity was an essential component of persuasive speech.[4] Sir Baron Jayatilaka's refusal thus served not only as a personal assertion of oratorical integrity but also as a tacit critique of the inadequacy of the broadcasting equipment available at the time. More broadly, the episode highlights the tension between the technical infancy of the medium and the cultural authority demanded by its most prominent users.[5]



Presto Disc Cutting Lathe Model 6N

Limiting the Maximum Recording Time

The primary technical reason for limiting the maximum recording time to three or four minutes in the mid-1930s was the physical constraint of 78 RPM shellac records.

Rotational Speed and Groove Density:

The standard 10-inch shellac record spun at 78 revolutions per minute (RPM). At this high speed, to maintain acceptable sound fidelity, the grooves could not be placed closer together without risking the needle skipping or causing severe distortion.

Physical Capacity:

The 10-inch 78 RPM record (the most common, cheaper, and standard size) could only hold about 3 to 3.5 minutes of audio per side. While 12-inch records existed, they only increased playing time to roughly 4-5 minutes.

Technological Limitations:

In the 1930s, the recording process was primarily direct-to-disc (usually lacquer or wax masters), which did not allow for editing or splicing.

Material Limitations:

Shellac was a brittle material, and higher-density, longer-playing grooves would have worn out too quickly or broken. This technical constraint was so influential that it determined the length of popular music, forcing artists to create "three-minute pop songs" that could fit on one side of a 78 RPM record.

Footnotes:

1. Annual Report of the Postmaster General, Ceylon, 1936.
2. Ibid.
3. C. P. L. Gunawardana, This is Colombo Calling (Colombo: Perali Publications, 1990), 46.
4. K. M. de Silva, A History of Sri Lanka (Colombo: Vijitha Yapa, 2005), 464.
5. Ibid.

December 1936

Remodelling of the 1 kW Transmitter at the Colombo Broadcasting Station

The Colombo Broadcasting Station was initially equipped with a 1 kilowatt (kW) medium-wave transmitter calibrated to a wavelength of 428.5 metres when it commenced operations in the mid-1920s.[1] By 1936, the regular weekday broadcasting schedule extended from 11:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m., with routine interruptions from 1:30 to 4:30 p.m. and from 6:10 to 6:30 p.m.[2] During school terms, however, afternoon transmissions resumed at 2:00 p.m., thereby reducing the interval available for technical maintenance. Consequently, engineers at the transmitting station in Welikada and the control facilities at Torrington Square were required to perform essential maintenance in the restricted morning hours between 8:00 and 10:00 a.m.[3]

To address these challenges, the Department of Telegraphs and Telephones remodelled the transmitter in December 1936, enhancing its output from 1 kW to 2.5 kW.[4] This technical advancement improved both signal strength and clarity, while also extending the station's geographical reach.[5]

Comparative Regional Context

Ceylon's transmitter upgrade mirrored broader broadcasting developments across South and Southeast Asia in the interwar period. In India, the Indian Broadcasting Company (later All India Radio) had initially begun operations in Bombay and Calcutta in 1927 using 0.5 kW and 1 kW transmitters.[6] By the mid-1930s, however, the Government of India had invested in higher-power installations, including a 5 kW transmitter in Delhi by 1936.[7] In Burma, Rangoon Radio established in 1935 operated with a 2 kW transmitter, while the Federated Malay States Broadcasting Station in Kuala Lumpur had upgraded to 1.5 kW by the late 1930s.[8]

Against this backdrop, Ceylon's remodelling of its transmitter to 2.5 kW positioned the Colombo Broadcasting Station as technically comparable, if not slightly superior, to many of its regional counterparts. While India, due to its vast geography and imperial importance, invested in higher-capacity networks, Ceylon's enhancement ensured adequate national coverage and a degree of parity with smaller colonial broadcasting systems in Southeast Asia.[9]

Technological Advancements and Social Implications

The remodelling of the transmitter marked a turning point in the island's broadcasting capacity. With the increased power, radio signals could penetrate more effectively into semi-urban and rural districts, broadening listenership beyond Colombo and other major towns.[10] Improved signal quality also reduced common reception issues such as static, fading, and distortion that had undermined listener confidence in the early years. The upgrade therefore contributed to the democratization of access to radio, reinforcing its role as an educational, cultural, and entertainment medium for a wider population. Moreover, by matching regional broadcasting standards, Ceylon positioned itself to later emerge as a leading postwar broadcaster in South Asia, a trajectory that culminated in Radio Ceylon's prominence in the 1950s.[11]

Footnotes:

1. Annual Report of the Postmaster General, Ceylon, 1925–26.
2. Ibid.
3. C. P. L. Gunawardana, This is Colombo Calling (Colombo: Perali Publications, 1990), 45.
4. Annual Report of the Postmaster General, Ceylon, 1936.
5. Ibid.
6. L. S. Bhuyan, The Growth of Broadcasting in India (New Delhi: Publications Division, 1972), 22–23.
7. Asa Briggs, The BBC and Its Audiences, 1922–1950 (London: Oxford University Press, 1985), 214.
8. Daniel Headrick, The Invisible Weapon: Telecommunications and International Politics, 1851–1945 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 201.
9. Annual Report of the Postmaster General, Ceylon, 1936.
10. Ibid.
11. Gunawardana, This is Colombo Calling, 44.

December 1936

Licensing and Broadcasting Hours

By the close of 1936, the Colombo Broadcasting Station had recorded the issuance of 3,874 radio licences, reflecting an increase of 821 over the preceding year.[1] This steady rise in licence holders underscores the growing public adoption of wireless broadcasting in Ceylon, particularly among urban and semi-urban audiences with the economic means to acquire radio sets.

In the same year, a more formalized broadcasting schedule was instituted. Regular transmissions were maintained daily from 11:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m., thus amounting to eleven hours of broadcasting.[2] Within this framework, provisions were also made for educational content, as school broadcasts were incorporated into the schedule. When such programmes were not aired, the total broadcast time was reduced to approximately 7 hours and 40 minutes.[3]

The increase in licences, coupled with a structured transmission timetable, reflected not only the technical and administrative consolidation of broadcasting but also the expanding role of radio as a medium of entertainment, information, and education in colonial Ceylon. This development mirrored similar trends across the British Empire, where broadcasting was increasingly regulated through licensing systems that both ensured state oversight and generated revenue for expansion.[4]

Footnotes:

1. Annual Administrative Report of the Postmaster General, Ceylon, 1936.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Asa Briggs, The BBC: The First Fifty Years (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 112–15.

December 1936

Colombo Broadcasting Service: Progress and Milestones 1936

I. Programmatic Developments

1. Expansion of English-Language Children's Programming In 1936, the Colombo Broadcasting Service introduced a more structured English-language programme schedule for children, building upon the experimental broadcasts of preceding years. These broadcasts included organised storytelling sessions, educational talks, and musical segments. This development marked an early recognition of audience segmentation and reflected an emerging commitment to educational broadcasting within the colonial public service framework.

II. Technical and Institutional Development

2. Technical Upgrades and Infrastructure Enhancement Significant technical improvements were carried out at the Torrington Square studios and associated transmitter facilities. Upgrades to studio acoustics, microphone positioning, and live transmission systems contributed to noticeable improvements in sound quality, particularly for musical and spoken-word broadcasts. These enhancements represented an important stage in the modernization of the station's technical capabilities.

III. Audience Interaction and Public Engagement

3. Listener Correspondence and Feedback Mechanisms During this year, the Broadcasting Service experienced a marked increase in listener correspondence. Letters and structured audience feedback served as

an informal but valuable mechanism for gauging public preferences and reception. Such engagement began to influence programming decisions, indicating the gradual emergence of a responsive broadcasting culture.

IV. Broadcasting Capacity and Scheduling

4. Expansion of Daily Broadcast Hours Daily transmission hours were expanded to approximately ten to eleven hours. This increase allowed for the inclusion of a broader range of educational, cultural, and musical content, reflecting both growing audience demand and the Service's intention to develop into a comprehensive national broadcaster.

V. Human Resource Development and Professional Standards

5. Professionalization of Announcers and Technical Staff Training and professional standards for announcers and technical personnel became more systematic during 1936. Staff were formally instructed in pronunciation, diction, microphone technique, and live broadcast procedures. These efforts laid the institutional foundations for professional broadcasting practices in Ceylon.

Setbacks and Challenges

VI. Structural and Operational Constraints

1. Limited Geographical Coverage

Despite technical improvements, medium-wave transmission continued to provide limited coverage, particularly in rural and remote regions. As a result, listenership remained largely concentrated in Colombo and its surrounding urban areas.

2. Constraints in Local Content Production

The production of original programming was restricted by a shortage of trained local artistes and producers. Consequently, the station relied heavily on gramophone records and limited imported material to fill programme schedules.

3. Budgetary and Resource Limitations

Financial constraints curtailed the acquisition of additional equipment, the expansion of staff, and the development of locally produced programmes. These limitations imposed significant operational constraints on the Service's growth.

4. Linguistic Imbalance in Programming Output

While English-language broadcasting continued to expand, Sinhala and Tamil programming remained relatively limited due to resource constraints. This imbalance reflected and reinforced prevailing colonial linguistic hierarchies within the broadcasting system.

Concluding Assessment

The year 1936 represents a phase of cautious expansion and institutional consolidation for the Colombo Broadcasting Service. Notable progress was achieved in technical modernization, staff professionalization, and the structured development of children's programming. At the same time, enduring challenges—particularly in geographical reach, financial capacity, local content production, and linguistic balance—highlight the structural limitations of colonial broadcasting. Overall, 1936 can be characterized as a year of incremental advancement toward a more professional and audience-oriented public broadcasting service.

1937

15 February 1937

Public Criticism by Listeners of the Colombo Broadcasting Service

In February 1937, the distinguished Indian statesman, orator, and **Sanskrit scholar Mr. Valangaiman Shankaranarayan Srinivasa Shastri** renowned for his eloquence and mastery of the English language visited Ceylon and delivered a public lecture at the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) Hall in Colombo.[1] The event was broadcast by the Ceylon Radio Service.

Although a thirty-minute slot had been allocated for the transmission, the lecture extended to forty-seven and a half minutes. With the approval of the Chief Engineer, the broadcast was terminated at the scheduled thirty-minute mark.[2]

This abrupt interruption provoked significant criticism from listeners, who expressed dissatisfaction with the decision to discontinue the broadcast mid-lecture.[3] In response, the Honourable Minister of Communications and Works, John Lionel Kotelawala, demanded accountability from the responsible officials and instructed the Postmaster General to submit a detailed report.[4]

Following this directive, the Postmaster General, John Radley Walters, submitted his findings to the Minister. On 2 March 1937, Walters addressed a formal letter to John Shillitoe, the Chief Telegraphs and Telephone Engineer, outlining future broadcasting protocol. The letter included the following directive: "I am of the opinion that speeches which cannot be delivered within a clearly defined time limit should not be broadcast. Therefore, any speech which may require interruption mid-transmission should not be aired at all."[5]

This episode not only reflects the operational and administrative challenges of early Ceylonese broadcasting but also highlights the growing public expectations of radio as a reliable medium of cultural and intellectual engagement. The controversy emphasized the need for stricter time management, while also revealing tensions between official broadcasting policies and audience demands.

Footnotes:

1. D. M. Colombage, Guwan Viduli Vanshaya (Colombo: M. D. Gunasena & Company, 1989), 19.
2. Annual Administrative Report of the Postmaster General, Ceylon, 1937.
3. C. P. L. Gunawardana, This is Colombo Calling (Colombo: Perali Publications, 1990), 46.
4. Ibid.
5. Letter from the Postmaster General to the Chief Telegraphs and Telephone Engineer, 2 March 1937.

6 June 1937

The 5 KW Transmitter and Its Technical Background

The commissioning of a 5 kilowatt (kW) transmitter in June 1937 represented a major technical milestone for broadcasting services in Ceylon. Prior to its installation, the existing transmitter offered a limited effective transmission radius of approximately fifty miles, constraining the ability of the Colombo Broadcasting Station to reach broader audiences.[1] The new transmitter addressed these limitations, providing a more powerful and technologically sophisticated platform capable of serving both local and regional listeners.



Hon, Valangaiman Sankaranarayana Srinivasa Sastri

The image is a portrait of V. S. Srinivasa Sastri, an Indian social reformer, educator, and independence activist.

He was a prominent leader of the moderate wing of the Indian National Congress.

Sastri served as a member of the Madras Legislative Council, the Imperial Legislative Council of India, and the Council of State between 1913 and 1925.

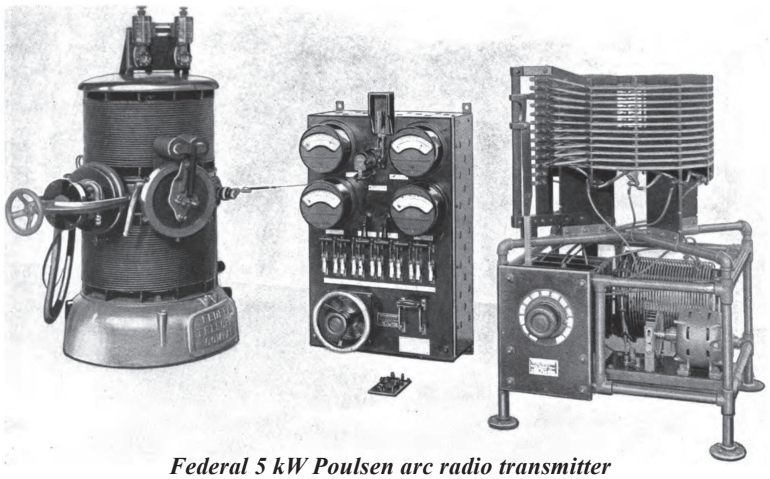
He was appointed as India's first Agent to the Union of South Africa in 1927.

Sastri was a prominent public speaker and a master of the English language.

He advocated for the rights of Indians within the British Commonwealth.

He was a signatory to the Four-Power Treaty between the US, the British Empire, France, and Japan in 1921.

Known for his powerful oratory skills, he was a close associate of Mahatma Gandhi.



Federal 5 kW Poulsen arc radio transmitter

A 5 kilowatt (kW) transmitter provides enough power to achieve global communication under the right atmospheric conditions, potentially reaching distances of over 10,000 miles via ionospheric refraction.

Understanding 5 Kilowatts of Power

In radio broadcasting, power represents the rate at which electrical energy is converted into electromagnetic radiation. A 5 kW output is a standard "medium-power" level for regional stations. To visualize this, 5,000 Watts is roughly equivalent to the energy consumed by three high-end electric ovens operating at maximum capacity simultaneously.

Factors Determining Signal Range

The distance a 5 kW signal travels is rarely limited by the power alone; it is dictated by propagation physics:

Frequency Type:

FM signals (VHF) travel in a "line-of-sight" path. They generally do not follow the curve of the Earth and are limited to about 40–60 miles. AM signals (Medium Wave) travel as "ground waves" that hug the Earth's surface, often reaching 100 miles or more during the day.

Antenna Height:

For FM and TV, the height above average terrain (HAAT) is more critical than power. A higher antenna extends the radio horizon, allowing the signal to travel further before being blocked by the Earth's curvature.

Atmospheric Conditions:

At night, the ionosphere reflects AM radio waves back to Earth. This "skywave" propagation can allow a 5 kW AM station to be heard hundreds of miles away.

The installation and supervision of the transmitter were undertaken by Mr. Arumugam Nadarasa, Divisional Telecommunication Engineer (Radio).[2] Many of its components were fabricated within the departmental workshops, and the assembly, calibration, and testing were carried out entirely by the technical personnel stationed at the Welikada Wireless Station, demonstrating the development of indigenous technical capacity.

The transmitter operated at a carrier frequency of 700 kilocycles (equivalent to a wavelength of 428.5 metres), precisely maintained by a crystal oscillator.[3] The crystal, carefully cut to specification, ensured frequency stability within ±17 cycles, preventing fluctuations that could degrade signal quality. The generated frequency was amplified through four stages of radio-frequency amplification prior to transmission via the aerial system.

Air-cooled valves were employed throughout most amplification stages, while the final stage utilized two parallel 10 kW water-cooled valves to manage the higher power output. Speech and music signals were modulated at the second amplification stage using low-power modulation, which allowed up to 80% modulation without perceptible distortion.[4]

A significant innovation in the design was the implementation of electrical filters between the final amplification stage and the transmission aerial. These filters permitted only the primary operating frequency to pass, effectively eliminating the harmonic distortions that had affected the previous transmitter.[5]

To support the transmitter's enhanced power requirements, one of the older generators at the Welikada Wireless Station was replaced by a high-tension direct-current (D.C.) generator, directly coupled to a three-phase alternating-current (A.C.) motor powered by Colombo city mains. This generator delivered 30 kW at 10,000 volts D.C. and was accompanied by a protective high-tension cubicle ensuring operator safety. All components carrying voltages above 110 volts were enclosed to prevent accidental contact, with high-voltage capacitors safely discharged before access.[6]

The 5 kW transmitter exemplified the integration of contemporary engineering practices with local expertise, extending the geographical reach of radio broadcasts, improving signal clarity, and enabling the expansion of multilingual programming across Ceylon. It laid the foundation for more ambitious broadcasting initiatives, reinforcing both the technical and cultural capacity of the Colombo Broadcasting Station.

Footnotes:

1. C. P. L. Gunawardana, This is Colombo Calling (Colombo: Perali Publications, 1990), 46-48.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.

06 June 1937

Official Inauguration of the New 5 KW Transmitter and Second Studio

On 6 June 1937, the Ceylon Radio Service officially inaugurated its newly installed 5 kilowatt (kW) transmitter and second broadcasting studio. The ceremony was presided over by the Honourable Sir John Kotelawala, Minister of Communications and Works, and attended by key figures including Mr. J. B. Clark, Director of the BBC Empire Service, Mr. J. R. Walters, Director of Broadcasting and Postmaster General, Major J. P. Appleby, Assistant Postmaster General, Mr. J. Shillitoe, Chief

Telecommunications Engineer and Controller of Broadcasting, Mr. David Lusk, Assistant Chief Telecommunications Engineer, and Divisional Telecommunication Engineers Mr. G. A. Platt and Mr. Ayampillai Nadarasa.[1]

In his inaugural address, Sir John Kotelawala emphasized the strategic importance of the new facilities:

"I am speaking to you from the new studio, and my words are being broadcast via the newly installed 5 kW transmitter. The opening of this second studio, along with the installation of a more powerful transmitter, signifies a major milestone in the evolution of broadcasting in Ceylon. Since broadcasting commenced in 1923, our facilities have progressively improved. Initially, a small room in the Central Telegraph Office served as the first studio, later replaced by a larger room at University College, Colombo. In 1927, the main studio at Torrington Square was commissioned. However, the use of a single studio has long posed logistical challenges. The expansion to a second studio is necessitated by the anticipated deployment of a second transmitter, which will enable simultaneous broadcasting of multiple programmes."[2]



more of a dictator in his
(Continued on page 58.)

The Battle On

Genuinely concerned at the rapid progress of German shortwave broadcasting in the British Empire, the BBC is sending J. B. Clark, pictured left, Director of Empire services, on a tour of Australia and New Zealand.

Mr. Clark will investigate the position with a view to providing better and more powerful Imperial broadcasts, so combatting the daily programmes and propaganda transmitted from Berlin. The position is discussed in an article on this page.

Britain and Germany

(Continued from Page 5.)



Mr. J. B. Clark, the Director of the BBC Empire Service

J. B. Clark visited Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) in June 1937 as part of a wider tour of the British Empire to assess and improve the reach of short-wave radio broadcasting.

Key details of his 1937 visit include:

Arrival and Context: Clark was undertaking an "Empire tour" and was in Ceylon around June 6–17, 1937, arriving during a period when the BBC was actively expanding its international broadcasting footprint.

Purpose:

The trip was aimed at strengthening broadcasting links, improving reception, and gathering feedback on the Empire Service, which was launched in 1932.

Local Cooperation:

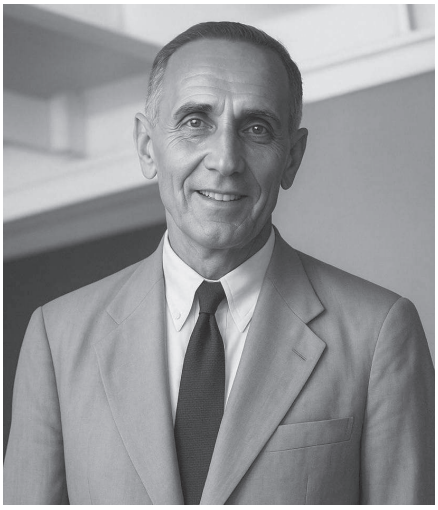
During his visit, Clark met with local officials from the Ceylon Post and Telegraph Department, which was responsible for early broadcasting in Ceylon.

Significance:

Clark's visit and subsequent reports were influential in shaping the development of the BBC's overseas services in the region.

J.B. Clark (later Controller of the Overseas Services) was a key figure in the early years of the BBC Empire Service.

The new studio was constructed to mirror the dimensions of the original studio and was equipped with sound-absorbing panels, a fully furnished control desk, and announcer facilities of equivalent standard. The 5 kW transmitter itself represented a substantial enhancement in both power output and signal clarity, extending the geographical coverage of the station to areas previously experiencing poor reception, including Anuradhapura, Jaffna, and other outstations, as well as regions in Malaya and South India.[3] Mr. J. B. Clark, representing the BBC Empire Service, highlighted the broader significance of the development:



Mr. John Shillitoe

Chif Telecommunication Engineer and Controler of Broadcasting, Ceylon Posts and Telegraph Department

"Although Ceylon was the first British colony to initiate organized broadcasting, it has significantly contributed to the Empire Broadcasting Service. Ceylon, like other territories such as Palestine, Egypt, and Belgium, has had to confront a challenge not faced in England: the complexity of broadcasting in three languages. Nonetheless, knowing that broadcasting in Ceylon is under capable leadership, the BBC is confident in the promising future of broadcasting in the Island. The new transmitter should be leveraged to extend the reach of programmes originating from Britain and other parts of the world to a wider audience in Ceylon."[4]



Sir John Kotalawala

Sir John Kotalawala

Minister of Communications and Works. 1936 - 1947

In 1937, John Kotalawala was a prominent member of the Second State Council of Ceylon (serving from 1936 to 1947), where he held the portfolio of Minister of Communications and Works.

Key details regarding Sir John Kotelawala in and around 1937 include:

Ministerial Role:

As the Minister of Communications and Works, *he was responsible for major infrastructure development, including the construction of the Ratmalana Airport, the expansion of the Port of Colombo, and early planning for the Laxapana hydroelectric scheme.*

Military Involvement:

He served in the Ceylon Defence Force, having been commissioned as a major in 1933, and continued to rise in rank, later becoming the second-in-command of the Ceylon Light Infantry in 1939.

Awards:

He was a recipient of the Coronation Medal in 1937.

Business:

He managed his family's graphite mining interests, specifically the Kahatagaha and Kolongaha mines in Dodangaslanda. During this period of the late 1930s, he was a key figure in the Board of Ministers under the colonial administration before becoming ***Prime Minister of Ceylon much later (1953–1956).***

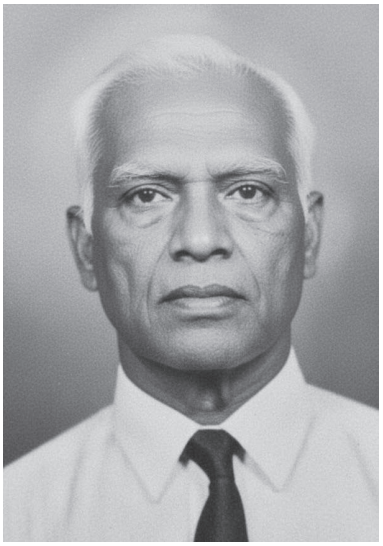
The inauguration of these modernized facilities marked a critical advancement in the technical infrastructure of radio broadcasting in Ceylon. It facilitated simultaneous multilingual programming, improved signal reliability, and provided a foundation for the future expansion of both local and internationally sourced broadcasts.

Footnotes:

1. D. M. Colombage, Guwan Viduli Vanshaya (Colombo: M. D. Gunasena & Company, 1989), 25-27.
2. Ibid.C. P. L. Gunawardana, This is Colombo Calling (Colombo: Perali Publications, 1990), 48-49.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.

June 1937

Personal Dedication in Technical Advancement Mr. E. C. Wijekoon, District Telecommunications Inspector Welikada.



Mr. E. C. Wijekoon

District Telecommunications Inspector Welikada Station

In particular, Mr. E. C. Wijekoon, then serving as District Telecommunications Inspector at Welikada, played a pivotal role in overseeing and facilitating the ***Welikada 5 KW Transmitter project.***

The successful installation of the 5 kW transmitter at the Welikada Wireless Station was not only a technological achievement but also a testament to the personal dedication and professional commitment of the technical personnel involved. In particular, Mr. E. C. Wijekoon, then serving as District Telecommunications Inspector at Welikada, played a pivotal role in overseeing and facilitating the project.[1]

Owing to the proximity of his official quarters to the Welikada Wireless Station, Mr. Wijekoon was able to devote himself entirely to the installation process. Demonstrating exceptional dedication, he worked tirelessly, often through day and night, without seeking or receiving any additional remuneration. His initiative and personal commitment were instrumental in ensuring the timely completion of the installation, highlighting the critical role of individual sacrifice in the development of public broadcasting infrastructure.[2]

This instance of professional selflessness exemplifies how the progress of early radio broadcasting in Ceylon was often reliant not only on institutional planning and funding but also on the extraordinary efforts of committed individuals who worked without expectation of personal gain.

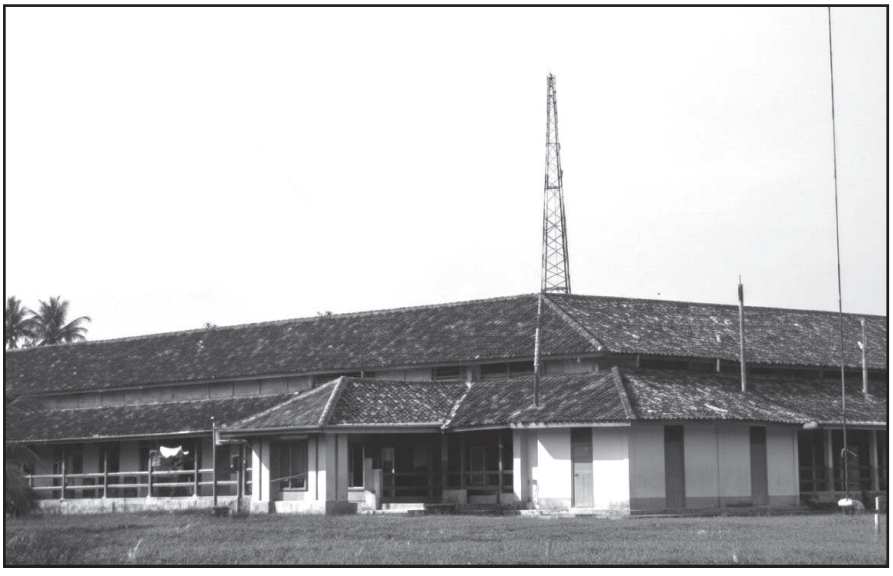
Footnotes:

1. C. P. L. Gunawardana, This is Colombo Calling (Colombo: Perali Publications, 1990), 48.
2. Ibid.

June 1937

The Establishment of the Second Studio

In June 1937, the Colombo Broadcasting Service undertook a significant infrastructural enhancement with the construction of a second studio at Torrington Square. This development was prompted by persistent operational challenges, particularly the inability to broadcast two live programmes consecutively such as musical concerts without necessitating short breaks between transmissions. The new facility also served as a rehearsal space, thereby alleviating scheduling conflicts and improving the overall efficiency of programme preparation.[1]



Colombo Broadcasting Service (CBS) 1937

In the expanding trajectory of Ceylon's broadcasting history, the Colombo Broadcasting Service's innovation in constructing this ***second studio*** *reflected a conscious effort to align local practices with international broadcasting standards. It signaled the recognition that a modern broadcasting service required not only reliable transmission technology, but also the necessary* ***studio infrastructure to ensure continuous, professional-quality programming.***

The second studio, *therefore, marked an important step in consolidating the institutional capacity of the Colombo Broadcasting Service during a decade of steady growth.*

The addition of a second studio represented more than a mere expansion of physical infrastructure; it was a strategic response to the growing complexity of broadcasting operations in the mid-1930s. Until this point, the reliance on a single studio restricted programming flexibility, hindered simultaneous preparations for diverse content, and often necessitated on-air pauses that detracted from the professionalism of the service.[2] By contrast, the establishment of a second studio allowed for a seamless transition between live and prearranged broadcasts, thus enhancing both the technical and aesthetic quality of radio programming.

In the broader trajectory of Ceylon's broadcasting history, this innovation reflected a conscious effort to align local practices with international broadcasting standards. It signaled the recognition that a modern broadcasting service required not only reliable transmission technology but also the necessary studio infrastructure to ensure uninterrupted, professional-quality programming. The second studio therefore marked an important step toward consolidating the institutional capacity of the Colombo Broadcasting Service during a decade of steady growth.

Footnotes:

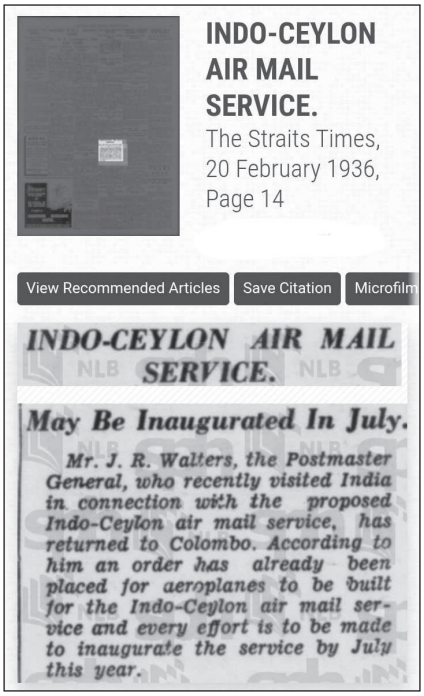
1. Annual Administrative Report of the Postmaster General, 1937.
2. C. P. L. Gunawardana, This is Colombo Calling (Colombo: Perali Publications, 1990), 48.

02 August 1937

Appointment of Mr. John Radley Walters, C.C.S., as Chairman of the Broadcasting Advisory Board

On 2 August 1937, Mr. John Radley Walters, then serving as Postmaster General of Ceylon, was appointed Chairman of the Broadcasting Advisory Board.[1] His appointment came after a distinguished career in the Ceylon Civil Service (C.C.S.), where he had held several key administrative positions.

Walters succeeded Mr. Harry Archibald Burden, who retired as Postmaster General in September 1933.[2] Upon Burden's retirement, Walters was appointed as the fourteenth Postmaster General and Director of Telecommunications in Ceylon, thereby assuming responsibility for both postal and wireless communication systems.[3] His tenure was marked by several notable achievements, most prominently his leadership in the establishment of the Ceylon India Airmail Service in July 1936, which represented a significant advance in intercontinental postal logistics and the modernization of communication infrastructure in the colony.[4]



INDO-CEYLON AIR MAIL SERVICE.

The Straits Times, 20 February 1936, Page 14

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INDO-CEYLON AIR MAIL SERVICE.

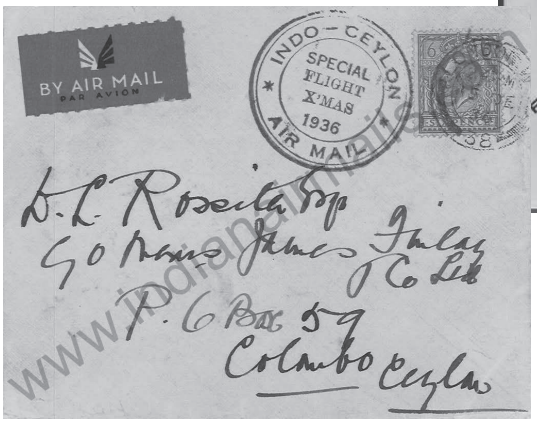
May Be Inaugurated In July.

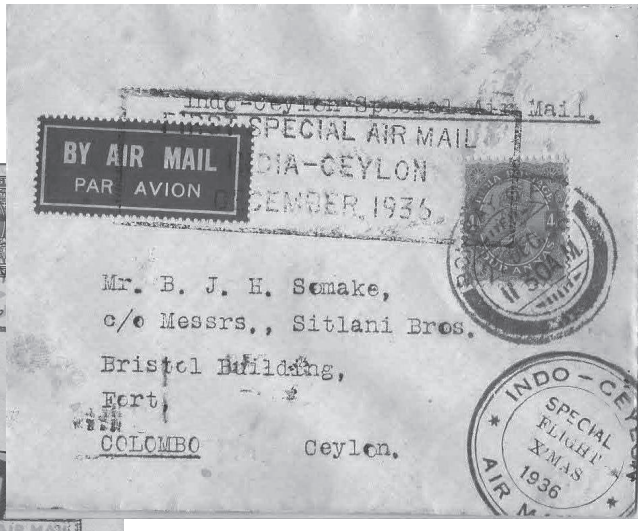
Mr. J. R. Walters, the Postmaster General, who recently visited India in connection with the proposed Indo-Ceylon air mail service, has returned to Colombo. According to him an order has already been placed for aeroplanes to be built for the Indo-Ceylon air mail service and every effort is to be made to inaugurate the service by July this year.

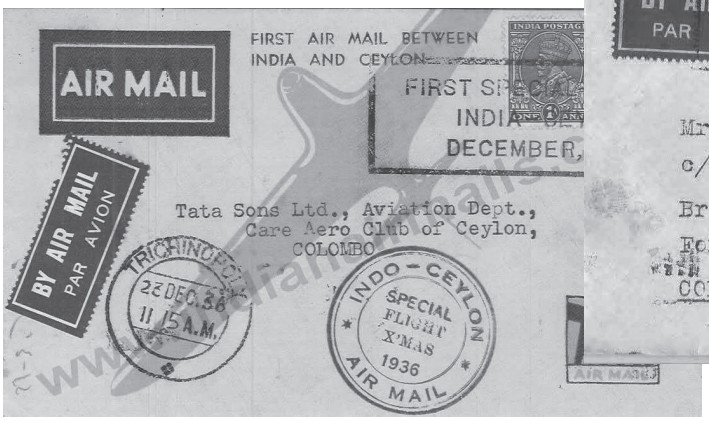


de Havilland DH.80A Puss Moth, registration G-ABLS. Aircraft









Following his tenure as Postmaster General, Walters was appointed Government Agent (G.A.) for the Uva Province, thereby continuing his long-standing career in colonial administration.[5] After his retirement from the Ceylon Civil Service, Walters emigrated to Australia with his wife, where he eventually settled in Canberra. **He passed away on 27 September 1972 at the age of eighty-four, bringing to a close a career that contributed substantially to the development of postal, telecommunication, and broadcasting institutions in Ceylon during the British colonial period.[6]**

Footnotes:

1. Annual Administrative Report of the Postmaster General, Ceylon, 1937 (Colombo: Government Printer, 1938), 4.
2. Ceylon Administration Reports, 1933, Post and Telegraph Department, 7.
3. D. M. Colombage, Guwan Viduli Vanshaya (Colombo: M. D. Gunasena & Company, 1989), 21
4. C. P. L. Gunawardana, This Is Colombo Calling (Colombo: Perali Publications, 1990), 53.
5. Government of Ceylon, Ceylon Civil List, 1938 (Colombo: Government Printer, 1938), 132.
6. Canberra Times, 28 September 1972, 6.

02 August 1937

Appointment of Mr. Shirley da Silva as Superintendent of Colombo Broadcasting Service 1937

On 2 August 1937, Mr. Shirley da Silva, a distinguished journalist and one of the early pioneers of broadcasting in Ceylon, was appointed Superintendent of Radio Ceylon.[1] His appointment coincided with a transitional stage in the evolution of Ceylon's broadcasting service, when the station was consolidating its programming structure and attempting to balance the expectations of colonial administrators, English-speaking elites, and the broader vernacular-speaking population.

Renowned for his eloquent command of the English language, da Silva brought a high standard of presentation and editorial judgment to Radio Ceylon.[2] His efforts were particularly visible in the diversification of programmes, which included news, cultural features, and music broadcasts, thereby contributing to the creation of a coherent broadcasting identity.[3] Despite possessing only limited proficiency in Sinhala, he nevertheless advocated for the expansion of local language content. In doing so, he laid the groundwork for the gradual development of a more inclusive programming policy, which increasingly reflected the linguistic and cultural diversity of the island.[4]

Da Silva's appointment represented a significant institutional shift within Colombo Broadcasting Service. Up to this point, the service had been largely administered and shaped by engineers and technical officers men like Edward Harper and later John Shillitoe whose expertise lay primarily in telecommunication infrastructure and transmission technology.[5]



Shirley da Silva

First Superintendent of Colombo Broadcasting Service 1937 - 1942

Shirley da Silva was appointed Superintendent of Broadcasting for the Colombo Broadcasting Service in 1937, driving significant progress in local radio. He was known for focusing on oriental programmes and spearheaded development until leaving the post on August 1, 1942.

Key Details About Shirley da Silva:

Role:

He served as the Superintendent of Broadcasting (often referred to as the Colombo Broadcasting Radio station).

Term:

He began his tenure in 1937.

Impact:

He is credited with bringing about "remarkable progress" in the development of broadcasting in Ceylon.

Programming:

He focused on promoting oriental programmes over the radio.

Departure:

He left his position on August 1, 1942, at which point H. de S. Gunawardena took over on an acting basis.

While their pioneering work was indispensable in establishing the technical foundation of wireless broadcasting, programming and cultural content remained secondary.

The choice of da Silva, a professional rooted in journalism rather than engineering, indicated the colonial administration's growing recognition that broadcasting was not merely a matter of technology but also of cultural and editorial leadership.[6] **This shift underscored a broader transition in the 1930s, whereby broadcasting began to evolve into a medium of public information, education, and entertainment, rather than being seen as a purely technical experiment.**

Biographical Note

Shirley da Silva was educated in Ceylon and established himself as a respected journalist before entering the broadcasting field.[7] His professional reputation for polished English prose and editorial acumen positioned him as a natural choice for leadership within the newly evolving broadcasting service. Though his tenure as Superintendent was relatively short, his influence was lasting, particularly in setting standards of professionalism and encouraging the inclusion of local cultural expression in broadcasting. After his service at Radio Ceylon, da Silva continued to contribute to journalism and public communication in the colony, where he was regarded as one of the pioneering figures in Ceylon's modern media landscape.

Footnotes:

1. Annual Administrative Report of the Postmaster General, Ceylon, 1937 (Colombo: Government Printer, 1938), 9.
2. C. P. L. Gunawardana, This Is Colombo Calling (Colombo: Perali Publications, 1990), 51.

3. D. M. Colombage, Guwan Viduli Vanshaya (Colombo: M. D. Gunasena & Company, 1989), 22.
4. K. M. de Silva, A History of Sri Lanka (Colombo: Vijitha Yapa, 2005), 481.
5. Annual Report of the Post and Telegraph Department, Ceylon, 1930–1935 (Colombo: Government Printer, 1936), 23.
6. Asa Briggs, The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom, Vol. I: The Birth of Broadcasting (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), 246–47.
7. Ceylon Daily News, 3 August 1937, 4.

02 August 1937

Reorganization of Programme Planning at the Colombo Broadcasting Service

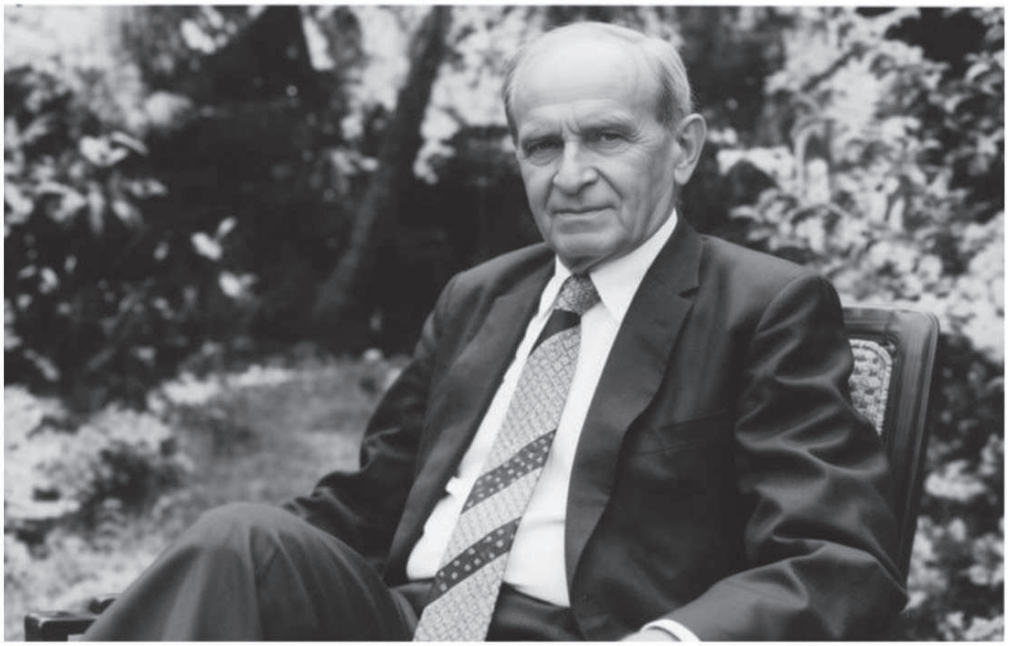
Until 2 August 1937, programme planning at the Colombo Broadcasting Service was carried out under the direct supervision of the Chief Wireless Engineer. The responsibility for this task fell to officers drawn from the postal clerical service, an arrangement that was highly unorthodox and, by contemporary standards, unparalleled in other broadcasting institutions.[1] **Engineers and clerical staff, though competent in technical and administrative functions, lacked the professional expertise required for content planning, programme structuring, and audience engagement.**

Recognizing this structural shortcoming, the Postmaster General repeatedly stressed in his Administrative Reports for 1935 and 1936 the need to appoint a suitably qualified officer to oversee programme planning.[2] This recommendation was realized with the appointment of Mr. Shirley da Silva, a seasoned journalist, to the newly designated post of "Superintendent of Broadcasting."[3] Da Silva's background in journalism equipped him with editorial judgment and creative leadership, qualities that quickly transformed the content and structure of Ceylonese broadcasting.

Soon after assuming office, however, da Silva encountered a significant limitation: his limited proficiency in Sinhala and Tamil constrained his ability to manage effectively the preparation of vernacular content.[4] **Acknowledging this difficulty, he formally requested the Chief Wireless Engineer to appoint an officer with sufficient linguistic and cultural competency to oversee the Oriental-language services and act on his behalf when required.[5] In response, Mr. C. L. P. Gunawardena who had previously served as Chief Clerk in charge of broadcasting under the Chief Wireless Engineer was transferred to the office of the Superintendent of Broadcasting on 28 August 1937.[6]**

The reorganization that followed was of considerable significance. Da Silva's leadership ushered in a new era of programme diversity and improved production standards. Drawing on his journalistic experience, he introduced innovative programme formats and ensured that broadcasts were presented with greater professionalism. A particular hallmark of his tenure was the invitation of distinguished international guests to speak on-air, thereby providing Ceylonese audiences with rare opportunities to engage with global perspectives.[7]

At the same time, Gunawardena played a pivotal role in systematizing Sinhala-language programming, ensuring its increased coherence and cultural relevance.[8] Together, their collaboration laid the institutional foundation for a more balanced and inclusive broadcasting service.



C. L. Pujitha Gunawardana

Controller of Programmes, Colombo Brodcasting Service 1937

Broadcaster, Author, and an Official in the early days of Colombo Brodcasting Service (CBS) Ceylon.

C. L. Pujitha Gunawardana was a pioneering staff officer in the Post and Telegraph Department who managed early Colombo Broadcasting Service programmes and technical logistics in the 1930s.

He is best known for his historical account of the broadcasting industry in the country.

Key details about C.L.P. Gunawardana:

Broadcasting Career:

He was associated with the Colombo Broadcasting Service. "This is Colombo Calling": He authored the book This is Colombo Calling: 1924-1949: Reminiscences, which serves as a vital historical record of the first 25 years of broadcasting in Ceylon.

Colombo Broadcasting Service (CBS) Radio Ceylon (RC) / Broadcasting Scene:

His work is cited in studies of the history of Colombo Broadcasting Service and Radio Ceylon, particularly regarding the development of radio dramas in the 1930s.

Broadcast Programme Office:

Records indicate he was part of the Broadcast Programme Office, working alongside other figures in the development of the British Broadcasting Advisory Board in Ceylon.

1937 Context:

During this period, the station was expanding, with Engineer (Radio) Ayampillai Nadarasa working under to develop a 5-kW transmitter.

Note:

C.L.P. Gunawardana is a historical figure from the late 20s to early 50s in Ceylon broadcasting.

Analytical Note

The 1937 reorganization of programme planning marked a watershed in the evolution of broadcasting in Ceylon. It represented a decisive institutional shift from a technically dominated model of administration where engineers oversaw not only transmission but also content planning toward a professionally oriented structure that recognized broadcasting as both a technological and cultural enterprise. This shift paralleled broader trends in international broadcasting, particularly within the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), where editorial and cultural expertise had, by the mid-1930s, become integral to broadcasting management.[9]

The appointment of da Silva as Superintendent of Broadcasting, supported by Gunawardena in vernacular programming, thus embodied the gradual localization and professionalization of broadcasting in Ceylon. It highlighted the tension between colonial administrative structures and the emerging need for culturally sensitive content. Most importantly, it laid the groundwork for subsequent decades in which Radio Ceylon would develop into one of South Asia's most influential broadcasting institutions, balancing technical innovation with linguistic and cultural inclusivity.

Footnotes:

1. Annual Report of the Post and Telegraph Department, Ceylon, 1936 (Colombo: Government Printer, 1937), 12.
2. Annual Administrative Report of the Postmaster General, Ceylon, 1935 (Colombo: Government Printer, 1936), 9–10.
3. C. L.P. Gunawardana, This Is Colombo Calling (Colombo: Perali Publications, 1990), 51-52.
4. D. M. Colombage, Guwan Viduli Vanshaya (Colombo: M. D. Gunasena & Company, 1989), 28.
5. Administrative Report of the Postmaster General, 1937, 9.
6. Ibid., 10.
7. Gunawardana, This Is Colombo Calling, 52.
8. Colombage, Guwan Viduli Vanshaya, 28.
9. Asa Briggs, The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom, Vol. I: The Birth of Broadcasting (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), 245–48.

25 August 1937

Administrative Restructuring Following the Appointment of Mr. Shirley Da Silva as Superintendent of Broadcasting

Three weeks after assuming office as Superintendent of Broadcasting, Mr. Shirley Da Silva submitted a formal report to his immediate superior, the Chief Telecommunications Engineer, in which he stated that he had gained a comprehensive understanding of the responsibilities attached to his new position. **In this report, Da Silva recommended that Mr. H. de S. Gunewardene, who had hitherto served as Clerk in Charge of Broadcasting (CBC), be relieved of his duties.** [1]

Da Silva further proposed that a qualified officer be appointed to replace Mr. Gunewardene one who would not only assist in the routine administration of the office but also take responsibility for the preparation of all oriental programme content and act on behalf of the Superintendent during periods of absence. [2]

As a direct outcome of this recommendation, Mr. C. L. P. Gunawardana, who had previously functioned as the Subject Clerk for Broadcasting under the Chief Telecommunications Engineer, was transferred to the Broadcasting Station and formally appointed as the new CBC. At the same time, Mr. H. de S. Gunewardene was reassigned to the post of Subject Clerk for Broadcasting within the office of the Chief Telecommunications Engineer. These changes became effective on 28 August 1937. [3]

Subsequently, following Da Silva's confirmation in the post of Superintendent of Broadcasting and his assumption of responsibility for the cash imprest, the designation of CBC was formally withdrawn from Mr. C. L. P. Gunawardana. Nevertheless, administrative directives stipulated that during periods of the Superintendent's leave, the cash imprest was to be temporarily entrusted to Gunawardana, who would also be required to discharge the duties of the Superintendent during such intervals. [4]

Analytical Note:

This restructuring illustrates an important moment in the institutional evolution of broadcasting in Ceylon. By shifting authority from clerical officers to a Superintendent with a broader vision of administrative and programmatic needs, the service began to move toward a more professionalized structure. The reallocation of responsibilities particularly the integration of programme planning with administrative oversight reflected an early recognition that broadcasting required specialized leadership rather than reliance on general clerical management.

Footnotes:

1. Government of Ceylon, Report of the Superintendent of Broadcasting to the Chief Telecommunications Engineer, 25 August 1937, Department of Posts and Telecommunications Archives, Colombo.
2. Ibid.
3. Government of Ceylon, Transfer and Appointment Orders Relating to Broadcasting Personnel, 28 August 1937, Department of Posts and Telecommunications Archives, Colombo.
4. Government of Ceylon, Administrative Instructions Regarding Cash Imprest and Broadcasting Duties, 1937, Department of Posts and Telecommunications Archives, Colombo.

August 1937

The Colombo Broadcasting Service Programme Office Staff

By August 1937, the administrative and operational structure of the Colombo Broadcasting Service (CBS) reflected a modest yet specialized staffing configuration, indicative of the early institutionalization of radio broadcasting in colonial Ceylon. The service operated under the direct supervision of **Mr. Shirley Da Silva**, Superintendent of Broadcasting. His immediate assistant, designated as Clerk in Charge of Broadcasting Service (CBC), was **Mr. C. L. P. Gunawardana,** who was likely responsible for coordinating programming as well as general administrative tasks.[1]

The clerical division comprised **Mr. R. F. Fonseka and Mr. St. Clair Ephrauma,** both serving as typists. Their duties would have been essential for the preparation of programme schedules, official correspondence, and script documentation.[2]

The announcer cadre was organized along linguistic lines. **Mr. E. Y. G. Rankine and Miss Pearl de Zilwa** served as English announcers, representing the station's outreach to the English-speaking public and the expatriate community. **Mr. T. Monis Ruberu** held position of Sinhala announcer, while **Mr. K. Vinayakamurthy** was responsible for Tamil announcements. This arrangement underscored the CBS's early commitment to multilingual inclusivity and regional representation within its programming.[3]

Support staff included **Mr. M. D. Abraham,** functioning as office peon; **Mr. K. A. Dharmadasa,** the studio attendant responsible for technical and logistical studio operations; and **Mr. S. Charles Silva,**identified as the cycle orderly, likely tasked with inter-departmental and city-wide message delivery in an era preceding motorized internal communication.[4]

Analytical Note :

The 1937 CBS staff configuration demonstrates the early professionalization of radio broadcasting in Ceylon, both in terms of administrative organization and technical specialization. The station's multilingual announcer cadre highlights an awareness of the colony's ethnolinguistic diversity and an effort to provide equitable representation across English, Sinhala, and Tamil audiences. Moreover, the inclusion of both male and female personnel, particularly Miss Pearl de Zilwa, indicates nascent gender inclusivity in a sector that would expand considerably in subsequent decades. The delineation of roles across administrative, technical, and support domains further suggests a deliberate attempt to create a functional and sustainable broadcasting infrastructure within the colonial state apparatus.

Footnotes:

1. Government of Ceylon, Staff List and Administrative Structure of the Colombo Broadcasting Service, August 1937, Department of Posts and Telecommunications Archives, Colombo.
2. C. P. L. Gunawardana, This is Colombo Calling (Colombo: Perali Publications, 1990), 53.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.

October 1937

Introduction of Auditions for Radio Artistes

In October 1937, Ceylon introduced the formal practice of selecting radio artistes through auditions, marking a significant step in the professionalization of broadcasting on the island. At the inaugural audition, **Miss Daisy Daniel** who would later achieve fame as **Rukmani Devi** was presented by **Mr. C. A. Fonseka,**a respected veteran musician and early radio performer. Despite performing two Sinhala songs, the judging panel concluded that her performance did not meet the broadcasting standards of the time.[1]



Daisy Rasammah Daniels

Daisy Rasammah Daniels Known popularly as Rukmani Devi (15 January 1923 – 1978

October 1978: was a Sri Lankan film actress and singer who was often acclaimed as ***"The Nightingale of Sri Lanka"*** *was a pioneering singer and actress, holding the distinction of being the island's foremost female playback singer and gramophone-era artist.*

She sang in nearly 100 films, including classics like Kadawunu Poronduwa, and famously performed her own playback vocals.

Key Aspects of Her Singing Career:

Early Success:

She began her career with ***"Siri Buddhagaya Vihare"*** *(1938) and recorded 44 songs for the His Master's Voice label.*

Musical Style:

Renowned for a melodious, emotive voice, she dominated early Sinhala cinema music and worked with notable musicians, includin Rupasinghe Master.

Popular Hits:

Her iconic songs include "Sandyave Sriya," "Pinsara Mage Soyura," "Gala Kandeni," "Moranawa Preme Hade," and "Doi Doi Puta".

Duets & Collaborations:

She recorded numerous popular duets with artists like H. R. Jothipala, Milton Mallawarachchi, and joined the Los Cabelleros band in the 1960s.

Legacy:

Awarded the Sarasaviya 'Rana Thisara' Lifetime Achievement Award posthumously in 1979.

She passed away in a tragic motor accident in 1978.

Initially, auditions were conducted at the Broadcasting Studio at Torrington Square, allowing the judging panel to observe artistes in person. However, this arrangement was deemed inadequate. Subsequently, a revised system was implemented in which judges were seated at the Central Telegraph Office (C.T.O.) while prospective artistes performed at the Broadcasting Studio, thereby ensuring a degree of anonymity and impartiality in the evaluation process.[2]

The audition programme, from its inception until the end of 1948, was overseen by Mr. C. L. P. Gunawardana, who maintained all audition schedules under strict confidentiality. Technical support for the auditions was provided by Mr. A. W. Dharmapala, ensuring the smooth operation of the process and the accurate assessment of each performance.[3]

Analytical Note

The introduction of formal auditions in 1937 represented a foundational measure in institutionalizing broadcasting standards in Ceylon. By establishing a merit-based selection system, the Radio Service sought to ensure quality and professional integrity in its programming, moving away from reliance on personal recommendations or informal networks. The participation of prominent cultural figures, such as C. A. Fonseka and the early appearance of Rukmani Devi, reflects the increasing prestige of radio as a medium for cultural expression. Moreover, the adoption of a structured, technically supported evaluation process signals growing administrative sophistication within the service.



Mr. A. W. Dharmapala
Outside Broadcast Engineer
Colombo Brodcasting Service

A.W. Dharmapala was a pioneering broadcaster and Outside Broadcast Engineer of Colombo Brodcasting Service and Radio Ceylon, the oldest radio station in South Asia.

In 1954, he was appointed as assistant engineer for Radio Ceylon.

Key details regarding A.W. Dharmapala:

Role:

He served as a Telecom Inspector and Outside Broadcast Engineer.

Contribution:

He worked closely with Chief Telegraph Engineer Edward Harper to establish broadcasting in Ceylon.

Legacy:

He was a foundational figure in the development of the oldest radio station in South Asia.

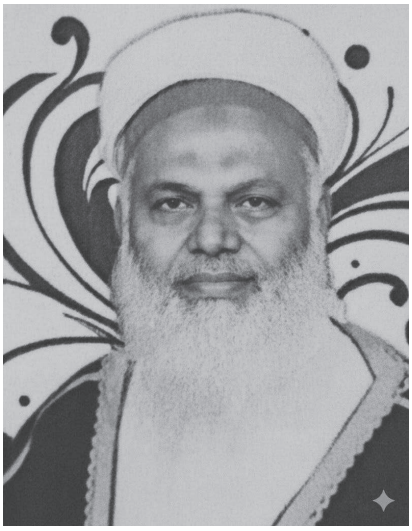
Mr. C. L. P. Gunawardana's custodianship of confidential records and Mr. A. W. Dharmapala's technical oversight illustrate the integration of management and engineering functions in content developmenta critical feature in the emergence of modern broadcasting practices.[4]

Footnotes:

1. Government of Ceylon, Report on the Inaugural Radio Audition, October 1937, Department of Posts and Telecommunications Archives, Colombo.
2. C. P. L. Gunawardana, This is Colombo Calling (Colombo: Perali Publications, 1990), 53.
3. Government of Ceylon, Administrative Records of the Broadcasting Studio: Audition Procedures and Technical Support, 1937–1948, Department of Posts and Telecommunications Archives, Colombo.
4. Ibid.

14 October 1937

The First Islamic Religious Broadcast in Sinhala



Mawlawi H. M. S. Salahudeen

Mawlawi H.M.S. Salahudeen is recognized for his pioneering role in the late 1930s.

He was a prominent figure in the early Muslim religious broadcasts, aiding in the establishment of Islamic programming during that era.

Pioneer:

Mawlawi H.M.S. Salahudeen was a key figure in the 1930s.

Significance:

Early Islamic programming on Radio Ceylon.

On 14 October 1937, between 8:45 p.m. and 9:00 p.m., Mawlawi H. S. M. Salahudeen delivered a religious address in Sinhala on the teachings of the Holy Qur'an. This event is widely recognized as the first Islamic religious broadcast to be presented in the Sinhala language over the airwaves in Ceylon.[1]

Analytical Note

The broadcast by Mawlawi H. S. M. Salahudeen represents a landmark moment in the early history of Ceylonese broadcasting, particularly in terms of religious and cultural inclusivity. By presenting Islamic teachings in Sinhala a language widely spoken across the island the initiative not only made religious content more accessible to the majority population but also fostered a sense of inter-religious understanding and harmony. This approach exemplifies the early role of radio as a platform for bridging ethno-religious communities, integrating spiritual education with vernacular culture, and promoting social cohesion. Furthermore, it underscores the potential of broadcasting to serve as a medium for both religious outreach and cross-cultural dialogue, well beyond its function as a source of information and entertainment.[2]

Footnotes:

1. Government of Ceylon, Broadcast Schedule and Programme Records, 14 October 1937, Department of Posts and Telecommunications Archives, Colombo.
2. Ibid.

13 November 1937

Delegation of Authority for the Selection of Artistes

On 13 November 1937, the Honourable Minister in charge of Public Works, Industries, and Communications formally delegated authority to the Director of Broadcasting, designating him as the officer responsible for the selection of radio programmes and associated artistes. This decision vested the Director with exclusive responsibility for curating broadcast content and determining the qualifications and suitability of individuals engaged in broadcasting activities.[1]

Analytical Note

This delegation of authority marked a critical step in the institutional consolidation of broadcasting in Ceylon. By centralizing decision-making power in the office of the Director of Broadcasting, the state sought to ensure consistency, professionalism, and accountability in both programme selection and artiste recruitment. The measure reflected broader trends of bureaucratization and cultural regulation within colonial governance, positioning the broadcasting service not merely as a technical department but as a state-managed cultural institution. This reorganization laid the groundwork for the subsequent evolution of broadcasting policy and content regulation in the late 1930s and 1940s.[2]

Footnotes:

1. Government of Ceylon, Official Gazette Notification on the Delegation of Authority to the Director of Broadcasting, 13 November 1937, Department of Posts and Telecommunications Archives, Colombo.
2. Ibid.

November 1937

Introduction of New Features and Listener Engagement

In November 1937, shortly after assuming duties, the newly appointed Superintendent of Broadcasting, together with his staff, introduced a number of innovative features to the radio programming schedule. Among the earliest of these initiatives was a segment titled **"You Asked for It"**,later rebranded as Listeners' Requests. The programme quickly gained popularity among the listening public due to its interactive format and personalized approach, which allowed audiences to participate directly in shaping broadcast content.[1]

Despite its success, the segment soon encountered difficulties. Its open-request structure made it vulnerable to misuse. In one notable incident, a young male listener submitted a request in which he publicly associated his own name with that of a young woman, providing her residential address

in the process. The broadcast of this request caused considerable embarrassment to the young woman's family, particularly her father, who, upon hearing the announcement, lodged a strong written protest with the Superintendent the following morning. In his letter, he emphasized that his daughter had neither submitted a request nor consented to the use of her name in such a context.[2]

Following this and similar complaints, the programme was temporarily suspended. This development underscored the necessity of editorial oversight and more stringent verification procedures for audience-participation formats, highlighting the delicate balance between interactivity and responsible broadcasting in the formative years of radio in Ceylon. [3]

Analytical Note

The introduction and temporary suspension of Listeners' Requests illustrates an early moment in the negotiation between listener agency and institutional control within Ceylonese broadcasting. While the programme demonstrated the growing influence of public participation in shaping radio content, its misuse also revealed the social sensitivities inherent in broadcasting to a multi-layered, tradition-bound society. The incident compelled the station to recognize the risks of unfiltered interactivity and reinforced the importance of editorial responsibility. More broadly, this episode highlights how listener engagement not only enriched programming but also prompted the development of broadcasting policies that sought to balance openness with safeguards against reputational harm and social disruption.[4]

Footnotes:

1. Government of Ceylon, Programme Innovations and Listener Correspondence Records, November 1937, Department of Posts and Telecommunications Archives, Colombo.
2. C. P. L. Gunawardana, This is Colombo Calling (Colombo: Perali Publications, 1990), 54.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.

01 December 1937

Appointment of Sinhala and Tamil Announcers

On 1 December 1937, a pivotal administrative decision was taken with regard to linguistic representation in the Colombo Broadcasting Service. The Postmaster General determined that it was no longer appropriate to retain **Mr. T. Monis Ruberu, a technical officer, and Mr. K. Vinayakamurthy, a clerical employee,** as full-time Sinhala and Tamil announcers, respectively. In their place, applications were formally invited for the recruitment of two dedicated language announcers, thereby marking an important institutional step toward professionalizing vernacular broadcasting in Ceylon.[1]

Following a process of voice tests and interviews, Mr. S. Nadarasa, (B.A.), was appointed as the Tamil announcer on 1 December 1937, while Mr. D. M. Colombage, a schoolteacher by profession, assumed duties as the Sinhala announcer on 1 January 1938. Both appointments were made on a daily wage basis, with remuneration fixed at 4 Rupees and 8 cents.[2]

At this juncture, announcers across all three broadcasting languages English, Sinhala, and Tamil were entrusted with responsibilities that extended beyond standard announcing duties. One notable obligation was music curation, which involved visiting gramophone record companies to select suitable recordings for transmission. To facilitate such official travel, each announcer was issued a General Post Office (G.P.O.) push bicycle.[3]



S. Nadarasa

First Tamil Permanent Announcer 1938

S. Nadarasa, (B.A.), was appointed as the First Permanent Tamil announcer on 1 December 1937, assumed duties as on 1 January 1938.

"Whereas the English news bulletin was read directly from pre-prepared texts, the Sinhala and Tamil announcers were required to translate these English bulletins into their respective languages and then deliver them live on air. This task demanded not only bilingual fluency but also considerable editorial discretion, as announcers had to convey official news accurately while adapting it into idiomatic Sinhala and Tamil for a diverse listening audience"



Don Martelis Colombage

First Permanent Sinhala Announcer 1938 - 1969

D. M. Colombage *was a pioneer in Sri Lankan broadcasting, recognized as the first Sinhala Permanent announcer of the Colombo Brodcasting Service.*

He later worked for both Radio Ceylon and the Ceylon Broadcasting Corporation.

Key Details about D. M. Colombage:

Broadcasting Pioneer: *He played a key role in the early development of radio communication in Sri Lanka, alongside figures like* ***Livy Wijemanna, D.T. L. Guruge Vernon Corea and Karunaratne Abeysekera.***

Colombo Brodcasting Service, Radio Ceylon and Ceylon Broadcasting Corporation:

He was active during the early years of radio in Ceylon, with mentions of his work dating back to late 1930s.

Moreover, Sinhala and Tamil announcers bore additional responsibilities not imposed upon their English-speaking colleagues. Whereas the English news bulletin was read directly from pre-prepared texts, the Sinhala and Tamil announcers were required to translate these English bulletins into their respective languages and then deliver them live on air. This task demanded not only bilingual fluency but also considerable editorial discretion, as announcers had to convey official news accurately while adapting it into idiomatic Sinhala and Tamil for a diverse listening audience.[4]

Footnotes:

1. Government of Ceylon, Administrative Circular on Broadcasting Personnel, 1 December 1937, Department of Posts and Telecommunications Archives, Colombo.
2. C. P. L. Gunawardana, This is Colombo Calling (Colombo: Perali Publications, 1990), 54.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.

December 1937

Establishment of the Gramophone Record Library at the Colombo Broadcasting Service

During its formative years, the Colombo Broadcasting Station did not maintain an independent repository of gramophone records, relying instead on the goodwill of commercial suppliers who generously loaned material for transmission. **As part of this arrangement, the station was obliged to acknowledge such contributions by announcing the record number, brand, and the supplying company during broadcasts.**[1]

The principal suppliers at this time included several leading firms:

Messrs. Cargills Ltd.,
representing His Master's Voice (H.M.V.) and Hutchings;
Messrs. Millers Ltd.,
who provided Columbia and Regal Zonophone records;
Messrs. Porolis Fernando & Company,
distributors of Columbia (Oriental), Odeon, and Megaphone; and
Messrs. X. P. Paiva,
who supplied Decca, Imperial Broadcast, Rex, Parlophone, Brunswick, Panachord, and Sterno.



This is a His Master's Voice (HMV) red "semi-circle" label mono LP record,

Featuring the opera Die Zauberflöte (The Magic Flute)

Label:

His Master's Voice (HMV), *a significant British record label that existed from 1909 to 1993.*

Catalogue Number:

ALP 1273.

Content:

Mozart's opera Die Zauberflöte (Overture & Act 1, Part 1).

Performers:

The Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by Sir Thomas Beecham, Bart.

Recording Date:

The performance was recorded in 1937/38.



This is a 10-inch 78 RPM shellac record on the Columbia label, release number 1116-D.

Artist:

Art Gillham and his Southland Syncopators

Song Title:

"I'd Walk a Million Miles (To Be A Little Bit Nearer To You)"

Composers:

Lewis and Marks

Recording Technology:

Features "Viva-tonal Recording" and "Electrical Process"

Recording Date:

The matrix number (144057) indicates it was ***recorded around 1927.***



This is a Parlophone 10-inch 78 rpm shellac record, catalog number R 2868.

Artist:

Teddy Wilson And His Orch. (Vocalist: Billie Holiday)

Title:

"Mean to Me" (Turk-Ahlert)

Series:

The 1943 Super Rhythm-Style Series, No. 76

Matrix Number:

B.21120

Origin:

Made in England by The Parlophone Co Ltd London

The gramophone needles most commonly used were Columbia Duro Gold, noted for their durability and quality. [2]

A significant administrative reform was undertaken in the latter half of 1937 with the establishment of a centralized gramophone record library. Records were purchased, catalogued systematically within the Broadcast Programme Office, and stored to allow for orderly retrieval, thereby reducing delays in the scheduling of recorded music broadcasts.[3]

In recognition of the delays inherent in routine government procurement procedures, the Superintendent of Broadcasting was granted special authorization to purchase gramophone records directly, bypassing the Government Stores Department. This exceptional measure followed consultations between Mr. D. F. C. Fernando of the Chief Telecommunications Engineer's Office, Mr. C. L. P. Gunawardana of the Broadcast Programme Office, and Mr. Hema H. Basnayake, Office Assistant to the Attorney General.



This is a complete catalogue of Parlophone and Odeon records from 1937-1938, which is a vintage collectible item.

The cover features illustrations of the record labels, including the ***Parlophone*** *"tiger rag" logo and the* ***Odeon*** *symbol.*

Parlophone, a British label, was known for its jazz releases in the 1920s, while Odeon issued numerous titles of Indian music during the same era.

These catalogues are considered rare and valuable collectibles for enthusiasts of vintage records and music history.

The catalogue lists records that were likely 78 rpm shellac discs, a common format at the time.

Mr. Basnayake, impressed by the professional conduct and initiative of the two officers, formally commended them in a letter addressed to the Chief Telecommunications Engineer.[4]

The establishment of the gramophone record library in 1937 represented a pivotal moment in the institutional development of broadcasting in Ceylon.



This is a vintage "His Master's Voice" (HMV) fibre gramophone needles tin.

The tin features the iconic trademark image of a dog named Nipper listening to a gramophone.

The tin was made for The Gramophone Company Limited in London.

It is an original item that encapsulates an era of early auditory entertainment.

Fibre needles, made from materials like thorn, were used for a softer tone and were considered "kinder" to records compared to steel needles.

The image, titled "His Master's Voice," was painted by Francis Barraud in 1898 and has become a timeless symbol of music and nostalgia.

It marked a deliberate shift from dependence on the goodwill of private suppliers toward institutional autonomy in the curation of musical content. By ensuring a reliable and expanding stock of recorded material, the library enhanced operational efficiency and laid the foundations for what would later become a valuable national musical archive. This initiative not only guaranteed programming continuity but also contributed to the preservation of musical culture.[5]

Furthermore, the administrative decision to bypass conventional bureaucratic channels for record acquisition demonstrated an early recognition of the operational flexibility required in a rapidly evolving medium. The collaborative approach adopted between technical and legal officers, coupled with formal commendation for professional standards, underscored the transformation of the Colombo Broadcasting Station from an experimental service into a more structured and institutionalized public broadcasting authority.[6]

Footnotes

1. Government of Ceylon, Broadcasting Station Administrative Records: Gramophone Procurement Files, December 1937, Department of Posts and Telecommunications Archives, Colombo.
2. C. P. L. Gunawardana, This is Colombo Calling (Colombo: Perali Publications, 1990), 52.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. D. M. Colombage, Guwan Viduli Vanshaya (Colombo: M. D. Gunasena & Co., 1989), 29.
6. Ibid.



This is a vintage tin of Columbia Duragold gramophone needles.

These needles were made for use with old wind-up gramophones and shellac records.

The needles are described in the tin as ***"Duragold"*** *and semi-permanent, claiming each one could play ten records.*

Standard steel needles for shellac records were typically single-use and needed changing after every play to prevent excessive record wear.

The records themselves contained an abrasive material designed to grind the needle tip slightly to fit the groove properly.

The tin is a collectible item, often from the 1930s or 1940s.

December 1937

Use of Gramophone Records and the Emergence of Early Popular Artistes

By December 1937, gramophone records had become an essential component of programming at the Colombo Broadcasting Station. Yet, not all commercially available recordings were considered appropriate for radio transmission. Only those that met the station's editorial and technical standards were selected for broadcast. To ensure this, announcers frequently visited gramophone record companies to audition selections and determine their suitability for airing.[1]

When these records were broadcast, the station followed the convention of announcing the record number and manufacturer alongside the performance. A typical announcement might state: **"This song is from HMV record number N 3037."**[2] This practice not only enhanced transparency but also provided reciprocal publicity to the recording companies, thereby reinforcing a mutually beneficial relationship between commerce and broadcasting. Indeed, radio exposure proved to be a powerful promotional tool, prompting competition among suppliers to provide the Colombo Broadcasting Station with early access to their latest releases before they reached the general public.[3]



Rukmani Devi

A legendary Sri Lankan Vocalists and actress.

As a pioneering, melodious vocalist of the gramophone era, she sang in over 60 films, often providing her own playback singing in early Sinhala cinema. She also recorded extensively and performed across diverse musical styles.

Key Aspects of Her Singing Career:

Early Career & Breakthrough:

Born Daisy Rasammah Daniels, she began her career by recording ***"Siri Buddha gaya vihare" with Rupasinghe Master in 1938 at age 13, which was a major hit.***

"Nightingale of Sri Lanka": Known for her exceptionally melodious voice, she was the foremost female singer in the 1940s and 1950s, popularizing songs that blended classical, traditional, and modern styles.

Playback Singing:

Unlike many contemporary actors, she sang her own songs in early Sinhala films, contributing to nearly 100 films as an actress and vocalist*.*

Recordings:

She was a prolific artist, recording for popular labels like His Master's Voice, and in 1976, she received the Best Background Singer award at the Presidential Awards.

Versatility:

Beyond classical, she adapted to new styles, collaborating with popular musicians like H.R. Jothipala, C.T. Fernando, and Milton Mallawarachchi.

Popular Songs and Legacy:

Her songs, such as "Siri Buddhagaya Vihare," "Sandahiru Tharu," and various duets, remain iconic in Sri Lanka.



Kala Suri Alhaj Kareem Mohideen Baig

Highly influential Sri Lankan musician known for his Buddhist devotional music.

He was a Muslim who moved to Sri Lanka from Salem in Tamil Nadu, India, but was of Hyderabadi Muslim origin.

He is one of the most influential Vocalists in Sinhala music.

He is known for popular songs such as "Mage Pem Kirilli" and "Thaniwai Upanne".

He released several albums and singles, including Sansarayedi Hamu Wi Mese and Me Salli Soyala.



Wasantha Sandanayake
Prominent Sri Lankan Vocalist

Wasantha Sandanayake, a renowned Sri Lankan gramophone Vocalists.

She was a prominent figure in Sri Lankan music history, known for her contributions during the gramophone era.

Her work is considered an immense service to the country's musical heritage.

She passed away on November 24, 2000.

Her songs remain available on various music platforms.

Among the pioneering vocalists whose gramophone recordings featured prominently during this formative period were J. Sadiris Silva, B. E. de Silva, P. A. Don Manis Pattiarachchi, H. W. Rupasinghe, Kokila Devi, Regina Perera, Susila Jayasinghe, Lawrence Perera, M. K. Vincent, Joseph Perera, Rukmani Devi, A. R. M. Ibrahim, T. A. Latheef Bai, Ahmed Mehideen, Siciliana Dias, Vasantha Sandanayake, Titus Samarawira, U. D. Perera, Wilfred J. Peiris, Mohideen Beg, and Greta Janet de Silva.[4] Many of these artistes also performed live on air, which further consolidated their reputations as public figures.



U. D. Perera
Renowned Vocalists Composer Lyricist

U.D. Perera was a prominent Sri Lankan lyricist and composer active in the mid-20th century, notably working with artists like G.S.B. Rani Perera on tracks such as "Samagi Baley". ***He was associated with early Columbia records and HMV in the late 1940s and 1950s, contributing to the Sinhala music scene.***

Key details regarding U.D. Perera:

Role:

Primarily a songwriter / Vocalists and composer.

Collaboration:

Worked with Master Mohamed Ghouse.

Key Works:

Penned "Samagi Baley" for G.S.B. Rani Perera (c. 1945-46) and "Lowa Rakina" for Greta Janet de Silva.

A characteristic feature of the music broadcast during this period was the adaptation of Sinhala lyrics to established Hindustani ragas and rhythmic patterns, thereby creating a hybrid idiom that resonated strongly with audiences.[5] A considerable portion of the repertoire consisted of Buddhagunagāna gīti devotional songs extolling the qualities of the Buddha alongside love songs and patriotic compositions. This period thus represents a critical juncture in the intersection of radio and the recording industry in Ceylon.

The Colombo Broadcasting Station not only disseminated popular music but also actively shaped public taste and conferred celebrity status on recording artistes. The reciprocal promotional system reinforced the economic vitality of the gramophone industry, while the station's commitment to quality control ensured cultural legitimacy. The adaptation of Hindustani musical frameworks to Sinhala texts simultaneously preserved religious and cultural traditions while fostering innovation, thereby laying the foundation for a distinct Sinhala musical identity within the broader South Asian soundscape.

Footnotes:

1. D. M. Colombage, Guwan Viduli Vanshaya (Colombo: M. D. Gunasena & Company, 1989), 10-11.
2. Ibid., 11.
3. Kusuma Karunaratne, Sri Lanka Broadcasting: A Historical Survey (Colombo: Sri Lanka Broadcasting Corporation, 1976), 29.
4. Colombage, Guwan Viduli Vanshaya, 11.
5. Samanthi Gunawardena, "Musical Adaptation and the Rise of Sinhala Song," Journal of South Asian Cultural Studies 12, no. 2 (1985): 113–115.

December 1937

Performance by Renowned Indian Vocalist Sabita Devi

In December 1937, the Colombo Broadcasting Station hosted a special musical recital by the celebrated Indian vocalist Sabita Devi, whose visit marked one of the earliest instances of an internationally acclaimed artiste performing live on Ceylonese radio. **She was accompanied by a distinguished ensemble of local musicians: Don Manis Pattiarachchi, M. G. Perera, Jinapala Pattiarachchi, and Somachandra Pattiarachchi, who provided instrumental support for the programme.**

The appearance of Sabita Devi, a vocalist of notable repute in the Indian classical and light music traditions, reflected the Colombo Broadcasting Station's increasing engagement in cross-border cultural exchanges during the late 1930s. Her performance not only introduced Ceylonese audiences to regional artistry but also demonstrated the station's capacity to serve as a conduit for international musical collaboration.

Analytical Note

The performance of Sabita Devi underscores the role of broadcasting as an agent of transnational cultural interaction during the colonial period. It highlighted Ceylon's openness to Indian artistic influences while simultaneously elevating the prestige of the Colombo Broadcasting Station as a cultural institution. The collaboration with accomplished local accompanists also illustrated the technical and artistic maturity of the island's musicians, who were capable of supporting and integrating with international performers.

Events such as these contributed significantly to the consolidation of Colombo's reputation as a regional broadcasting hub, a status that would later underpin the emergence of Radio Ceylon as a dominant South Asian broadcaster in the postwar period.

Biographical Note on Sabita Devi

Sabita Devi (dates uncertain) was an accomplished Indian vocalist active during the 1930s and 1940s, associated with both classical and light Hindustani traditions. While her career is sometimes overshadowed by her namesake the well-known Calcutta-based film actress of the same era archival references identify her primarily as a performing artiste engaged in vocal recitals across the Indian subcontinent. Her repertoire frequently blended traditional ragas with more accessible musical forms, making her a popular figure in public concerts and radio appearances. Her visit to Ceylon in 1937 represents an early example of Indian musicians participating in the island's broadcasting activities, strengthening the cultural and artistic ties between India and Ceylon.

Footnotes:

1. Ceylon Administration Report, Post and Telecommunications Department, 1937, Sri Lanka National Archives.
2. "Musical Notes: Sabita Devi Performs in Colombo," The Times of Ceylon, December 14, 1937.
3. See Nalini Gera, Indian Music and Radio: Early Cross-Border Exchanges (New Delhi: Sangeet Natak Akademi, 1989), 112–14.
4. D. M. Colombage, Guwan Viduli Vanshaya (Colombo: M. D. Gunasena & Co., 1989), 91.



Sabitha Devi

Renowned Indian Vocalists and Actress

Sabita Devi (born Iris M. Gasper; November 20, 1912/1914 December 31, 1998) was a prominent Anglo-Indian/Jewish singer actress and producer in Hindi cinema during the 1930s and 1940s.

Known for her work in "pioneering era" films, she was one of the leading stars alongside actresses like Devika Rani and Seeta Devi.

Key Facts and Career:

Real Name:

Born Iris Maude Gasper in Calcutta (now Kolkata), she adopted the screen name Sabita Devi to gain acceptance in the Hindi film industry.

Career Highlights:

She began in the silent film Aparadhi (1931) and gained fame in the 1930s, often acting alongside Motilal in films produced by Sagar Movietone.

Filmography:

Notable films include Silver King (1935), Dr. Madhurika (1935), Grama Kanya (1936), Kulvadhu (1937) Prarthana (1943), and English Babu Desi Mem (1996).

Production:

She co-founded the production house "Sudama Pictures" with director Sarvottam Badami.

Later Life:

In 1951, she married David Trefor Lewis and moved to the United Kingdom.

Death:

She passed away on December 31, 1998, in Nottingham, England.

December 1937

Licensing Growth and Expansion of Broadcasting Hours

According to the Annual Administrative Report of the Postmaster General for 1937, a total of 4,911 radio licences had been issued by the end of that year. This figure represents a significant increase of 1,032 licences over the preceding year, 1936, indicating both growing accessibility and heightened public engagement with radio broadcasting in Ceylon.[1]

A structured daily broadcasting schedule, first implemented in 1936, was consistently maintained throughout 1937. The schedule extended from 11:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m., amounting to eleven hours of transmission each day.[2] This included dedicated segments for school broadcasts, reflecting the integration of educational content into the national broadcasting agenda during its formative years.

Analytical Note

The steady rise in the number of radio licences by 1937 reflects the diffusion of radio technology across broader social strata, enabled by the increasing affordability of radio receivers. The issuance of more than 1,000 additional licences within a single year underscores the expanding public reliance on broadcasting as a source of information, entertainment, and cultural enrichment.

Equally significant was the maintenance of a fixed eleven-hour transmission schedule, which provided listeners with predictable access to programmes and signified the administrative consolidation of the broadcasting service. The inclusion of educational broadcasts within this framework reveals the state's early recognition of radio's potential as a tool of mass education, foreshadowing later state-driven initiatives to integrate broadcasting into formal and non-formal educational policies.[3]

Footnotes:

1. Ceylon. Administration Report of the Postmaster General for 1937. Colombo: Government Press, 1938, 4.
2. C. P. L. Gunawardana, This is Colombo Calling (Colombo: Perali Publications, 1990), 55.
3. See also K. M. de Silva, A History of Sri Lanka (Colombo: Vijitha Yapa, 2005), 471–72; Nalini Gera, Indian Music and Radio: Early Cross-Border Exchanges (New Delhi: Sangeet Natak Akademi, 1989), 108–12.

December 1937

Colombo Broadcasting Service: Progress and Milestones 1937

I. Linguistic Expansion and Institutional Appointments

1. Expansion of Multilingual Programming and Announcer Appointments

In 1937, the Colombo Broadcasting Service formally institutionalized multilingual broadcasting through the appointment of dedicated Sinhala and Tamil announcers. Mr. D. M. Colombage was appointed as the Sinhala announcer, while Mr. S. Nadarasa assumed duties as the Tamil announcer. This development reflected a deliberate policy intervention aimed at improving linguistic equity and inclusivity for non-English-speaking audiences, while retaining English as a principal medium of broadcast. Collectively, these appointments established a trilingual broadcasting framework that marked a significant evolution in colonial-era radio policy.

II. Professionalization and Talent Development

2. Institutionalization of Auditions and Professional Standards

A formal system of auditions for radio artistes was introduced in October 1937, replacing earlier ad hoc selection practices. These auditions introduced merit-based evaluation criteria and incorporated systematic record-keeping and technical supervision. The participation of prominent performers such as C. A. Fonseka and Rukmani Devi underscored the Colombo Broadcasting Service's expanding role as a national platform for artistic talent development and cultural standard-setting.

III. Cultural Programming and International Exchange

3. Cultural Preservation and Cross-Border Artistic Exchange

During the year, the Service placed increased emphasis on the preservation of indigenous musical traditions through curated gramophone recordings and live studio performances. Broadcasts featuring Buddhagunagāna gīti, folk compositions, and Sinhala adaptations of Hindustani classical ragas reinforced cultural continuity and audience familiarity with traditional forms. Simultaneously, international artistic exchange was facilitated through performances by visiting artistes, notably Indian vocalist Sabita Devi, reflecting early forms of transnational cultural collaboration.

IV. Broadcasting Capacity and Educational Outreach

4. Expansion of Broadcasting Hours and Educational Content

Daily transmission schedules were maintained for approximately eleven hours, generally spanning from 11:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m. The programme lineup incorporated school broadcasts alongside general entertainment, cultural, and informational content.

This sustained expansion of airtime reflected growing administrative coherence and the integration of educational and public service objectives into national broadcasting practice.

V. Audience Growth and Public Adoption

5. Expansion of Radio Licensing and Public Reach

By the conclusion of 1937, the number of licensed radio receivers had increased to 4,911, representing a net growth of 1,032 licences compared to the previous year. This upward trend indicated expanding public adoption of radio technology, increasing affordability of receivers, and enhanced public confidence in broadcasting as a reliable and influential medium.

Setbacks and Challenges

VI. Structural, Editorial, and Resource Constraints

1. Technical and Maintenance Limitations

Despite incremental improvements to transmission infrastructure, rural signal coverage remained inadequate. Constraints in routine maintenance and the absence of localized receiver repair facilities continued to affect service reliability and limited the effective reach of broadcasts beyond urban centres.

2. Programming Constraints and Content Dependence

The capacity to generate original programming remained restricted by limited resources and production facilities. As a result, schedules continued to rely heavily on gramophone records and commercially supplied material, constraining the development of a fully indigenous broadcast repertoire.

3. Linguistic and Cultural Imbalances

Although progress was made in expanding Sinhala and Tamil programming, English-language broadcasts remained dominant. This imbalance reflected enduring colonial priorities in content planning and resource allocation, limiting the pace of linguistic democratization.

4. Challenges in Listener Participation and Editorial Control

Listener-interactive programmes, including request-based broadcasts, occasionally presented editorial challenges. Instances of unsuitable or sensitive content highlighted the need for clearer content guidelines and stronger editorial oversight mechanisms.

5. Financial and Resource Constraints

Budgetary limitations restricted the remuneration of artistes and curtailed the commissioning of additional live performances. These financial constraints slowed the expansion of locally produced content and constrained institutional ambition.

Concluding Assessment

The year 1937 represents a period of both consolidation and experimentation for the Colombo Broadcasting Service. Institutionally and socio-politically, it marked a decisive shift toward linguistic inclusivity and professional governance. Culturally, the Service advanced local heritage preservation while encouraging international artistic exchange. Economically, growing listener engagement and licensing figures reflected expanding public trust in broadcasting. However, persistent technical limitations, resource constraints, and structural imbalances tempered overall progress. Collectively, 1937 illustrates a dual trajectory of notable institutional growth alongside enduring operational challenges within the colonial broadcasting framework.

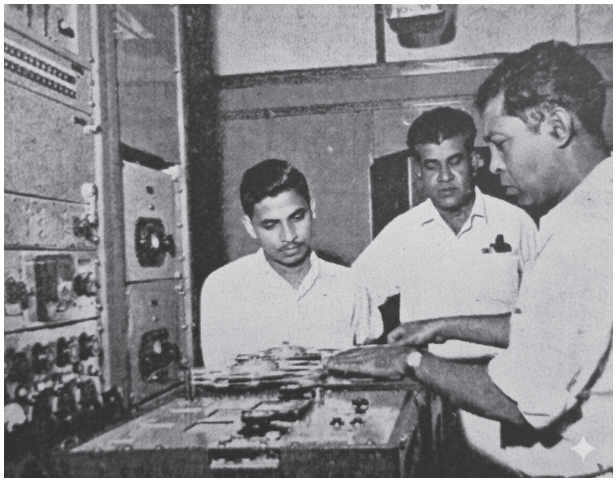
1938

01 January 1938

D. M. Colombage Assumes Duties as the First Sinhala Announcer

Don Marthelis Colombage, born on 4 May 1909 in Kirulapone, Colombo, completed his formal education and began his professional career as an assistant teacher of English, serving in schools in Kalutara, Boralesgamuwa, and Wellawatte. Subsequently, he resigned from the teaching service and joined the Colombo Broadcasting Service.[1]

As the first Sinhala-language announcer at the Colombo Broadcasting Service, Colombage became widely recognized for his distinctive style of addressing the listening audience during early transmissions.[2] He inaugurated Sinhala-language announcements with the memorable phrases: **"කොළඹ සිට කතා කරමි" "Speaking from Colombo"** and **"මේ කොළඹ ගුවන් විදුලි සේවයයි" "This is the Colombo Broadcasting Service".**[3]



In the early 1950s, DM Colombage was preparing to record a program with two other technicians, (Mr. Colombage is in the middle of the photograph)

Analytical Note:

These announcements represent a significant milestone in the cultural localization of radio broadcasting in Ceylon. The introduction of Sinhala into the medium symbolized a deliberate emphasis on vernacular inclusivity and marked an important step toward integrating local linguistic identity within public communication.

Footnotes

1. C. P. L. Gunawardana, This is Colombo Calling (Colombo: Perali Publications, 1990), 54.
2. D. M. Colombage, Guwan Viduli Vanshaya (Colombo: M. D. Gunasena & Co., 1989), 14.
3. Department of Broadcasting, Souvenir: Fifty Years of Radio Ceylon, 1925–1975 (Colombo: Government Press, 1975), 17.

01 January 1938

Commencement of Twice-Daily News Broadcasts

On 1 January 1938, the Colombo Broadcasting Service initiated the regular transmission of news bulletins twice daily, a development facilitated through a formal arrangement with the Reuters News Agency.[1] This marked a decisive step in the institutionalization of news broadcasting in Ceylon, aligning local practices with broader interwar trends in the standardization and professionalization of radio journalism.
Prior to this initiative, news items had been broadcast only sporadically, without a consistent schedule or systematic editorial oversight.[2] The introduction of a fixed timetable typically morning and evening bulletins not only enhanced the credibility of the service but also signaled its growing role as a dependable source of current affairs reporting. The arrangement underscored radio's emerging status as a vital medium of real-time public communication within the British Empire.

The agreement with Reuters guaranteed a continuous supply of international news, thereby raising the editorial output of the Colombo Broadcasting Service to a standard comparable with practices in Britain and the Dominions.[3] Reuters, headquartered in London, had long functioned as the central news distribution agency within the imperial press network, and its collaboration with Colombo symbolized Ceylon's formal integration into this global information circuit.[4]

Note: Although the bulletins were initially confined to English, the success of the twice-daily news format established the groundwork for future efforts to provide news in vernacular languages such as Sinhala and Tamil, thereby widening the scope and accessibility of public broadcasting across the island's multi-ethnic society.

Footnotes:

1. Annual Administrative Report of the Postmaster General for the Year 1938 (Colombo: Government Press, 1939), 22.
2. Nimal Chandrasiri, History of Broadcasting in Sri Lanka: 1925–1975 (Colombo: Department of Information, 1980), 67–69.
3. Asa Briggs, The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom, Vol. II: The Golden Age of Wireless (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965), 212–13.
4. Simon J. Potter, News and the British World: The Emergence of an Imperial Press System (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2003), 145–47.

29 March 1938

J. R. Jayewardene Joins the Colombo Broadcasting Service as Playwrighter and Actor

On 29 March 1938, Junius Richard Jayewardene who would later become the first Executive President of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka contributed to the formative stage of Sinhala radio drama as both playwright and performer. On that day, Jayewardene wrote and acted in a short Sinhala playlet titled Social Worker, which was broadcast by the Colombo Radio Service in the evening hours.[1]

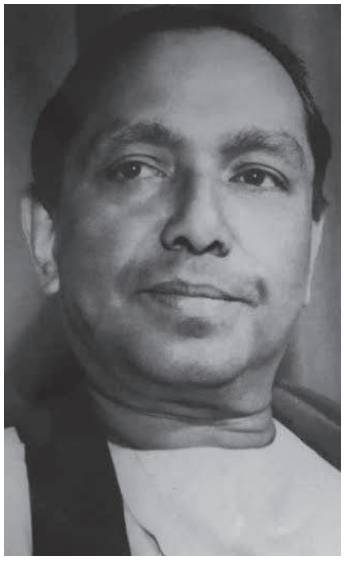
The production of Social Worker was arranged at short notice by Shirley da Silva, Superintendent of Broadcasting. Because of its impromptu scheduling, the programme was not listed in the official radio schedule submitted in advance for newspaper publication.[2] The broadcast, transmitted between 5:30 p.m. and 6:03 p.m., was instead announced directly over the airwaves. The play featured a distinguished cast including J. R. Jayewardene, Mrs. Elina Jayewardene, Dr. G. P. Malalasekera, Mudaliyar E. A. Abeysekera, U. G. P. de Silva, and C. A. Fonseka.[3]



Hon. J. R. Jayawardena



Mrs. Elina Jayaweera



Dr. G. P. Malalasekera



Mudliyar E. A. Abyasekara



Mr. U. G. P. de Silva

The programme was received with notable enthusiasm by listeners. A particularly striking example of its impact was recorded when a Kandyan lady from Ratnapura, profoundly moved by U. G. P. de Silva's performance in the role of a beggar, sent a monetary donation of Rs. 25 to the Superintendent of Broadcasting, requesting that it be delivered to the actor as a gesture of appreciation.[4] At the time of this broadcast, de Silva was serving as Headmaster at the Government Training College.

Analytical Note:

This broadcast constitutes an important moment in the evolution of Sinhala-language radio drama. It is significant not only because of the participation of a future head of state, but also as evidence of the emotional resonance of radio as a medium capable of forging connections with audiences across geographical and social boundaries.

Footnotes:

1. Nimal Chandrasiri, History of Broadcasting in Sri Lanka: 1925–1975 (Colombo: Department of Information, 1980), 74.
2. Department of Broadcasting, Souvenir: Fifty Years of Radio Ceylon, 1925–1975 (Colombo: Government Press, 1975), 21.
3. C. P. L. Gunawardana, This is Colombo Calling (Colombo: Perali Publications, 1990), 55.
4. Ibid

May 1938

Ananda Samarakoon's Return and Debut on the Colombo Broadcasting Service: Cultural Nationalism and the Sinhala Musical Revival

In May 1938, Ananda Samarakoon later recognized as the composer of Sri Lanka Māthā, the national anthem of Sri Lanka returned to Ceylon after completing advanced training in Indian classical music at Santiniketan, the renowned cultural and educational institution founded by Rabindranath Tagore.[1] Upon his return, he was recruited into the musical programming of the Colombo Broadcasting Service (CBS), making his inaugural broadcast contribution through a radio drama titled Temple Bells.[2] The programme was transmitted live from Ananda College, Colombo, on Vesak Full Moon Poya Day, aligning the performance with the commemoration of the Buddha's birth, enlightenment, and parinirvāna, thereby situating the broadcast within a culturally resonant framework.



Mr. Ananda Samarakoon

Mr. Ananda Samarakoon

Composer Lyricist Visual Artists

Ananda Samarakoon occupies a central place in the cultural history of modern Sri Lanka as a pioneering composer, lyricist, and visual artist. ***Born George Wilfred Alwis Samarakoon,*** *he is best remembered as the composer of* ***Sri Lanka Māthā,*** *which was later adopted as the National Anthem of Sri Lanka.* ***His artistic formation was shaped by both local traditions and international influences, particularly those encountered during his brief period of study in India.***

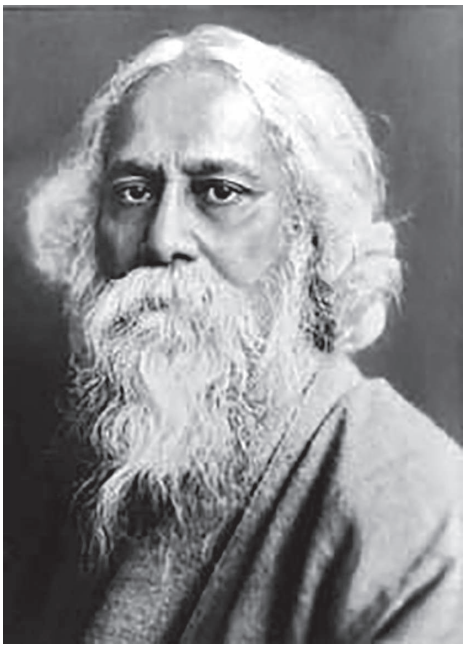
In 1936, Samarakoon entered Rabindranath Tagore's Santiniketan,(later Visva Bharati University) However, he returned to Sri Lanka after approximately six months, *rather than completing a formal course of study. Despite this early return, his engagement with India did not cease; he continued to visit the country intermittently in subsequent years.* ***These encounters contributed significantly to his artistic outlook, which reflected Tagorean humanism and an emphasis on cultural synthesis rather than imitation.***

It is widely held that the opening lines of Sri Lanka Māthā were conceived during one such return journey from India, notably on Samarakoon's first experience of air travel. Inspired by an aerial view of his homeland emerging through the clouds, he is said to have begun composing the song during the flight.

Upon his return to Sri Lanka, ***he completed the composition and introduced it to students at Mahinda College, Galle, where he was serving as the music teacher. This occurred in 1940, eight years prior to Sri Lanka's independence.***

At the time of its composition, the song was not intended to function as a national anthem. Consequently, when a formal competition was later convened after independence to select a national anthem, Samarakoon was reportedly not resident in the country. ***The submission of Sri Lanka Māthā to the selection committee was undertaken by his wife, a circumstance that underscores the incidental rather than premeditated path through which the song achieved national status.***

In addition to his enduring contribution to music, Ananda Samarakoon was also a distinguished painter, reflecting a broader artistic sensibility that traversed multiple disciplines. ***His legacy remains integral to Sri Lanka's cultural and national identity, representing an early and influential articulation of aesthetic nationalism rooted in personal experience, artistic integrity, and a deep emotional attachment to the land.***



Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore,

Rabindranath Tagore, a renowned Indian polymath, poet, philosopher, musician, writer, and social reformer.

He was the first non-European to win the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1913 for his collection of poems, Gitanjali.

Referred to as "Gurudev," he composed the national anthems of both India (Jana Gana Mana) and Bangladesh (Amar Shonar Bangla).

Tagore was a key figure in the Indian independence movement and renounced his British knighthood in protest of the 1919 Jallianwala Bagh massacre.

He established the Visva-Bharati University in rural West Bengal to promote a unique blend of traditional and modern education.

Samarakoon quickly emerged as the leader of the radio musical ensemble known as the Guwan Viduli Gandarwayō (Air Artistes).[3] His productions, characterized by the synthesis of Indian rāga structures and Sinhala lyrical content, attracted considerable public attention due to their spiritual and aesthetic depth. In response to listener demand, Temple Bells was rebroadcast on 10 July 1938, followed by the airing of Renunciation on 27 July, also relayed live from Ananda College.[4]

The ensemble subsequently produced Pilgrimage to Kataragama, a drama that exemplified the fusion of traditional religious narratives with the nascent aesthetic possibilities of radio drama.[5] Samarakoon also began performing regularly under his own name, often accompanied by Miss Swarna de Silva, whose collaboration facilitated the integration of live instrumental accompaniment with vocal interpretation of Sinhala poetic forms.[6]

These broadcasts reflect a pivotal moment in the indigenization of Ceylonese radio content, occurring at a time when the country was experiencing a resurgence of Sinhala literary and musical nationalism. The 1930s witnessed increased attention to the preservation and modernization of Sinhala culture in response to colonial influence, and the incorporation of classical Sinhala musical idioms into broadcast programming contributed to the dissemination of vernacular artistic forms to a mass audience.

By blending Indian musical techniques with local literary sensibilities, Samarakoon not only enhanced the aesthetic quality of radio programming but also helped establish a distinctively Ceylonese cultural voice in the public sphere.

Furthermore, the CBS broadcasts of 1938 can be understood as part of a broader cultural strategy: radio emerged as a vehicle for cultivating a shared national consciousness, bridging urban and rural audiences, and creating a platform for vernacular modernity. Samarakoon's work exemplifies how artistic innovation, technological mediation, and nationalist sentiment converged in the early history of Sri Lankan broadcasting, marking the beginning of a sustained process of cultural self-definition through public media.

Santiniketan Bolpur, West Bengal

This image, taken by British photographer Emil Otto Hoppé in 1929, captures a moment at Rabindranath Tagore's school in Santiniketan, India.

The school was founded in 1901 by the renowned poet and philosopher Rabindranath Tagore, based on ancient Indian traditions and a vision of unity.

It was built on a site that his father, Debendranath Tagore, had established as a retreat for meditation in 1863.

The educational philosophy focused on learning in harmony with nature, and students often gathered for classes outdoors.

Santiniketan is now part of the town of Bolpur in West Bengal and was declared a UNESCO World Heritage site in 2023.



Footnotes:

1. Nimal Chandrasiri, History of Broadcasting in Sri Lanka: 1925–1975 (Colombo: Department of Information, 1980), 78.
2. Department of Broadcasting, Souvenir: Fifty Years of Radio Ceylon, 1925–1975 (Colombo: Government Press, 1975), 23.
3. D. M. Colombage, Guwan Viduli Vanshaya (Colombo: M. D. Gunasena & Co., 1989), 30.
4. Ibid.
5. D. M. Colombage, Guwan Viduli Vanshaya (Colombo: M. D. Gunasena & Co., 1989), 55.
6. Ibid.

14 June 1938

Expansion of Hospital Radio Listening Facilities in Ceylon

On 14 June 1938, the eighth installation under the hospital radio listening scheme organized by the Radio Club of Ceylon and South India was officially inaugurated at the Anti-Tuberculosis Hospital in Ragama.[1] **The ceremonial opening was conducted by His Excellency Sir Andrew Caldecott, Governor of Ceylon, and Lady Caldecott, in the presence of several senior officials and medical professionals. Among the dignitaries were the Honourable Minister of Health, Mr. W. A. de Silva; Dr. C. I. de Silva, Superintendent of the Anti-Tuberculosis Institute; Dr. W. E. Ranawaka, Medical Officer-in-Charge of Ragama Hospital; Dr. Vanlangenberg, Chairman of the Hospital Wireless Fund; Mr. F. A. E. Price, President of the Radio Club; and Mr. J. F. Ness, Secretary of the Club.[2]**



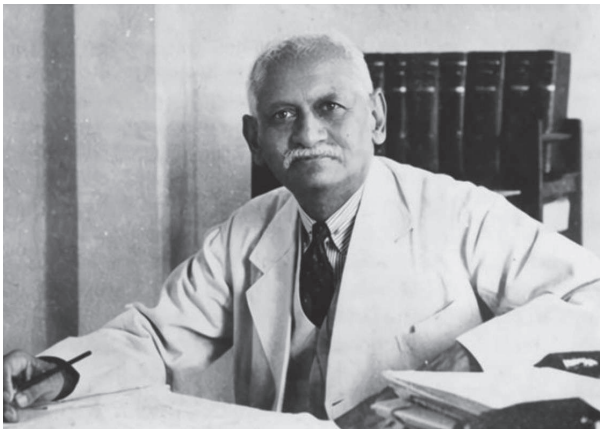
Sir Andrew Caldecott
Governor of Ceylon from 1937 to 1944

This portrait is of Sir Andrew Caldecott, a British colonial administrator who served in various high-ranking positions across the British Empire.

He was the last British Governor of Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) from 1937 to 1944.

He also served as Governor of Hong Kong from 1935 to 1937.

He was appointed a Knight Grand Cross of the Most Distinguished Order of Saint Michael and Saint George (GCMG).



Wilmot Arthur de Silva
Minister of Health (1936–1942)

W. A. de Silva (15 March 1869 - April 1942) was a Ceylonese veterinary surgeon, politician and philanthropist. He was the Minister of Health (1936–1942) in the second State Council of Ceylon and a former President of the Ceylon National Congress.

To the present generation the late Mr. W A de Silva is a somewhat elusive figure in the national pantheon. Yet in his day he filled a significant role as a politician, scholar, agriculturist, trusted Buddhist leader and inveterate, almost reckless philanthropist.

Before many of the voters of today were born, and his name is rarely mentioned even in what used to be his spacious home (Srawasthi) which is early a dormitory for parliamentarians.

In his address, Dr. Vanlangenberg highlighted the achievements of the Hospital Wireless Fund since its inception, acknowledging the generous donation of the radio and loudspeaker equipment by Mr. M. K. Kapadia and expressing hope that such philanthropic contributions would continue.[3] Governor Caldecott, in his remarks, commended the spirit of voluntary service in Ceylon, noting that the public's civic-mindedness constituted a source of national pride.[4]

By mid-1938, the Ceylon Wireless Fund had successfully installed radio equipment in multiple hospitals and care institutions across the island, including the School for the Blind and Deaf, Mount Lavinia; Victoria Home, Colombo; Leprosy Hospital, Hendala; Memorial and Siemens Wards, Paying Wards, and Staff Quarters of the Colombo General Hospital; the Eye Hospital, Colombo; and Lady Havelock and Lady Ridgeway Hospitals, Colombo.[5] Expansion plans were underway for the Chest Hospital, Kandana; De Zoysa Women's Hospital, Colombo; Mental Hospital, Angoda; Leprosy Hospital, Mullaitivu; and General Hospitals in Kandy and Galle, contingent upon the availability of funds.[6]

A notable financial requirement was highlighted for the Victoria Home for the Critically Ill in Colombo, where an existing battery-operated radio installed in 1929 required conversion to operate fully on electric power. A sum of Rs. 350 was requested for this purpose, and potential donors were invited to contribute to the Honorable Treasurer of the Hospital Radio Fund, P.O. Box 100, Colombo.[7]

Analytical Note:

The hospital radio listening initiative demonstrates the early intersection of technology, public health, and social welfare in colonial Ceylon. By providing patients with access to entertainment, news, and educational content, the project reflected a growing recognition of radio as a medium with therapeutic and social value. Moreover, the program relied on a combination of public philanthropy, institutional coordination, and technical expertise, illustrating the collaborative efforts required to integrate mass communication into health and welfare infrastructures. The involvement of high-ranking colonial officials further underscores the prestige and visibility associated with such public welfare projects, situating radio not merely as a tool of entertainment but as a mechanism for civic engagement and social uplift.



F. A. E. Price
President Ceylon Wireless Club 1938

F. A. E. Price was a notable figure in local amateur radio and wildlife circles during the 1930s.

Role and Context:

F. A. E. Price was a prominent member of the radio community in Ceylon in the 1930s, active in the era when the Ceylon Wireless Club and early Colombo radio experiments were taking place.

Activity Period:

His name appears in literature related to Ceylon's amateur radio and field sports (specifically wildlife writing) during the mid-to-late 1930s.

Significance:

While Edward Harper is recognized as the "Father of Broadcasting in Ceylon" (starting in 1925), individuals like F.A.E. Price were part of the dedicated group of British and Ceylonese radio enthusiasts that drove the development of radio in the colony.

Footnotes

1. Ceylon Daily News, 15 June 1938, 3.
2. C. P. L. Gunawardana, This is Colombo Calling (Colombo: Perali Publications, 1990), 55.
3. Department of Broadcasting, Souvenir: Fifty Years of Radio Ceylon, 1925–1975 (Colombo: Government Press, 1975), 28.
4. Ceylon Daily News, 15 June 1938, 3.
5. Nimal Chandrasiri, History of Broadcasting in Sri Lanka: 1925–1975 (Colombo: Department; of Information, 1980), 81.
6. D. M. Colombage, Guwan Viduli Vanshaya (Colombo: M. D. Gunasena & Co., 1989), 79–80.
7. Ceylon Daily News, 15 June 1938, 3.

July 1938

The First Electrical Recording of "Magul Bera" by S. Panibharatha: A Technological and Cultural Milestone in Sri Lankan Broadcasting

In July 1938, the Colombo Broadcasting Service achieved a landmark in% both technological advancement and cultural preservation with the first electrical recording of a traditional Magul Bera performance, rendered by the youthful drummer S. Panibharatha.[1]This event represented a turning point in the documentation and transmission of Sri Lanka's musical heritage, accomplished through the adoption of modern recording technology. The recording was made on an MSS-type disc recorder, developed by the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) in 1936, which allowed the station to experiment with acetate-coated discs and establish a new framework for archival and broadcast practices.[2]

The initiative was spearheaded by D. P. Jayasekera, a telecommunications engineer who had returned to Ceylon in 1936 following advanced training abroad.[3] After joining the Radio Division in mid-1937, Jayasekera introduced a structured programme of staff training in electrical recording methods. The acquisition of the MSS recorder, with its single turntable mechanism, provided the necessary equipment for experimental and instructional sessions at the Colombo Broadcasting Station.[4]

In these early efforts to test the station's new recording capacities, Jayasekera collaborated with leading intellectuals and cultural figures. Among them was Venerable Rambukwelle Sri Siddhartha Maha Thera, a distinguished lecturer in Oriental Languages at Ceylon University College, celebrated for his eloquent recitations of Pāli gāthās, Sinhala vannam, and prose compositions suited for ceremonial occasions.[5] These recordings, which also featured traditional artists such as Urapola Kiribanda, were incorporated into the broadcasting schedule, thereby preserving indigenous liturgical and performative traditions while making them accessible to a wider radio audience.[6]

When testing rhythmic and dynamic forms such as drumming, Jayasekera turned to J. D. A. Perera, an eminent educator in the visual and performing arts. Perera recommended the gifted young drummer S. Panibharatha, then still in his late teens, as an ideal performer for this pioneering experiment.

Bharatha's rendering of a Magul Bera sequence an auspicious ritual drumming form deeply embedded in Sinhalese ceremonial culture became the first instance of this traditional performance being captured through electrical recording by the Colombo Broadcasting Service.

Biographical Note on, Sittaracharige Panis Algama Known as S. Panibharatha (1920–1991)

S. Panibharatha (1920–1991) occupies a preeminent place in the history of Sri Lankan traditional dance and drumming. Trained from an early age in the Kandyan performing arts, he displayed exceptional talent in the Magul Bera and other ritual drumming sequences central to Sinhala ceremonial culture. His formative years coincided with the rise of cultural revival movements in the 1930s, which sought to preserve and modernize

indigenous artistic traditions. It was in this context that the Colombo Broadcasting Service recorded his Magul Bera performance in July 1938, when he was still in his late teens, marking both his earliest association with mass media and a landmark in the documentation of Sri Lanka's musical heritage.

Over the following decades, Bharatha established himself as one of the foremost exponents of Kandyan dance and drumming, combining rigorous traditional training with a capacity for innovation. He became widely respected for his mastery of ves dance rituals and his ability to integrate the drumming traditions of the berava caste into public performance and pedagogy. His artistry extended beyond the ritual sphere into theatre and modern stage performance, where he collaborated with leading cultural reformers of the mid-twentieth century.

Panibharatha's career also assumed an international dimension. He performed extensively abroad, bringing Kandyan dance and drumming to audiences in Europe, Asia, and North America. Through these tours he served as an unofficial cultural ambassador, situating Sri Lankan traditional performance within global artistic circuits. His contributions were not limited to performance alone: he was instrumental in training a new generation of dancers and drummers, thereby ensuring the continuity of the Kandyan tradition within modern institutional frameworks.



Sittaracharige Panis Algama known as S. Panibharatha

Renowned Sri Lankan classical dancer S. Panibharatha in traditional Kandyan dance attire. Hec is a legendary figure in Sri Lankan arts, known for popularizing Kandyan dance.

Panibharatha was instrumental in bringing traditional dance to a wider audience, notably performing at Radio Ceylon at a young age. He was one of the few Kandyan dancers whose image was featured in major local newspaper pictorials.

The photograph captures him in the elaborate ceremonial head-dress and jewelry characteristic of the Kandyan dance form.

Kandyan dance is considered the classical dance tradition of Sri Lanka and was traditionally performed only by men

By the time of his passing in 1991, Panibharatha had come to symbolize the vitality of Sri Lanka's dance and drumming heritage. His early association with broadcasting in the late 1930s demonstrates the role of radio in both preserving traditional art forms and elevating the careers of emerging artists.

Footnotes:

1. Department of Broadcasting, Souvenir: Fifty Years of Radio Ceylon, 1925–1975 (Colombo: Government Press, 1975), 32.
2. Ibid.
3. Nimal Chandrasiri, History of Broadcasting in Sri Lanka: 1925–1975 (Colombo: Department of Information, 1980), 87.
4. Ibid. 5. Ibid., 88.
6. Department of Broadcasting, Souvenir: Fifty Years of Radio Ceylon, 32.

August 1938

The First Live Broadcast and Recording of the Kandy Esala Perahera via Telephone Trunk Lines: A Milestone in Long-Distance Outside Broadcasting

In August 1938, the Colombo Broadcasting Service achieved a landmark in both technological innovation and cultural dissemination by successfully carrying out the first live broadcast and recording of the Kandy Esala Perahera.[1] This occasion marked the inaugural use of long-distance outside broadcasting in Ceylon, accomplished through the employment of the Colombo Kandy telephone trunk lines. The achievement set a precedent for remote event coverage and signaled the Service's growing technical sophistication.

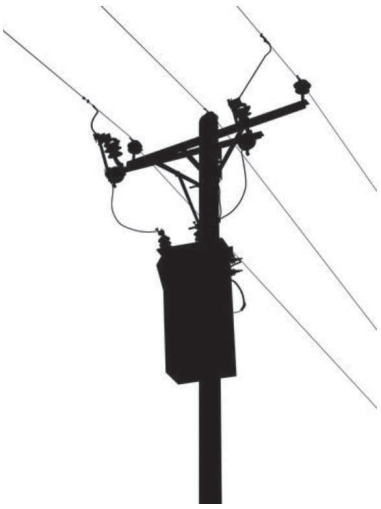
The proposal originated with Engineer D. P. Jayasekera, who had already overseen several technical innovations at the Colombo station. Seeking to provide staff with practical training in long-distance audio transmission, Jayasekera suggested to the Chief Telecommunications Engineer, John Shillitoe, that the annual Esala Perahera in Kandy be broadcast live using trunk line infrastructure.[2] Shillitoe approved the plan and engaged the services of F. A. E. Price, a European planter from Elkaduwa and an enthusiastic supporter of broadcasting, to deliver live commentary.[3]

The second-floor balcony of the Queen's Hotel in Kandy, overlooking the Perahera route, was selected as the broadcast point.[4] From this elevated vantage, microphones were suspended over the street to capture the ambient sounds of the procession drums, conch shells, elephants, and dancers while Price provided vivid real-time narration.[5]
These feeds were carried via the telephone trunk circuits to the Broadcasting Station at Torrington Square, Colombo, and then relayed to the transmitters at Welikada for island-wide dissemination.[6]

The technical preparations for this ambitious undertaking were extensive. District Inspectors of Telecommunications conducted a full inspection of the Colombo Kandy trunk line, ensuring signal quality and line stability. All work crews along the route were mobilized to correct faults and implement permanent repairs.[7] **Trial transmissions were personally supervised by A. Nadarasa, Divisional Engineer (Radio), assisted by H. B. F. de Silva, District Inspector of Telecommunications at Welikada.[8] Additional technical oversight was provided by E. C. Wijekoon, W. R. Ratnatunga, and A. W. Dharmapala, who coordinated monitoring from both Kandy and Colombo to ensure broadcast fidelity.[9]**Significantly, Dharmapala supplied headphones to Shillitoe at the Queen's Hotel, enabling the Chief Engineer to monitor the live transmission as received on site, thus confirming its quality in real time.[10]

The broadcast of the 1938 Esala Perahera demonstrated not only the technical maturity of the Colombo Broadcasting Service but also the capacity of radio to integrate diverse cultural experiences into the national consciousness. By bringing the sacred and festive spectacle of Kandy's streets into households across the island, the Service transformed radio from an urban elite pastime into a medium of cultural unity. The event





Telephone Trunk Line

1938 identified as a single, famous historical project.

However, 1938 was a significant year for the advancement of telephone technology, particularly regarding automatic switching and early digital concepts, which relate to the development of trunk lines (long-distance circuits connecting exchanges).

Here is a brief overview of key developments in 1938:

1XB Crossbar Switching System (1938):

The first No. 1 Crossbar (1XB) switching system, developed by Bell System, became operational in February 1938 in Brooklyn, New York. This was a major step forward from manual switchboards, allowing for faster, more efficient, and automated routing of calls between subscribers and across networks.

Early Digital Theory (1938) :

Alec Reeves at ITT in Paris developed the theory for Pulse Code Modulation (PCM) in 1938. This theoretical framework allowed analog voice signals to be converted into digital signals for efficient transmission, which later revolutionized telephone trunking (interoffice lines).

Expansion of Networks: *During this late 1930s period, telephone networks were rapidly moving from small, local setups to large-scale, interconnected networks, with trunk lines enabling long-distance communication and automatic switching replacing manual labor.*

In summary, 1938 marked the transition towards modern, automated, and digitized telephone infrastructure, replacing slower, manual, or electro-mechanical methods.

highlighted an ethos central to early South Asian broadcasting the fusion of colonial technological infrastructure with the living traditions of local culture.

Footnotes

1. Department of Broadcasting, Souvenir: Fifty Years of Radio Ceylon, 1925–1975 (Colombo: Government Press, 1975), 34.
2. Ibid.
3. C. P. L. Gunawardana, This is Colombo Calling (Colombo: Perali Publications, 1990), 60-61
4. Ibid. 5. Ibid. 6. Ibid. 7. Ibid.,61. 8. Ibid. 9. Ibid. 10. Ibid.

23 August 1938

The Re-Broadcast of the Kandy Esala Perahera by the BBC Empire Service: An Early Instance of International Cultural Transmission

In mid-1938, the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) expressed its interest in broadcasting the Kandy Esala Perahera Sri Lanka's most renowned Buddhist pageant on its Empire Service. The BBC formally approached the Director of the Ceylon Tourists Bureau, Cyril E. de Pinto, C.C.S., requesting an audio recording suitable for rebroadcast on the final night of the Perahera.[1] Recognizing the international cultural significance of such an undertaking, de Pinto immediately consulted the Postmaster General and Director of Broadcasting, J. R. Walters, C.C.S., who in turn referred the matter to the Chief Telecommunications Engineer, John Shillitoe.[2]

Recalling the live outside broadcast and field recording of the Perahera carried out in 1937, Shillitoe entrusted the task to Engineer D. P. Jayasekera of the Colombo Broadcasting Station.[3] Upon reviewing the matter with de Pinto, Jayasekera advised that the 1937 recordings were technically unsuitable for international rebroadcast, citing their limited acoustic quality.[4] Given the short timeframe and the logistical impossibility of recording the 1938 Perahera live and transmitting it overseas in time, Jayasekera proposed an innovative alternative: to recreate the sounds of the procession within the controlled environment of the Colombo Broadcasting Station's studio.[5]

This reconstruction combined re-recordings with selected segments from earlier field material in order to simulate a faithful auditory impression of the Perahera. Ambient soundscapes were carefully recreated, including the rhythmic cadences of ceremonial drumming, chants performed by the Kavikara Maduwa (traditional court musicians), and the jingling of elephant bells.[6] To secure authenticity, traditional drummers and musicians from the Dalada Maligawa (Temple of the Sacred Tooth Relic) were brought to Colombo. Their participation was facilitated through the support of Kandyan dignitaries, notably Sir Jayatilaka Cudah Ratwatte, Chief Adigar, who endorsed the project and delegated assistance through the Diyawadana Nilame, Tikiri Banda Ratwatte, Dissawa.[7] The Chief Adigar's sons, Abeyrathna Cudah Ratwatte and Leonard Ratwatte, managed the logistical arrangements, including the performers' transport and accommodation at the residence of de Pinto in Colombo.[8]

At the Broadcasting Station in Torrington Square, studio engineers including Inspectors of Telecommunications B. S. Seneviratne and A. W. Direkze conducted high-quality electrical recordings, while control operations were managed by Inspectors D. S. Kasturiaratchi and M. Wimalaratne.[9] In one particularly creative measure, studio assistants simulated the movement of elephants by walking through the corridors with metal bells to reproduce the characteristic ceremonial soundscape.[10] The final edited production, blending live performance with studio-crafted effects, was dispatched to London for integration into the BBC's Empire Service.



Queen's Hotel Kandy

The Queen's Hotel in Kandy, a historic colonial-style property with over 160 years of history, was operating as a premier accommodation provider in 1938.

Originally the Dullawe Walawwa residence and later Ceylon Rifle Regiment barracks, by the late 1930s it was established as a grand hotel in the heart of Kandy.

1938 Context:

As one of the oldest hotels in Sri Lanka, it was a central hub for visitors during the British colonial period. Architecture: The building features grand, colonial-era architecture that has been maintained as a heritage site.

Location:

The hotel is situated in the heart of Kandy city, offering access to major sites.

History:

It was originally built as a residence for the Last King of Ceylon, Sri Wickrama RajaSinghe, before being converted into military barracks and eventually a hotel.

By 2025,

The Queen's Hotel Kandy is positioned to be recognized as a ***world-class luxury heritage hotel,*** *following extensive modernization programs aimed at elevating its status.* ***While traditionally considered a 3-star colonial property,*** *its upgrading efforts focus on providing high-end luxury services.*

The rebroadcast of the recreated Kandy Esala Perahera on 23 August 1938 was widely regarded as a success, marking one of the earliest instances of Sri Lanka's cultural heritage being transmitted to a global audience through radio.[11] The BBC subsequently conveyed its appreciation to C. E. de Pinto for his central role in facilitating and coordinating the project.[12]

Footnotes:

1. Department of Broadcasting, Souvenir: Fifty Years of Radio Ceylon, 1925–1975 (Colombo: Government Press, 1975), 36.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. C. P. L. Gunawardana, This is Colombo Calling (Colombo: Perali Publications, 1990), 60.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid.,61.
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid.
11. Ibid.
12. Ibid.

October 1938

Radio Exhibition to Popularize Broadcasting in Ceylon

In October 1938, the Ceylon and South Indian Wireless Association organized a three-day public exhibition at the Ceylon University College premises in Colombo, running from 6 to 8 October.[1] The primary objective of the exhibition was to familiarize the general public with radio technology and to stimulate interest in the domestic use of broadcasting equipment. To encourage innovation and amateur craftsmanship, a cash prize of Rs. 30 was offered for the best home-built radio receiver displayed during the event.



Ceylon University College

Several commercial and technical firms participated, showcasing a range of radio apparatus and equipment. These included Cargills Ltd. (Seedees Cine Radio Company), Walkers and Greig Ltd., Fentons Ltd., Medical Stores, Kollupitiya, Radio Engineers, Millers Ltd., British Electricity Company, E. B. Creasy and Company, and Lanka Engineers.[2] Many of these exhibits were demonstrated live to illustrate their functionality. Additionally, a segment of the exhibition was dedicated to vintage and historically significant radio equipment, highlighting both the technological and cultural value of earlier broadcasting apparatus. Members of the public were encouraged to contribute antique equipment to this section.

In parallel, a separate prize of Rs. 30 was announced for newly manufactured, locally produced radios capable of operating on either battery or electricity. Participants were required to submit their entries to the Honorary Secretary at P.O. Box 2008 prior to 5 October 1938. The organizing committee further indicated that participating companies could award prizes according to the value of the equipment they donated and solicited suggestions from the public to enhance the event's success.[3]

The 1938 exhibition represents an early institutional effort in Ceylon to popularize radio broadcasting, foster local innovation, and cultivate public engagement with modern communication technology.

Footnotes:

1. "ගුවන් විදුලි ප්‍රදර්ශනයක්," Dinamina, 6 October 1938, 6.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.

November 1938

Reassignment of Call Signs for the Colombo Broadcasting Service

By late 1938, the Colombo Broadcasting Station underwent a significant administrative and technical reorganization concerning its call sign designations. Since the station's inception, it had utilized the call sign VPB, a designation concurrently employed for ship-to-shore maritime communications. This dual usage likely resulted in operational ambiguities, particularly as Ceylon's broadcasting infrastructure expanded. In November 1938, regulatory authorities addressed the issue by reserving VPB exclusively for maritime communications and assigning distinct call signs to terrestrial broadcasting transmitters.[1]

The medium wave transmitter, operating on the 428.5-metre band (equivalent to 700 kilocycles per second), was assigned the call sign ZOH, while the short wave transmitter on the 48.7-metre band (6160 kilocycles per second) received the call sign ZOI.[2]

These changes aligned Ceylon's broadcasting operations with internationally recognized nomenclature used throughout the British Empire, thereby improving both technical coordination and signal identification for domestic and overseas audiences.

Short wave transmissions, which had been conducted experimentally since their inception, were officially discontinued by the end of 1938.[3] This cessation marked a strategic retreat from experimental broadcasting, possibly due to technical limitations, financial considerations, or a policy decision to concentrate on enhancing medium wave coverage for the domestic listener.

The reassignment of call signs in November 1938 illustrates a pivotal stage in the professionalization of broadcasting in Ceylon, reflecting both its integration with global broadcasting standards and the maturation of institutional practices within the Colombo Broadcasting Station.

Footnotes:

1. "Call Sign of Colombo Broadcasting Station," Ceylon Government Broadcasting Department Records, November 1938.
2. C. P. L. Gunawardana, This is Colombo Calling (Colombo: Perali Publications, 1990), 62.
3. Ibid.

ZOH

Colombo Brodcasting Service, Ceylon

ZOI

The medium wave transmitter, operating on the 428.5-metre band (equivalent to 700 kilocycles per second), was assigned the call sign ZOH, while the short wave transmitter on the 48.7-metre band (6160 kilocycles per second) received the call sign ZOI.

Call Signs and Meaning of ZOH

In the context of radio broadcasting in Ceylon (now Sri Lanka), call signs functioned as official, unique, and internationally recognized identification codes for radio stations, mandated by standards such as those from the International Telecommunication Union (ITU).

Early Call Signs:

Radio broadcasting began experimentally in Ceylon in 1923 under the Telegraph Department. In 1925, a regular service was established under the call sign ***"Colombo Calling".***

Wartime & Post-war Shifts:

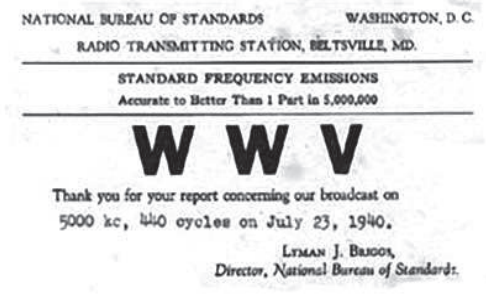
During World War II, the British military took over, operating the station as ***Radio SEAC (South East Asia Command).*** *Following the war, this transitioned into Radio Ceylon on October 1, 1949.*

Significance:

These identifiers helped distinguish Ceylon's broadcasts, which grew to be the first in Asia and a dominant force in South Asian broadcasting.

Meaning of ZOH:

ZOH was the call sign assigned to the shortwave transmitter utilized by Radio Ceylon. It was a well-known identifier for listeners across the Indian subcontinent and South-East Asia tuning into Radio Ceylon's shortwave transmissions.


NATIONAL BUREAU OF STANDARDS WASHINGTON, D. C.
RADIO TRANSMITTING STATION, BELTSVILLE, MD.
STANDARD FREQUENCY EMISSIONS
Accurate to Better Than 1 Part in 5,000,000
W W V
Thank you for your report concerning our broadcast on 5000 kc, 440 cycles on July 23, 1940.
LYMAN J. BRIGGS,
Director, National Bureau of Standards.

This is a QSL card sent by the U.S. National Bureau of Standards (WWV) to a listener who confirmed reception of their radio broadcast in July 1940.

1938

Colonial Office Recommendations and the Suspension of Short Wave Broadcasting in Ceylon

In 1938, a significant consultation occurred between John Shillito, Chief Posts and Telegraphs Engineer of Ceylon, and the Radio Sub-Committee of the Colonial Office in London.[1] This meeting represented a key moment in the technical and policy-oriented evolution of broadcasting in the colony. As the British Empire sought to standardize and rationalize radio communications across its territories, strategic dialogues with local engineering authorities were instrumental in shaping the development of colonial broadcasting infrastructure.

Following the consultation, the Colonial Office Radio Sub-Committee recommended that radio broadcasting in Ceylon be primarily conducted via the medium wave system.[2] This decision was influenced by considerations such as greater signal reliability over shorter distances, improved compatibility with existing radio receivers among the local population, and reduced operational costs relative to high-frequency short wave transmitters.

Consequently, the experimental short wave broadcasts, intermittently conducted since the mid-1930s, were formally suspended later in 1938.[3] While short wave had provided the potential for long-distance transmission and offered strategic value for imperial communication and diaspora outreach, it was judged less suitable for the practical requirements of domestic broadcasting in Ceylon at that time.

Analytical Note:

This policy shift highlights the increasing institutionalization and localization of broadcasting in Ceylon, emphasizing domestic needs over imperial or experimental ambitions. It also demonstrates the collaborative interaction between local technical leadership and imperial policy-making in shaping the trajectory of media development within British colonies.

Footnotes:

1. "Meeting between Chief Telecommunications Engineer Mr. John Shillito and the Colonial Office Radio Sub-Committee," Ceylon Telecommunications Department Internal Report, 1938.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.

1938

Linguistic Sensitivity and the Mispronunciation of Sinhala Names by English Announcers

In 1938, an incident occurred that underscored the growing awareness of linguistic and cultural sensitivity within colonial broadcasting in Ceylon. During the broadcast of the English-language news bulletin on the Colombo Broadcasting Station, announcer Mr. E. Y. G. Rankine, an Anglo-Indian, inadvertently mispronounced the name of a Sinhala village Kahatagasdigiliya (කහටගස්ඩිගිලිය).[1]

Though Mr. Rankine was known for consulting his Sinhala colleagues to obtain correct pronunciations, on this occasion, an error slipped through during his delivery.

The mispronunciation was noted by Mr. J. R. Walters, Ceylon Civil Servant (C.C.S.), who then served as Postmaster General and Director of Broadcasting. Mr. Walters, equipped with an official radio receiver for monitoring purposes, listened to the broadcast and subsequently issued a humorous but pointed memo the following morning. In it, he phonetically spelled the correct form 'කහටගස් දිගිලිය' "Kahatagasdigiliya" and instructed: "Mr. Rankine to repeat the correct pronunciation twenty-five times before he gets up from his bed tomorrow morning."[2]

Though light in tone, the memo reflects a broader administrative commitment to linguistic accuracy and cultural respect in public broadcasting. Notably, Mr. Walters, an Englishman by origin, had served in several provinces of the island and had made a personal effort to familiarize himself with local place names, including those of lesser-known villages.

This episode is illustrative of the colonial ethos among certain civil servants of the time who went beyond bureaucratic expectations to engage with indigenous languages and customs. Indeed, there is anecdotal evidence that European officers in the Ceylon Civil Service of the earlier decades received direct instruction in Sinhala from local scholars.



Mr. E. Y. G. Rankine

Mr. E. Y. G. Rankine, of Anglo-Indian origin, holds the distinction of being the first English-language announcer of the Colombo Broadcasting Service (CBS) to be appointed on a permanent and pensionable basis.

This appointment represents a significant institutional development in the early professionalisation of broadcasting in Ceylon, indicating a formal recognition of the announcer's role within the organisational and administrative hierarchy of the service.

Rankine's elevation to permanent status was founded upon his demonstrated professional competence and reflects the evolving standards of recruitment, status, and occupational legitimacy within the colonial broadcasting establishment.

One popular (perhaps apocryphal) story recounts how such a civil servant once addressed his servant with the grammatically elaborate and idiomatically rich line: "එම්බල මෙහෙකරුව, මෙහි එව, පසුගිය දිවා කාලයේදී කාලක්‍රියා කළ සූකර පෝතකයා නුගරුක මුල භූමදාන කරව". an example of both linguistic immersion and performative command of classical Sinhala style.[3]

Analytical Note:

Such moments highlight the intersection of language, governance, and broadcasting in the colonial period, demonstrating that radio was not only a technological tool but also a medium through which cultural negotiations and identity politics were subtly played out.

Footnotes:

1. Ceylon Broadcasting Archives, "Mispronunciation Incident Log," 1938.
2. Memo from J. R. Walters to E. Y. G. Rankine, October 1938, Telecommunications Department Records, National Archives of Sri Lanka.
3. Oral tradition among retired Ceylon Civil Service officers; anecdote recorded in P. B. Alwis Perera, Reminiscences of Early Broadcasting in Ceylon (Colombo: Sarasavi Publishers, 1972), 94.

December 1938

Growth in Radio Licensing

By the close of December 1938, the number of radio licenses issued in Ceylon demonstrated a marked increase, reflecting the expanding reach and popularity of broadcasting across the colony. While a total of 4,911 licenses had been issued in 1937, the figure rose to 6,007 by the end of 1938, representing an annual increment of 1,096 licenses.[1]

This growth in licensing indicates not only the increasing accessibility of radio receivers among the general public but also the widening appeal of broadcast content, encompassing news, educational programmes, and religious transmissions. The data provides a quantitative measure of the deepening integration of radio into the domestic and cultural life of Ceylonese society during the late 1930s.

Footnotes:

1. Postmaster General of Ceylon, Annual Administrative Report for the Year 1938 (Colombo: Government Press, 1939), 21.

December 1938

Colombo Broadcasting Service: Progress and Milestones 1938

I. Programme Innovation and International Engagement

1. Introduction of International Musical Programming

In July 1938, the Colombo Broadcasting Service expanded its musical horizons through live broadcasts featuring the American entertainer Dr. Jazz, who introduced syncopated jazz piano to Ceylonese audiences. His performances on 16 and 30 July, relayed live from the Regal Theatre in Colombo, demonstrated the Service's openness to global musical trends and reflected a cosmopolitan outlook within the late colonial broadcasting environment. These broadcasts marked a significant departure from primarily regional and imperial musical content.

II. Technological Advancement and Cultural Documentation

2. Electrical Recording of Indigenous Musical Traditions

A landmark technological achievement was realized in July 1938 with the first electrical recording of a traditional Magul Bera performance. The recording was executed by the young drummer S. Pani Bharatha under the technical supervision of engineer D. P. Jayasekera, utilizing an MSS-type disc recording system supplied by the BBC. This initiative represented a major advancement in the preservation and documentation of Sri Lankan musical heritage through modern recording and broadcasting technology.

III. Outside Broadcasting and Infrastructure Innovation

3. First Long-Distance Outside Broadcast

In August 1938, the Colombo Broadcasting Service successfully conducted its first long-distance live outside broadcast by relaying the Kandy Esala Perahera via the Colombo Kandy trunk telephone lines. Broadcasting from the Queen's Hotel in Kandy, engineer D. P. Jayasekera and commentator F. A. E. Price coordinated the transmission to the Torrington Square studios. This event marked a pioneering use of national telecommunications infrastructure for remote cultural coverage.

IV. International Cultural Transmission

4. International Dissemination via the BBC Empire Service

On 23 August 1938, a studio-reconstructed version of the Kandy Esala Perahera combining live field recordings with controlled studio effects was rebroadcast by the BBC Empire Service. This transmission constituted one of the earliest instances in which Sri Lankan cultural heritage was disseminated internationally via radio, positioning Ceylon within broader imperial and global broadcasting networks.

V. Public Engagement and Technological Popularization

5. Promotion of Radio Technology and Amateur Innovation

From 6 to 8 October 1938, the Ceylon and South Indian Wireless Association organized a public radio exhibition at the Ceylon University College. The exhibition aimed to popularize radio technology and stimulate public interest in broadcasting. Cash prizes awarded for the best home-built and locally manufactured radio receivers reflected growing enthusiasm for amateur experimentation and indigenous technical innovation.

VI. Religious Broadcasting Developments

6. Institutionalization of Buddhist Religious Broadcasting

Formal broadcasting of Seth Pirith protective Buddhist chants was initiated in 1938 under the supervision of Shirley da Silva. This marked a transition from lay-led performances to monk-led recitations and later facilitated temple-based live relays. The initiative signified the institutional recognition of religious broadcasting as a component of public service radio.

VII. Expansion of Audience Reach

7. Growth in Radio Licensing

By December 1938, the number of licensed radio receivers had risen to 6,007, representing an increase of 1,096 licences over the previous year. This growth reflected the increasing affordability of receivers, expanding public confidence in radio broadcasting, and the medium's deeper integration into Ceylonese social life.

Setbacks and Challenges

VIII. Administrative, Technical, and Policy Constraints

1. Administrative and Staffing Limitations

Operational bottlenecks were evident in requests for additional clerical staff and the installation of a second telephone line in the Programme Office. While an additional telephone line was eventually authorized, staffing shortages persisted, reflecting fiscal restraint and stringent administrative oversight.

2. Broadcasting Policy and Technical Limitations

Following recommendations from the Colonial Office, the Service was advised to concentrate primarily on medium-wave broadcasting. Consequently, experimental shortwave transmissions were curtailed, a decision that, while technically pragmatic, limited the potential for long-distance and imperial outreach.

3. Linguistic and Cultural Sensitivity Challenges

Instances of mispronunciation of Sinhala personal and place names by English-language announcers underscored the need for greater linguistic competence and cultural awareness in broadcast presentation. These incidents highlighted ongoing challenges in managing multilingual content within a colonial administrative framework.

4. Discontinuation of Shortwave Broadcasting

Experimental shortwave transmissions were officially discontinued by the end of 1938 due to technical limitations and financial considerations, further constraining international broadcasting ambitions.

5. Resource-Intensive Nature of Technological Innovation

Pioneering outside broadcasts and studio reconstructions for international rebroadcast required intensive coordination and engineering resources, revealing the high operational demands associated with technological experimentation.

Concluding Assessment

The year 1938 stands as a landmark in the institutional and technological evolution of the Colombo Broadcasting Service. Technologically, it witnessed significant innovations in recording, outside broadcasting, and international relay. Culturally, the Service advanced both the preservation and global dissemination of Sri Lankan traditions, while embracing international musical influences. Socio-politically and economically, expanding listener engagement and public participation signaled radio's growing societal relevance. Nevertheless, administrative constraints, policy limitations, and infrastructural pressures underscored the growing pains of a maturing colonial broadcasting institution. Collectively, 1938 reflects a year of ambitious experimentation balanced by cautious institutional management.

1939

01 January 1939

Highlights from the Radio Times

The programming schedule published in the Radio Times of January 1939 offers a representative snapshot of the diversity and ambition of radio broadcasting in colonial Ceylon during the late 1930s. The content included locally produced features, children's concerts, career talks, and dramatic performances, as well as recorded programmes from the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC).

Featured Programmes

Among the notable items broadcast that month was Scrapbook for 1903, a BBC-recorded programme aired on the 15th of January. Other featured broadcasts included Consider, Your Verdict by Peter Batten (aired Mondays), and The Old Contemptibles, scheduled for the 22nd and 29th. Additional performances included Songs, Grave and Gay by Lorna Taylor (22nd), readings by Master Tony Gabriel (26th), and A Northern Evening from Brobleton (8th). A review of the dog show was presented by B. W. Gillespie (8th), and the popular PCJ Happy Station's Programme was aired on both the 11th and the 18th of the month.[1]



Miss. Victoreen Cramer

Children's Concerts

Children's programming occupied a prominent position, with concerts scheduled every Wednesday. These included presentations by the Station Superintendent (11th), **Victoreen Cramer** (18th), and Mrs. R. A. Spencer-Sheppard (25th).[2]

"On the Job" Career Series

One of the most socially instructive series of the month was the "On the Job" segment, which aimed to introduce career paths to the youth of Ceylon. Talks directed toward male audiences included:

"The Bar" by Dr. R. F. Dias, W. A., LL.D., D.J. Colombo (16th),
"Planting" by R. C. Scott, Chairman, Planters' Association of Ceylon (30th),
"Medicine" by **Dr. Lucian de Zilwa** (9th),
"Flying" by Flight-Lt. R. Duncanson (23rd).



Dr. (Mrs) Mary Helen Irwin Ratnam

Talks aimed at women featured:

"Home Nursing" by Mrs. V. Gabriel (13th),
"Medicine" by **Dr. (Mrs.) Mary H. Rutnam** (20th),
"Teaching" by **Mrs. C. L. Motwani** (27th).[3]

Entertainment and Dramatic Offerings

Interactive content included the Guess the Artist series, broadcast every Tuesday and Thursday from 8:15 to 8:30 p.m., with prizes awarded to successful participants.[4]

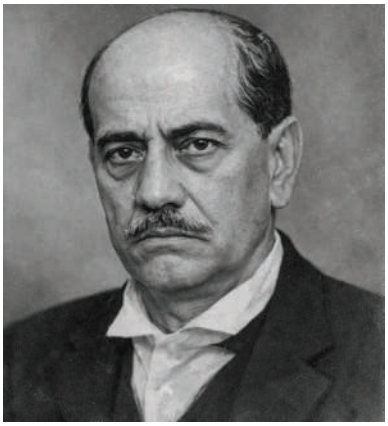


Mrs. Clara L. Motwani

Clara Motwani was a highly respected educator and principal of Buddhist girls' schools in Sri Lanka.

She was one of the most famous educationists of her time in the country.

The national honour ***"Deshabandu"*** *was awarded in recognition of her significant contributions to education in Sri Lank*



Dr. Lucian de Zilwa

The month's dramatic productions featured both local and BBC plays. Local performances included works by Peter Batten and his Radio Players (6th), J. S. M. Paterson (8th), Rev. J. S. H. Edirisingha (13th), Agnes Marshall (20th), and Vincent Cox (27th).
BBC plays included If I Were You by **P. G. Wodehouse** (1st), Murder in the Crisis and The River Gildeth (3rd and 17th), Storm in a Teacup (17th), and Hands Across the Sea by Noël Coward (6th).[5]

Music Recitals

The musical programming was equally diverse, showcasing both international and local talent. Song recitals were given by Arnold Matters (1st), O. Peter Rust (11th), Lorna Taylor and the Foenander brothers—Winston and Orwell (22nd), Mrs. Jas. T. Young (25th), and Mrs. Esma Joseph (30th).

Cello and piano recitals featured Norimo Semino (Cello) and John Pauer (Piano) from the BBC (2nd), as well as Beryl Bartholomeusz (Cello) and Mrs. Carmen Herft (Piano) (15th).

Church organ recitals were performed by Mrs. R. A. Spencer-Sheppard (1st), a BBC item (8th), and **Victoreen Cramer** (22nd). Piano recitals were presented by Rawicz and Landauer (1st), John Simons (BBC) (14th), Patricia Rossborough (15th), Mrs. Flower Munasinghe (18th), and Analeen Claasz (22nd).[6]

Footnotes:

1. Radio Times, January 1939, "Features," Colombo Broadcasting Station.
2. Ibid., "Children's Concerts."
3. Ibid., "On the Job Series."
4. Ibid., "Guess the Artist Series."
5. Ibid., "Plays (Local and BBC)."
6. Ibid., "Song, Piano, Cello, and Organ Recitals."

January 1939

Supplementary Programming Highlights

In addition to the core schedule, the Radio Times for January 1939 reveals a rich and eclectic mix of musical, dramatic, educational, and religious broadcasts that exemplified the evolving cultural role of radio in colonial Ceylon.

Syncopated and Instrumental Music

A. R. Bartholomeusz performed syncopated music on the 5th, while the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) contributed similar items on the 2nd, 9th, and 25th.[1] Cinema organ recitals featured Reginald Dixon (2nd), Joseph Seal (3rd), and a BBC broadcast on the 24th. Instrumental performances by local and international artists included violinist Eileen Rodrigo (15th), banjoist Dedrick Nagel (13th), mandolinist Mrs. R. V. Burns (22nd), and a BBC accordion recital (17th). Additional violin and cello recitals were aired by the BBC on the 23rd and 11th, respectively.[2]

Hotel Bands and Promenade Concerts

Two prominent hotel bands made regular appearances: Nick's Versatile Six performed on the 4th, 8th, 14th, 18th, 22nd, and 28th, including Promenade Concerts on the 8th and 22nd. A. Felice and His Blue Star Band featured on the 7th, 11th, 15th, 21st, and 29th, and were part of Symphony Concerts on the 15th and 29th.[3]

Talks and Public Lectures

The BBC broadcast several informative talks, including London's New Year by Anthony Weymouth (1st), This Racing Business by Lord Brassey (3rd and subsequent Tuesdays), World Affairs (Wednesdays), Under Big Ben by Howard Marshall (6th), and The Royal Air Force by Capt. H. Balfour (9th and 16th). A short story reading was aired on the 12th.[4]

Locally produced talks included Is Life Worth Living? by J. J. Virgo (21st), Periodic Health Examination by Dr. O. E. R. Abeyaratne (23rd), Trincomalee by Annesley de Silva (8th), and The Tappal Bag, a regular Thursday segment. Other features included With Silent Friends by Shirley da Silva (Mondays) and B. W. Gillespie's Review of the Kandy Dog Show (8th).[5]

Sports Coverage

The station carried live commentaries and sports reports, including a Football Association Cup match (7th), the England-Wales rugby match (21st), Colombo Race commentaries (28th), and a general Sports Talk (29th).[6]

Religious Services and Epilogues

A series of church services reflected the religious diversity of the island. Broadcasts originated from St. Philip Neri's Church, Pettah (1st, 22nd), St. Michael's and All Angels (1st), the Dutch Reformed Church (8th), Christ Church, Galle Face (8th), Colpetty Methodist Church (15th), St. Peter's Garrison Church (15th), the Salvation Army (22nd), Cinnamon Gardens Baptist Church (29th), and St. Andrew's Scots Kirk (29th).[7]

Evening epilogues were delivered by Rev. J. E. Hardy (15th), Rev. R. V. Metzeling (22nd), Rev. G. H. P. Leembruggen (8th), and pre-recorded segments aired on the 1st and 29th.[8]

BBC Cultural Features

Several BBC features contributed to the enrichment of the cultural broadcasting landscape. These included In Town Tonight (Mondays), Musical Games (3rd), Madrigals and Part Songs (23rd), and Calling All Dogs (6th). Music-focused features such as Steamboat (7th, 21st), Italian Pianoforte Music (7th), Music Hall (17th), and the operatic performance Chu Chin Chow (23rd) were also broadcast. Other notable items included Burns Songs (25th), Figaro, Act II (28th), Songs of the Clans (14th), and Hansel and Gretel (14th).[9]

Footnotes:

1. Radio Times, January 1939, "Syncopated Music."
2. Ibid., "Cinema Organ Recitals" and "Other Instrumental Items."
3. Ibid., "Hotel Bands."
4. Ibid., "Talks (BBC)."
5. Ibid., "Talks (Local)."
6. Ibid., "Sports Items."
7. Ibid., "Church Services."
8. Ibid., "Epilogues."
9. Ibid., "BBC Features."

January 1939

Selected BBC and Ceylon Broadcasting Programmes: A Monthly Overview

During the early period of organized broadcasting in Ceylon, the programming reflected a rich blend of imperial musical culture, localized religious content, and informative talks geared towards a rapidly diversifying audience. The following overview is drawn from a historical schedule dating from the late 1930s, evidencing the diversity of content aired through the Colombo broadcasting service.

BBC Musical Programmes

Among the notable contributions from the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) were performances by prominent ensembles such as the Empire Symphony Orchestra, featured on the 2nd and 16th of the month, the BBC Military Band (5th and 15th), and the Royal Air Force Band (26th). These programmes were emblematic of the British cultural presence and influence in colonial Ceylon during this period.[1]

Special Recorded Programmes

The recorded musical offerings included several prominent European classical works: Le Coq D'or Suite, Hungarian Melodies and Gypsy Airs, Nutcracker Suite, Bolero, and Yeomen of the Guard, all broadcast on the 1st of the month. Additionally, themed programmes such as The Music of Strauss and a recurring feature titled Slumber Music (1st, 2nd, 10th, 13th, and 15th) enriched the late-night listening experience. Localized offerings included Planters' Half Hour (Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays), W. Douglas Programmes (Tuesdays and Thursdays), and You Asked for It (Mondays). Lighter entertainment included On the Good Ship Lollipop (Mondays) and a weekly show by Roderick Ephraums (Tuesdays).[2]

Programming for Sinhalese Listeners

Acknowledging the religious and cultural needs of the majority Buddhist population, a series of Bana Sermons were broadcast on Poya Days. These featured venerated monks such as Ven. Palane Siri Vajiranana Nayake Thero (5th), Rev. Pitakotte Somananda Thera (12th), Rev. Kalukondayāwe Pannasekera Thero (19th), and Rev. Kamburugamuwe Mahanama Thero (28th). Additionally, Sunday Morning Sermons were delivered by prominent monks including Rev. Panditha Ahangama Pragnaloka Thero (1st), Rev. Hedigama Indajoti Thero (8th), Rev. Makuluduwe Piyaratana Thero (15th), Rev. Madihe Pannaseeha Thero (22nd), and Ven. Nawinne Sri Devananda Nayake Thero (29th).[3]

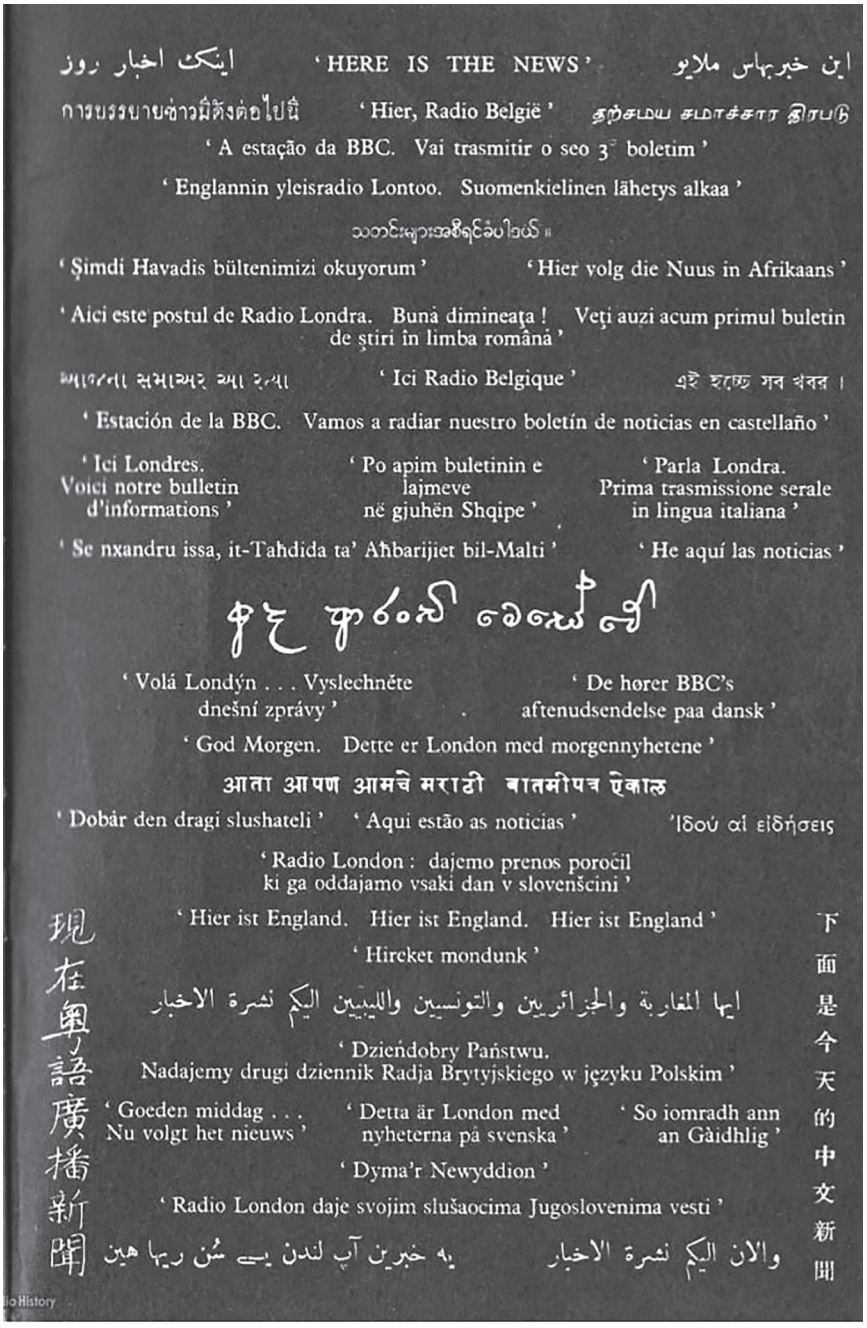


Dr. E. W. Adikaram, Ph.D.

Kalutara Koralalage Edward Winifred Brito Adikaram, *5 March 1905 – 28 December 1985)* ***Dr. E. W. Adikaram was a distinguished Sri Lankan educationalist, scholar, writer, and social activist.*** *He obtained his Master of Arts degree from the London School of Oriental Studies in 1931 and was awarded the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in 1933 for his doctoral thesis entitled Early History of Buddhism in Ceylon.*

Upon his return to Sri Lanka, Dr. Adikaram commenced his academic career at Ananda Sastralaya, Kotte. In 1934, he was appointed Principal of the institution, a position through which he made a lasting contribution to progressive educational reform. He is particularly noted as the founder of ***Anula Vidyalaya, Colombo,*** *one of the country's leading institutions for girls' education, thereby playing a pioneering role in the advancement of female education in Sri Lanka.*

In addition to his scholarly and educational achievements, ***Dr. Adikaram was an influential advocate of non-violence and social reform.*** *His intellectual pursuits, institutional leadership, and ethical commitment to non-violent activism collectively establish him as a* ***significant figure in the cultural, educational, and social history of modern Sri Lanka.***



A note on the various language services broadcast worldwide through the BBC Empire Service records that, among the introductory announcements used in different languages, the phrase "Here is the News" appears in Sinhala as "අද ආරංචි මෙසේ වේ." The inclusion of Sinhala in this context is particularly noteworthy, as it indicates that the language had attained a position of prominence within the BBC's foreign-language broadcasting services, reflecting both its recognized audience reach and its cultural and communicative significance within the imperial broadcasting framework.

Concerts and Local Performances

Live and recorded concerts highlighted the talents of several local artists. These included Eddie de Silva (3rd), A. R. M. Ibrahim (15th), Wilfred J. Peiris (16th), and Rukmani Devi (7th and 21st). Also featured were K. Albert Perera (22nd), W. Francis Perera (26th), K. Lionel Perera (10th), and H. W. Rupesinghe (31st). Performances were also given by the Station Orchestra (8th and 29th) and the Sarada Sangeetha Samaja (24th), a local music society known for promoting classical and devotional music.[4]

Informative Talks

The station also catered to intellectual and educational interests. Talks included "Ceylonese and Their Diet" by H. E. D. Sugathadasa (3rd), "Duruthu Utsavaya" by Rev. M. Piyaratne Thero (4th), and "Mind and Health" by Dr. W. S. Ratnavale (16th).
Additionally, J. H. de Saram spoke on "Scouting in Ceylon" (21st), and Ven. Palane Sri Vajiranana Thero delivered a general address (23rd).[5]

Public Broadcast Lectures

Two key figures, Dr. E. W. Adikaram and P. T. Pandita Gunawardhana, presented public broadcast lectures on the 20th and 27th respectively. Both were significant intellectuals known for their contributions to education and Buddhist thought in Ceylon.[6]

Miscellaneous Programmes

Among miscellaneous features were Jataka Stories narrated by C. L. P. Gunewardene (17th), "Facts About Our Ancient History" by Piyadasa Weerawardene (9th), and a light-hearted segment titled Humorous Interlude by Gamarala (14th), indicative of the station's efforts to balance erudition with entertainment.[7]

Footnotes:

1. BBC musical content reflected a continuing commitment to cultural imperialism and served to maintain British identity within the colonies. See also Chandrika Kaimal, Empire and Broadcasting: British Cultural Propaganda in the Colonies (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), 145–149.
2. Ibid., 151; "Broadcast Programme Listings," Radio Times Ceylon Edition, January 1939.
3. Ven. Palane Vajiranana and his contemporaries played a formative role in disseminating Buddhist doctrine via radio. See Ananda Guruge, The Role of Broadcasting in Buddhist Education (Colombo: Buddha Jayanthi Publications, 1965), 35–39.
4. For a history of musical broadcasting in colonial Ceylon, see Ruvan de Soysa, Melodies of the Airwaves: A History of Sri Lankan Radio Music (1925–1975) (Colombo: Sarvodaya Press, 2010), 72–78.
5. Educational content often addressed both practical health concerns and cultural traditions. See also P. B. Galappatti, Public Health and Radio in Ceylon (Colombo: Ministry of Health, 1947), 21–22.

6. Dr. Adikaram's public broadcasts contributed significantly to secular and rationalist discourse during the mid-20th century. See Piyadasa Ranasinghe, B. W. Adikaram: Life and Legacy (Kandy: Dharmavijaya Foundation, 1995), 101–103.
7. The inclusion of humorous interludes and folktale segments helped bridge oral and modern broadcast traditions. Cf. Malathi de Alwis, "Popular Culture and the Public Sphere: Sinhala Radio Comedy," Journal of South Asian Cultural Studies 12, no. 3 (2003): 211–214.

January 1939

Ethno-Religious Programming in Colonial Radio: Tamil and Muslim Broadcasts in Ceylon

As part of its inclusive approach to multilingual audiences, the Colombo broadcasting station during the colonial period made concerted efforts to provide culturally and religiously resonant content for Tamil and Muslim listeners. These programmes were integral in fostering linguistic equity and communal participation in a medium historically dominated by English and Sinhala.

Tamil-Language Broadcasts

The Tamil service encompassed an array of musical, religious, and informative programming, designed to reflect the vibrancy of Tamil cultural life in Ceylon.

Tamil Concerts

Notable vocal performances were delivered by Mrs. S. R. Rajalucksmy (1st), Mrs. L. Lokasubramaniam (9th), and Gowri Thiagarajah (30th), while instrumental and ensemble music was performed by K. Chellatamby (25th) and the Station Studio Orchestra (8th and 22nd).[1] These concerts offered both classical Carnatic and semi-classical Tamil music to the listening public, thereby preserving indigenous musical heritage through a modern broadcast medium.

Devotional Music

Devotional broadcasts played a central role in religious observance. Vocalists such as K. Chellatamby (6th), K. S. Sithambaranathan (18th), K. V. Kurukai (20th), and A. K. Thambimuttu (27th) performed bhakti-themed songs, predominantly dedicated to Saiva and Vaishnava traditions.[2] These programmes contributed significantly to spiritual continuity among Tamil Hindu audiences in urban and rural regions.

Special Features and Talks

The weekly programme Poopradaksana a Sunday newsletter-style broadcast served as a current affairs digest, possibly including community news, poetry, and cultural reflections. In addition, the service aired a series of

talks by K. V. S. Vas (7th and 21st), M. K. Chettiar (13th), and a Tamil-language translation or adaptation of Dr. W. S. Ratnavale's "Mind and Health" (26th), exemplifying efforts to promote public education in vernacular languages.[3]

Additional Tamil Concerts

Expanding the station's musical offerings, performances by Mrs. M. A. J. Amath (17th), M. A. Hassan Alliyar (18th), and the duo Pali Bhai and her brother (11th) added diversity to the aural landscape, likely reflecting North Indian and Urdu musical traditions popular among Tamil-speaking Muslims and Hindus alike.[4]

Special Thaipongal Broadcasts

To mark Thaipongal, the Tamil harvest festival, the station relayed two special programmes from Madras Station: Ingaswaram (a likely reference to temple nadaswaram music) and a cultural segment titled Pongal Feast a culinary and festive celebration emphasizing the Tamil agrarian ethos.[5] These broadcasts reinforced transnational Tamil identity, linking Ceylonese Tamils with South Indian traditions.

Muslim-Language and Religious Broadcasts

Broadcasting in Tamil and Arabic for Muslim audiences also formed a crucial segment of early radio programming in Ceylon. These broadcasts typically focused on religious recitation, institutional representation, and educational talks.

Institutional Programmes and Koran Recitals

Muslim organizations such as the Muslim Missionary Association (4th), Husseni Schools Burdah Union (12th), and the Juma Athul Muslimeem Association (20th) were granted airtime to present religious teachings, community announcements, and Islamic cultural discussions.[6]

Qur'anic recitations were performed by A. C. P. Mohideen (5th), H. S. M. Salahudeen (19th), M. R. Mohideen (26th), and Katherb Mohamed Sabir (12th), with recitations likely following tajwīd (rules of pronunciation), thereby enabling widespread auditory exposure to Islamic scripture.[7]

Muslim Public Talks

Lectures and public discussions by N. M. M. Ishak (5th), M. H. M. Munas (19th), and A. M. A. Azeez (28th) addressed religious and socio-political issues affecting the Muslim community. Of these, Azeez, an eminent civil servant and scholar, is particularly notable for his work on Muslim education and identity in colonial Ceylon.[8]

Footnotes:

1. Radio Times Ceylon Edition, January 1939.
2. R. Cheran, Musical Traditions of Tamil Hindus in Sri Lanka (Colombo: Ilankai Tamil Sangam, 2005), 49–52.
3. R. Sivathamby, Media and the Tamil Cultural Experience in Sri Lanka (Chennai: Cre-A, 1998), 77–80.
4. A. Rameez, "North-Muslim Identity and Culture in Broadcast Media," Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs 28, no. 2 (2008): 231–233.
5. Sumathi Ramaswamy, The Lost Land of Lemuria: Fabulous Geographies, Catastrophic Histories (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 210–212.
6. M. A. Nuhman, Sri Lankan Muslims: Ethnic Identity within Cultural Diversity (Colombo: ICES, 2007), 122–123.
7. Farzana Haniffa, "Broadcasting Islam in Ceylon: Radio, Language, and the Public Sphere," South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies 36, no. 1 (2013): 61–64.
8. Shihan de S. Jayasuriya, A. M. A. Azeez: His Life and Times (Kandy: Muslim Educational Society, 2002), 45–48.

25 January 1939

Enhancing Sinhala Broadcasting: Institutional Initiatives and Cultural Challenges in 1939

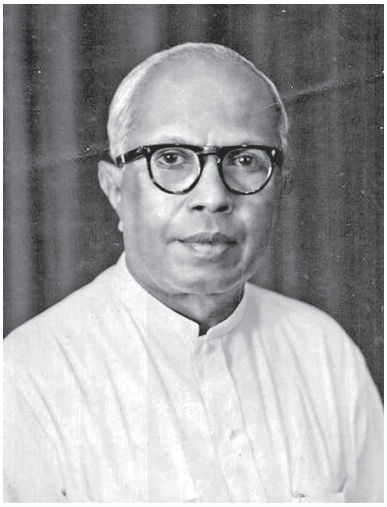
By the late 1930s, Radio Ceylon had begun to recognize the inadequacies of its Sinhala-language programming and the cultural gaps between its content and intended audience. A report dated 25 January 1939 outlines the institutional efforts led by Superintendent Shirley da Silva and his assistant C. L. P. Gunawardana to reform and enhance the quality of Sinhala radio programmes.

Cultural Landscape of Sinhala Music

At the time, Sinhala music was largely associated with a specific social stratum. It was notably unpopular among the upper-class elites, who exhibited a marked indifference towards indigenous musical forms. Many of the active Sinhala music enthusiasts had already adopted North Indian musical idioms, and were primarily professional performers operating in urban centers.[1] However, with the advent of public broadcasting, a younger generation began developing a renewed interest in Sinhala music a trend encouraged by the Colombo Broadcasting Service through its programming policies.[2]

Initial Attempts to Engage Tower Hall Artistes

In an early initiative, the station attempted to recruit leading artistes from Tower Hall, a major cultural institution in Colombo known for its contribution to Sinhala musical drama. However, the effort was met with resistance and even formal complaints, with only H. W. Rupesinghe agreeing to participate in a broadcast.[3] This failure underscored the complexity of bridging institutional broadcasting with independent artistic networks that remained wary of state or colonial control.



Mr. P. de. S Kularathna

Patrick de Silva Kularatna, a prominent Sri Lankan educationist and politician.

He served as the Principal of Ananda College and Dharmaraja College and was the founder of Nalanda College, Colombo.

He is also honored as the founder of Dharmapala Vidyalaya in Pannipitiya.

He was a Member of the State Council of Ceylon (1942–1947) and a Member of Parliament (1960–1965).

He is known for heralding a new era in Buddhist education in Ceylon.



Mr. Wilmot A. Perera

Wilmot A. Perera, a prominent Sri Lankan figure known as the founder of Sri Palee College.

He was a significant leftist politician, serving in the first Parliament of Ceylon from 1947 to 1956.

Perera introduced an industrial revolution in the 1950s by switching his rubber factory from producing sheet rubber to special crepe rubber.

He left politics after disagreeing with S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike over the "Sinhala Only" cause, as Perera advocated for Sinhala-Tamil parity.

He was a close friend of S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike, who invited him to contest the general elections.

Formation of the Sinhala Audition Panel

In response to these challenges, Superintendent Shirley da Silva convened a meeting of the recently established Sinhala Audition Panels. An official letter dated 25 January 1939 invited panel members to a meeting scheduled for 3 February 1939 at the Broadcasting Programme Office, Torrington Square, Colombo, where collaborative strategies would be discussed. The Superintendent expressed dissatisfaction with the "quality and type" of Sinhala programmes and emphasized the urgent need for reform.[4]

The meeting was attended by an impressive panel of intellectuals, educationists, and cultural leaders, including Dr. G. P. Malalasekera, Mudaliyar E. A. Abayasekera, Mr. J. D. A. Perera, Mr. P. de S. Kularatne, Mr. S. L. B. Kapukotuwa, Mr. E. W. Kannangara (C.C.S.), Mr. P. T. Panditha Gunawardhana, Dr. Julious de Lanerolle, Mr. J. N. Jinendradasa, Mr. U. G. P. de Silva, Mudaliyar H. Gunaratne, Mr. Wilmot A. Perera, Rev. J. Simon de Silva, Mr. M. E. Fernando, and Mr. John M. Seneviratne.[5]



Mr. J.D.A. Perera

J. D. A. Perera (1897–1967) was a prominent Sri Lankan portrait painter, educator, and founding figure of the Government College of Fine Arts.

While active in the mid-20th century, his significant contributions included fostering art education, with the JDA Perera Gallery in Colombo later named in his honor.

Key Aspects of J.D.A. Perera

Artistic Style:

Known for realistic, portrait-focused, and often raw-textured paintings.

Education:

Studied art at the Ceylon Technical College.

International Recognition:

Exhibited in Europe (1946–1947), including the Royal Society of Portrait Painters, Scottish Academy, and Paris Salon.

Legacy:

Established the Government College of Fine Arts in 1953.

Background: Born in Pahalagama, Gampaha in 1897.

The JDA Perera Gallery (46, Horton Place, Colombo 07) remains a major venue for local and international art exhibitions.

These collaborators pledged full support for the Superintendent's vision. They agreed to provide content in their respective areas of expertise and to recommend other capable contributors. Their endorsement signified a turning point in the evolution of vernacular radio content in Ceylon, marking an early example of collaborative public broadcasting reform.[6]

Educational Programming: "On the Job"

Another innovative feature introduced around this time was a career guidance series titled On the Job, a set of talks in English delivered by experts from various professional sectors. Speakers included:

Dr. R. F. Dias, M.A., LL.D., District Judge of Colombo and founding member of the Ceylon Wireless Club (est. 1922), who spoke on The Bar;
Mr. R. C. Scott, Chairman of the Planters' Association, on Planting;
Dr. Lucian de Zilwa and Dr. (Mrs.) Mary Ratnam, on Medicine;
Flight Lieutenant R. Duncanson, on Flying;
Ms. V. Gabriel, on Nursing;
Mrs. C. Motwani, on Teaching.[7]

This series reflected the station's commitment to public service broadcasting and educational empowerment, particularly in a context where formal career guidance was limited to elite institutions.

Interactive Programming: "Guess the Artiste"

In an effort to foster audience engagement, the station introduced a new competition titled Guess the Artiste. Listeners were invited to identify the performing artiste during a broadcast music segment and submit their answers via postcard. The first correct entry received by the station was awarded a prize donated

by a local sponsor.[8] This early form of interactive radio entertainment helped stimulate listener attention and encouraged participation, while subtly supporting the station's goal of identifying and promoting local musical talent.

Footnotes:

1. Ananda Samarakoon, "Social Attitudes and Sinhala Music," Journal of Ceylon Cultural Studies 4, no. 2 (1940): 33–35.
2. Ruvan de Soysa, Melodies of the Airwaves: A History of Sri Lankan Radio Music (1925–1975) (Colombo: Sarvodaya Press, 2010), 46–48.
3. Ibid., 49.
4. Official Correspondence of Superintendent Shirley da Silva, 25 January 1939. Colombo Broadcasting Station Archive, National Archives of Sri Lanka.
5. Ibid.
6. K. M. de Silva, A History of Sri Lanka (Colombo: Vijitha Yapa, 2005), 492–495.
7. D. A. Perera, The Origins of Career Guidance in Colonial Ceylon (Colombo: Department of Education Publications, 1989), 87–90.
8. Radio Times Ceylon Edition, February 1939.

20 February 1939

The Establishment and Evaluation of the First Sinhala Oriental Music Orchestra

The necessity and importance of establishing a dedicated Oriental orchestra had been recognized from the early stages of broadcasting in Ceylon and was conveyed to the Chief Broadcasting Engineer. However, due to prevailing financial constraints, the proposal could not be implemented at the time.

Nevertheless, Superintendent of Broadcasting, Mr. Shirley da Silva, who fully appreciated the need for an Oriental ensemble, took steps to form a Sinhala Orchestra in 1939. For the first time, this orchestra broadcast a musical performance on 20 February 1939 at 9:15 PM. The orchestra was led by Mr. H. Don Vincent Peiris, with other members including Mr. D. Ranasinghe, Mr. M. K. Vincent, Mr. W. Leopold, and Mr. Michael Sudusinghe.[1]

A significant feature of this initiative was Superintendent da Silva's decision to seek formal, written evaluations of the programme from individuals with scholarly knowledge of Oriental music. Among the responses received was a critical report by Mr. W. Sittampalam (Barrister-at-Law), who possessed in-depth expertise in the subject.[2]

In his assessment, Mr. Sittampalam noted:

"It was difficult to discern whether the ensemble was indeed a Sinhala Orchestra, based on the instruments used and the style of performance. It would not be inaccurate to describe the broadcast as a weak imitation

of an Indian orchestra. Nevertheless, it is possible that a segment of the Sinhala listening audience may have found it enjoyable. Personally, I found the performance tedious after the first few minutes."

He also provided the following recommendations to enhance the quality and identity of the orchestra:

1. If the ensemble is to be known as a Sinhala Orchestra, its musical segments should reflect traditional Sinhala forms such as Silo and Pal Kavi.
2. In the absence of distinctly Sinhala instruments, the limited use of Indian instruments may be permissible. However, primary importance should be given to Sinhala instrumental arrangements.[3]
3. Indigenous instruments such as the udakki, pantheru, mihigu bera, and horanäva should be incorporated into the ensemble.
4. The tubophone should be replaced by either a jalatarangam or a xylophone, as the tubophone produces an overly resonant and jarring tone.[4]
5. Every musical arrangement should be carefully composed. Each musician in the ensemble should be afforded an opportunity to perform solo. If not, collective participation should be confined to the "pallavi" or "sthayi" (principal) section of the piece.[5]

Due to financial difficulties and logistical constraints associated with the onset of World War II, the orchestra was dissolved within a few months of its founding.

Shortly thereafter, a new musical programme titled Vadan Perahera ("Procession of Instrumentals") was launched under the direction of musicologist Mr. Lionel Edirisinghe, who had returned to Ceylon after thirteen years of musical education in India. However, this programme also appears to have had only limited continuity on air.

Footnotes:

1. "Office Memorandum on the Formation of a Sinhala Orchestra," Department of Broadcasting, Colombo, February 1939.
2. Report by W. Sittampalam, Barrister-at-Law, to the Superintendent of Broadcasting, February 1939, Archives of the Ceylon Broadcasting Corporation.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. Oral history interview with Lionel Edirisinghe, Colombo Radio Archives, 1946

12 March 1939:

The First Live Sinhala Commentary from a Foreign Country in the History of Ceylon Broadcasting

On 2 March 1939, following the passing of Pope Pius XI, a conclave of the College of Cardinals was convened at the Vatican. During this assembly, Cardinal Eugenio Pacelli was elected to the supreme office of the Papacy. He became the 260th Pope of the Roman Catholic Church and assumed the papal name Pius XII. His official coronation was held at the Vatican on 12 March 1939.[1]

On the same day, a live Sinhala-language radio commentary of the coronation ceremony of His Holiness Pope Pius XII was presented from Vatican City by Reverend Fr. Joe Quintus Perera.[2]

This event holds a historically significant place in the annals of Ceylonese broadcasting as the first-ever live Sinhala radio commentary transmitted from a foreign country.[3] Contemporary press coverage of this broadcast was published between 8 and 14 March 1939 in several newspapers, including The Ceylon Daily News, The Ceylon Times, The Catholic Messenger, and Gnānārtha Pradīpaya. These reports further noted that Reverend Fr. Joe Quintus Perera's commentary was clearly received and well appreciated by local listeners.[4]

Footnotes:

1. "Pope Pius XII Elected at Vatican Conclave," The Ceylon Daily News, March 8, 1939.
2. "Radio Commentary from Rome in Sinhala," The Catholic Messenger, March 12, 1939.
3. "Historic Broadcast from Vatican," Gnānārtha Pradīpaya, March 14, 1939.
4. See also "Vatican Coronation Ceremony in Sinhala," The Ceylon Times, March 10, 1939.



His Holiness Pope Pius XII

Pope Pius XII (Italian,born Eugenio Maria Giuseppe Giovanni Pacelli, 2 March 1876 – 9 October 1958) was head of the Catholic Church and sovereign of Vatican City from 2 March 1939 until his death on 9 October 1958.



Reverend Fr. Joe Quintus Perera

A live Sinhala-language radio commentary of the coronation ceremony of His Holiness Pope Pius XII was broadcast from Vatican City, with the commentary delivered by Reverend Fr. Joe Quintus Perera. This broadcast occupies a place of considerable historical significance in the development of Ceylonese broadcasting, as it represents the first recorded instance of a live Sinhala-language radio commentary transmitted from a foreign country.

04 July 1939

A Landmark Broadcasting Event: The Celebrity Concert of Western Artistes

On 4 July 1939, a landmark broadcasting event took place in Ceylon when a celebrity concert by prominent Western artistes was organized under the distinguished patronage of His Excellency Sir Andrew Caldecott, then Governor of Ceylon. This event, arranged by the Superintendent of Broadcasting, Mr. Shirley da Silva, was held at the Royal College Hall, Colombo, and was simultaneously broadcast live over Colombo Brodcasting Service.[1]



St, Clair Students Orchestra

Back Row, from left:
Basil White, *Corbett Jayewardene, Kai Nielson,* ***Marjorie Bartholomeusz,*** *Mrs Van Cuylenberg, Phyllis Arseculeratne.*

Middle Row;
May Muttunayagam, Lennie Sandrasagara, ***Prienie Molamure,*** *Charlemont Dias, Netta uttunayagam,*
Mrs WG St Clair Evelyn Felsinger, Mrs EE Spencer, Beryl Bartholomeusz

Seated:
Rosemary van Houven, Ada Swan, , ***Laurette De Zilwa****, Mrs Caspersz, Mrs Jayetilleke, Rene de Franz*

Seated on ground*:*
Douglas Ferdinand, Audrey Dharmakirti.

Many young faces, later to dominate the music scene in Sri Lanka either as musicians or as music teachers, could be seen in the photograph here. Standing at the extreme left of the back row is ***Basil White,*** *later to be a lawyer and Crown Counsel, and a dramatist of no mean skill. Standing next to him is* ***Corbett Jayewardena,*** *a younger brother of former President JR Jayewardene and a man of many parts.*

Third from left in the front row is ***Laurette de Zilwa,*** *daughter of gynaecologist Dr Lucien de Zilwa, the first man in Ceylon to be named "Lucien"! At the age of 14 Laurettes was offered a scholarship to the Royal Academy, but her father did not send her as he felt that not having reached the London Matriculation level at that stage, her general education was not broad enough for her to specialise in music. Laurette lived in England reaching her nineties and was possibly the longest lived in this group.*

Seated on the ground at left is ***Douglas Ferdinand,*** *who in later life was a leading violinist and conductor. He was a household name in musical circles and Director of the Colombo Symphony Orchestra for many years. On the ground on right is* ***Audrey Dharmakirti*** *who after marriage was known as Audrey Dharmakirti Peiris, an accomplished violinist and pianist performing in many recitals and concerts in Colombo.*

Admission to the concert hall was granted by invitation only, with complimentary tickets issued by the Broadcasting Superintendent to a limited number of licensed radio listeners. The hall reached full capacity, a testament to the public enthusiasm generated by the opportunity to see popular radio personalities "in the flesh." Those unable to attend were nonetheless able to enjoy the full proceedings through the live radio broadcast. The event was compered by Mrs. Clament Black, who guided the audience through an evening of varied performances.[2]

The concert featured a broad array of musical and theatrical talent, showcasing the diversity and cultural sophistication of the contemporary broadcasting milieu. Among the performers were:
Mr. Hallock Anandarajah and Mrs. Joyce Kennedy (vocalists);
Mr. Rupert Wagn, accompanied by his double quartet, comprising Messrs. I. Pullenayagam, Douglas de Alwis, C. M. K. Pillai, H. S. J. Ferdinando, D. B. U. P. Lokubalasuriya, P. de Zilva, S. C. Forbes, and E. L. Herft (violin solos);

Miss. Madeliene de Zilwa (piano); **Miss. Audrey Dharmakirti** (violin); **Miss Beryl Bartholomeusz** (cello);
Miss Esme Joseph and Mrs. Lorne Taylor (vocals and piano).[3]
In a demonstration of radio dramaturgy, Sheila Mackenzie, Andre Willie, and Peter Batten presented a live dramatization to illustrate the inner workings of radio play production. Meanwhile, Mr. A. R. ("Sonny") Bartholomeusz contributed a spirited piano syncopation, and Miss June Percival made a striking impression with her performance of a dramatic scene from Madama Butterfly.[4]
Dance was also featured prominently in the programme.



Madeleine de Zilwa (1908–1972).

Background:

She was born on May 8, 1908, in Colombo, Ceylon (now Sri Lanka).

Family:

She was the daughter of Dr. Lucien Arnold Emmanuel de Zilwa and Charlotte Eleanor Sachs. Around the 1930s, members of the de Zilwa family in Ceylon were active in musical circles, often studying piano and performing.

Time Period:

She lived in Ceylon during the late 1930s before later passing away in British Columbia, Canada in 1972.

Misses Marjorie Sample, Timmie Swan, Sheila Mackenzie, Patricia Swan, and Sheila Swan executed a range of choreography including tap, foxtrot, waltz, and blues. The evening concluded with a unique segment of Hawaiian music, performed by Miss Thelma Kaai and her Troubadours, who delivered two accomplished selections that captivated the audience.[5]

While the concert was heralded as a resounding success, it generated some institutional discord. Notably, Mr. Shirley da Silva, in assuming the role of official host for the evening, relegated Mr. J. R. Walters, C.C.S., the Postmaster General and Director of Broadcasting, to a seat among the general audience. The following day, Mr. da Silva received a curt memorandum from Mr. Walters, stipulating that all future events of this nature must be overseen by the Head of Department, and not the Superintendent.[6]

This concert represented not only a significant cultural moment for the radio-listening public of Ceylon but also a milestone in the evolution of broadcasting professionalism, public engagement, and the internal politics of colonial administrative structures within the island's broadcasting sector.

Footnotes:

1. "Celebrity Concert by Western Artistes," Radio Ceylon Archives, 4 July 1939.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.

August 1939

A Listener's Reaction to Classical Music Programming

In August 1939, Radio Ceylon introduced a new midday music programme titled Fort Forty-Five, scheduled for broadcast every Tuesday and Thursday from 12:45 p.m. to 1:30 p.m. The programme featured recorded selections of highly classical music and was curated by W. Douglas, as part of an effort to diversify and elevate the musical content available to listeners during the lunchtime slot.[1]

Despite its cultural ambition, Fort Forty-Five elicited mixed reactions from the listening public. One particularly sardonic response came from a European listener who, evidently disinclined towards classical music, directed a letter to the Station Superintendent. The message, laced with dry wit, read: "Can you inform me if Mr. W. Douglas will be leaving the Island soon, and if he has accommodation for all his records, I can supply him with packing cases."[2]

This remark took on an added dimension of irony given that W. Douglas the supposed target of the listener's critique was in fact W. Douglas Shirley da Silva, the Superintendent of Broadcasting himself. As both the architect of the programme and its administrative overseer, Mr. da Silva had personally endorsed the promotion of classical repertoire within the national broadcast schedule.[3]

Note:

This brief but pointed exchange reflects early tensions between the aspirations of broadcasting authorities to cultivate refined musical taste, and the prevailing preferences of certain segments of the colonial-era radio audience. It underscores the complex interplay between cultural policy, personal taste, and the public reception of high art in the medium of radio broadcasting during late 1930s Ceylon.

Footnotes:

1. "A Listener's View on Classical Music," Radio Ceylon Listener Correspondence Files, August 1939.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.

02 August 1939

Celebrity Concert by Sinhala Artistes

On the evening of Wednesday, 2 August 1939, a landmark musical event in the history of early Ceylonese broadcasting took place: a live concert featuring prominent Sinhala artistes was broadcast from Ananda College, Colombo. This event, held under the distinguished patronage of the Honourable Sir Baron Jayatilaka, closely followed a similar broadcast by Western artistes from Royal College, Colombo. The programme aired from 9:00 to 10:30 p.m., and was introduced to listeners by Mr. U. G. P. de Silva.[1]

This broadcast marked a significant milestone in the public careers of Rukmani Devi and Eddie Jayamanne, as it was during this concert that they rose to prominence.[2] The lineup featured several prominent Sinhala performers, representing a wide range of musical and performance genres. Among the artistes were:

Padma Wijetunga and Sisters –

Orchestral performance

Sirimathie Perera – Viridu singing

H. Don Vincent Peiris – Violin performance

Rukmani Devi – Vocal performance

Edwin Kottegoda – Folk Lore recitation

Padma Wijetunga – Vocal solo

Chandra Seneviratne – Vocal performance

Eddie Jayamanne – Humorous performance



Rukmani Devi and Eddie Jayamanna

This image captures the wedding day of the prominent Sri Lankan actress and singer Rukmani Devi and actor Eddie Jayamanne. Rukmani Devi, often acclaimed as "The Nightingale of Sri Lanka," was a leading figure in the country's early cinema and music.

The couple appeared together in the first Sinhala film, Kadawunu Poronduwa (The Broken Promise), which premiered on January 21, 1947.

The wedding photograph captures two significant luminaries of the Sri Lankan entertainment industry.

Wilson Illangakoon and Sisters – Vocal performance

M. K. Vincent – Vocal performance

Dannie Fonseka – Vocal performance

Efforts were underway at the time to organize a comparable concert featuring Tamil artistes. However, the outbreak of World War II on 3 September 1939 led to the abrupt abandonment of this plan.[3]

Footnotes:

1. "Celebrity Concert by Sinhala Artistes," Radio Times (Ceylon Edition), August 1939, 9.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.

August 1939

Reorganization of Buddhist Sermon Broadcasts

In August 1939, a significant alteration was introduced to the broadcast schedule of religious programming on Colombo Brodcasting Service. The long-standing practice of airing Buddhist sermons (Bana) on each of the four monthly Poya days was formally replaced by a new arrangement, whereby sermons would be broadcast on every Full Moon Day and on Wednesday evenings.[1]

The original initiative, launched in 1929, had established the broadcasting of Buddhist sermons on all four Poya days each month.[2] This tradition continued unbroken for a decade until the reorganization in 1939. The change was necessitated primarily due to scheduling complexities, as Poya days do not recur on fixed days of the week, complicating the coordination of consistent weekly programming.

Prior to implementing the revised schedule, consultations were held with leading members of the Buddhist monastic order as well as prominent lay leaders to ensure that the proposed modifications aligned with religious and cultural expectations.[3] This revised structure, introduced in 1939, has continued as a foundational element of religious broadcasting policy in Sri Lanka to this day.

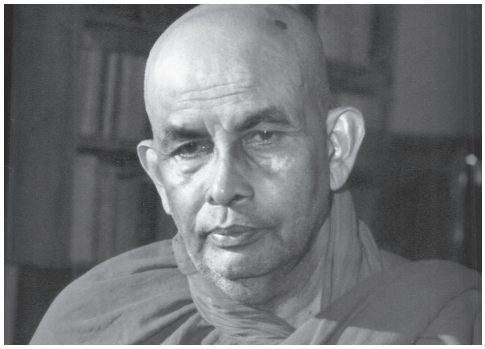
Notes:

1. “Broadcast of Buddhist Sermons (Bana) on Wednesday Evenings,” Radio Times (Ceylon Edition), August 1939, 4.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.

August 1939

Buddhist Sermon Broadcasters in 1939

By the year 1939, marking a decade of Dharma preaching via the Colombo Radio Broadcasting Service, the following venerable monks had participated as Dharma preachers on air:



Most Venerable Madihe Pannaseeha Mahathera,

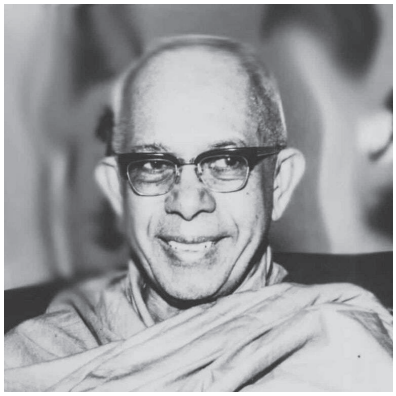
Mahanayaka (chief high priest) of the Amarapura Chapter 1969 - 2003

Most Venerable Madihe Pannaseeha Mahathera, an eminent Sri Lankan Buddhist monk. He was a revered figure in Sri Lankan Buddhism and a significant national leader. He was the Mahanayaka (chief high priest) of the Amarapura sect from 1969 until his death in 2003.

He was deeply committed to education and monastic training, co-founding the Maharagama Sri Vajiragnana Dharmayatanaya in 1958.

He was known as a fearless advocate for the preservation and propagation of Buddhism.

He was highly respected alongside other prominent monks like Narada Thera and Ananda Maitreya Thera.



Most Venerable Narada Maha Thera of Vajirarama Monastery

Venerable Narada Maha Thera, a prominent Theravada Buddhist monk, scholar, and missionary from Sri Lanka.

He was a highly regarded scholar in Pali, Sinhala, and Sanskrit languages.

He is well known for his extensive written works, including "The Buddha and His Teachings" and "Buddhism in a Nutshell".

He was instrumental in spreading Theravada Buddhism globally, notably being the first Theravada bhikkhu to set foot in Indonesia in over a thousand years.

He was friend, guide, and philosopher to all who came to him, regardless of their background or beliefs.

1. Most Venerable Pelene Siri Vajirajñāna Mahānāyaka Thera
2. Venerable Narada Thera of Vajirārāma Monastery
3. Venerable Kalukondayāwe Paññāsēkhara Nāyaka Thera
4. Venerable Ahangama Paññāloka Thera
5. Venerable Pitakotte Sōmānanda Thera
6. Venerable Bentara Sumana Tissa Thera
7. Venerable Madihe Paññāsīha Thera
8. Venerable Moronthuduwa Siridhammānanda Nāyaka Thera

9. Venerable Dr. Paravāhara Vajirajñāna Thera
10. Venerable Hīnētiyana Dhammāloka Thera
11. Venerable Kotahēna Paññākitti Thera
12. Venerable Kiriwattuduwa Paññāsāra Nāyaka Thera
13. Venerable Karaputugala Dhammāloka Nāyaka Thera
14. Venerable Karadana Jinaratana Nāyaka Thera
15. Venerable Karadana Paññālankāra Thera
16. Venerable Karaputugala Dhammavaṁsa Thera
17. Venerable Kamburugamuwa Mahānāma Thera
18. Venerable Hedigama Indajoti Thera
19. Venerable Makuluduwa Piyaratana Thera
20. Venerable Iduruwe Uttarānanda Thera
21. Venerable Kotikawatte Saddhātissa Thera

The invitation of these highly revered monks for radio broadcasts was made in consultation with and upon the approval of senior ecclesiastical authorities, including Venerable Lunupokunē Dhammānanda Thera, Head of the Vidyālankāra Monastery in Peliyagoda; Venerable Pelene Siri Vajirajñāna Nāyaka Thera, Abbot of the Vajirārāma Monastery in Bambalapitiya; and Venerable Baddegama Piyaratana Nāyaka Thera, Chief Prelate of the Vidyōdaya Monastery.[1]

Among this esteemed group of preachers, Venerable Karadana Sri Jinaratana Nāyaka Thera was especially noted for his melodious recitation of Pāli stanzas, while Venerable Kalukondayāwe Sri Paññāsēkhara Thera was particularly recognized for his clarity and accuracy in articulation.[2]

Footnotes:

1. Radio Times of Ceylon, August 1939; National Archives of Sri Lanka, Broadcasting Records Collection, Colombo Radio Service Documentation, 1939.
2. Ibid.

September 1939

Free Distribution of Colombo Broadcast Printed Programmes

On 1 September 1939, a significant development in the dissemination of broadcast information was announced through an official communiqué issued by the Post Office Department. This notice, published in both the national press and the Ceylon Radio Times, stated that all licensed radio holders who wished to receive printed programmes of the Colombo Broadcasting Station would be eligible to obtain them free of charge.[1]

According to the communiqué, beginning from the above date, printed programmes would be issued fortnightly. Each issue was designed not only to provide a schedule of upcoming broadcasts over the following two weeks but also to include a specially prepared station newsletter. This supplementary section was intended to offer detailed information regarding forthcoming special broadcasts as well as general notices relevant to listeners.[2]

The initiative was intended to enhance listener engagement by allowing licence holders to plan their listening schedules in advance based on personal interests. The notice also clarified that those wishing to subscribe to this complimentary service were required to submit a formal application, which included details such as their radio licence number and the office of issue, along with their full name and address. Additionally, a postage stamp to the value of fifty cents was to be enclosed to cover mailing costs for twenty-four fortnightly issues over a one-year period.[3]

Footnotes:

1. "Free Issue of the Colombo Broadcast Printed Programmes," Ceylon Radio Times, September 1, 1939.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.





The outbreak of the Second World War on 1 September 1939 constituted a decisive turning point in the nature and organization of radio communication between the East and the West.

With the escalation of hostilities, the BBC Radio Times suspended its customary practice of publishing detailed daily programme schedules and instead redirected its editorial focus towards comprehensive wartime news coverage. In response to these developments, the Colombo Broadcasting Service adopted the policy of distributing the Radio Times magazine free of charge to licensed radio listeners, reflecting both the altered informational priorities of the period and the strategic importance of broadcasting as a medium of wartime communication.

3 September 1939

The Outbreak of the Second World War and Its Impact on Communications

The Second World War officially began on 3 September 1939, following the invasion of Poland by Nazi Germany on 1 September. In response to this aggressive military action, Britain and France declared war on Germany, marking the formal commencement of global hostilities.[1]



Radio at War

World War II revolutionized radio, transitioning it from a nascent technology to a critical, portable, and strategic tool. It enabled real-time battlefield coordination (air-to-ground), advanced radar for detection, and acted as a powerful, centralized medium for propaganda and public morale, profoundly influencing both military tactics and civilian life.

Key Impacts on Radio Communication:

Military & Tactical Use:

The development of portable, two-way radios like the walkie-talkie allowed troops on the move to communicate, ***while Frequency Modulation (FM) improved signal clarity.***

Technological Advancements:

The war accelerated advancements in miniaturization, radar, and electronic countermeasures, including jamming enemy frequencies.

The origins of the war may be attributed to a convergence of several historical and political factors, including the rise of nationalism, the deep dissatisfaction and economic instability that followed the First World War, the systematic violations of international law, and the general failure of global powers to uphold a collective security framework. These circumstances, compounded by the expansionist policies of Nazi Germany, culminated in a renewed world conflict.[2]

With the onset of the Second World War (1939–1945), serious disruptions emerged in global communication systems, influenced by wartime exigencies, technological limitations, and national security concerns. These challenges are outlined below:

1. Technological Limitations

During the early stages of the war, the primary means of communication remained limited to wireless telegraphy, radio broadcasts, and written correspondence. The destruction of large portions of telephone infrastructure further emphasized reliance on older methods such as telegrams and printed dispatches.[3]

Moreover, the limited availability of radio frequencies presented a significant obstacle to live communication between countries, with international broadcasting becoming increasingly difficult under wartime conditions.[4]



Mr. Raja Singham

In September 1939,

Raja Singham provided the weekly Tamil newsletter for the BBC, marking early efforts to reach Tamil speakers during World War II.

This broadcast initiative was part of the BBC's efforts to communicate news in various languages during the war, highlighting a significant moment for Tamil-language media.

Broadcast Date: September 1939.

Broadcaster:

Raja Singham.

Content:

Weekly newsletter in Tamil.

Platform:

BBC.

2. Destruction of Communication Infrastructure

Intercontinental communication was severely impaired by the destruction of essential infrastructure such as submarine cables, railway-based postal networks, and landline systems. These disruptions were direct consequences of military activity, especially in regions of strategic importance.[5]

3. Propaganda and Information Control

Many governments exercised strict control over media and broadcasting networks as a means of managing public morale and shaping national sentiment.[6]

As a result, access to accurate and verifiable information became limited, with state-sanctioned propaganda replacing independent reporting. This suppression of truthful reporting created significant challenges for civilian populations attempting to remain informed about the broader context of the war.[7]

Footnotes:

1. A. J. P. Taylor, The Origins of the Second World War (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1961), 285.
2. Richard Overy, The Road to War (London: Macmillan, 1989), 21–24.
3. William R. Keylor, The Twentieth-Century World and Beyond: An International History since 1900, 6th ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 202.
4. Asa Briggs, The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom, Vol. 2 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965), 328.
5. John Keegan, The Second World War (New York: Viking, 1990), 44.
6. Philip M. Taylor, Munitions of the Mind: A History of Propaganda from the Ancient World to the Present Day, 3rd ed. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), 182–185.
7. Susan Carruthers, The Media at War: Communication and Conflict in the Twentieth Century (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000), 77–80.

September 1939

Wartime Measures and the Colombo Broadcasting Service

Following the outbreak of the Second World War on 3 September 1939, the conflict rapidly spread across Europe and soon exerted significant geopolitical and psychological influence throughout the Middle East and Asia.[1] As military aggression escalated, global audiences increasingly relied on radio broadcasts and newspaper reports for information regarding aerial bombardments, enemy advances, and the broader implications of the war.[2]



Sir Oliver Goonetilleka

Sir Oliver Goonetilleka was appointed to key civil defence positions in Ceylon during the World War II era, acting as the lead official for civil defense preparations.

Appointment Details:

Although the Civil Defence Department was officially formed in late 1941, Sir Oliver Goonetilleke took on the role of Civil Defence Commissioner for Ceylon to lead preparations for the country in anticipation of attacks.

Role Scope:

He was in charge of developing and leading the newly formed Civil Defence Department, an appointment that was crucial when the Imperial Japanese Navy began air raids on Colombo and other cities in 1942.

Key Responsibilities:

He acted as the second-in-command to the British Commander-in-Chief Admiral Geoffrey Layton regarding civilian, rather than military, defense efforts.

Recognition:

Due to his successful handling of the Civil Defence Department, he was knighted with a KBE in 1944.

While 1939 marked the start of the war, the formalization of the Civil Defence Department under his leadership,, specifically addressing the Japanese threat, occurred prominently leading up to and after the 1941/1942 period.

Although no direct military action occurred on Ceylonese soil at the time, the Government of Ceylon began preparing contingency protocols in anticipation of a possible air raid or other wartime emergency. Particular emphasis was placed on public protection and civilian preparedness. In this context, the government established a new post titled Commissioner of Civil Defence, appointing Mr. Oliver Goonetilleke to oversee national safety efforts.[3]

Protective shelters were constructed at various locations in the city, and trenches were dug alongside roads and residential areas. The Colombo Broadcasting Service was tasked with informing the general public including schoolchildren on how to utilize these facilities.[4] This initiative positioned the broadcasting service not merely as an entertainment medium but as a vital tool for wartime communication and civic instruction.

In order to facilitate accurate and timely information dissemination, English-language announcements issued by the colonial government were translated into Sinhala and Tamil, recorded onto discs, and broadcast over the radio.[5] This multilingual outreach ensured that instructions reached all major linguistic communities on the island. In some instances, English bulletins of five minutes in length were translated and recorded within an hour to ninety minutes for immediate transmission.[6]

During this time, a temporary airstrip was established at the nearby Racecourse grounds, in close proximity to the Colombo Broadcasting Office.[7] This location raised concerns at the administrative level, as the broadcasting centre was deemed vulnerable in the event of an airstrike or a crash-landing accident. Moreover, the high decibel levels associated with aircraft takeoffs and landings posed a consistent disruption to live and recorded radio transmissions. Consequently, the government made the decision to relocate the broadcasting centre to a more secure site.[8]




Boston Evening Globe

RED STREAK FINAL

WAR BEGINS

Poland Invaded; Cities Bombed

Italy to Keep Out of Conflict




Daily Herald

SAUSAGES GO BETTER WITH H-P SAUCE

WAR DECLARED BY BRITAIN AND FRANCE

The Fleet Moves Into Position

GREAT BRITAIN DECLARED WAR ON GERMANY AT 11 O'CLOCK YESTERDAY MORNING.

Fifty minutes later, at 5 p.m., France declared war.

Unthinkable We Should Refuse The Challenge

WAR CABINET OF NINE

Churchill Is Now First Lord

POLES SMASH WAY INTO E. PRUSSIA

London Hears Its First Raid Warning

BREMEN REPORTED TAKEN


SPECIAL WAR EDITION

Sunday Express

STOP PRESS NEWS PAGE 4

WAR DECLARED ON GERMANY

Britain's Ultimatum Ignored By Hitler

FRANCE WILL FIGHT TOO, CHAMBERLAIN TELLS EMPIRE

LONDON, Sunday.

THE WHOLE BRITISH EMPIRE HEARD THE DIGNIFIED ANNOUNCEMENT AT 12.15 (SOUTH AFRICAN TIME) TO-DAY BY MR. NEVILLE CHAMBERLAIN, PRIME MINISTER OF GREAT BRITAIN, THAT BRITAIN WAS AT WAR WITH GERMANY.

Mr. Chamberlain announced in the House of Commons that France had joined Great Britain in the war against Germany.

AT 12.15 (SOUTH AFRICAN TIME) MR. CHAMBERLAIN SPOKE ON THE RADIO FROM No. 10 DOWNING STREET TO THE WHOLE EMPIRE.

The British Premier's voice was steady and firm as he said: "This country with France is now at war against aggression."

HIS MAJESTY THE KING

BRITISH PREMIER EXPLAINS

Mr. Neville Chamberlain

How the Premier Told the Empire

Mr. Chamberlain's Speech

We have a clear Conscience

Hitler would not have Peace

Right Will Prevail

Consultation Held All Day

Official Note to Germany


The New York Times.

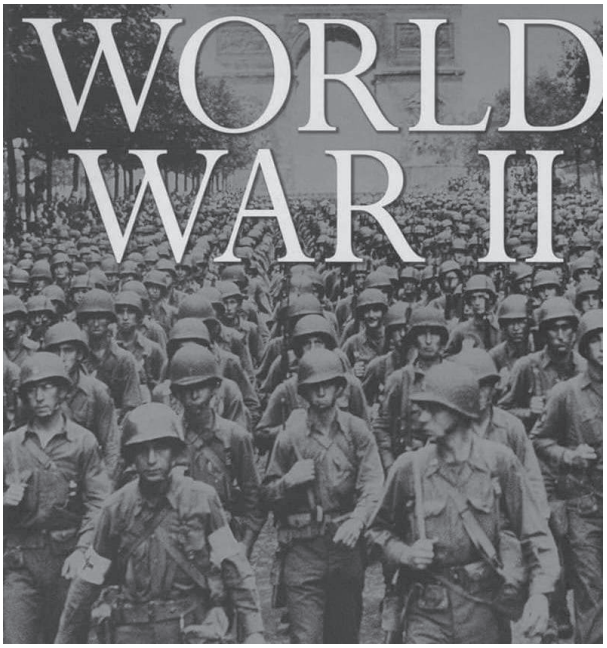
EXTRA

GERMAN ARMY ATTACKS POLAND; CITIES BOMBED, PORT BLOCKADED; DANZIG IS ACCEPTED INTO REICH

Hitler Acts Against Poland

historyimages.blogspot.com

On September 1, 1939, Germany launched the September campaign against Poland, beginning WW2


WORLD
WAR II











Footnotes:

1. John Keegan, The Second World War (New York: Viking, 1990), 5–7.
2. Richard Overy, The Bombing War: Europe 1939–1945 (London: Penguin, 2013), 33–38.
3. K. M. de Silva, A History of Sri Lanka (London: Hurst, 1981), 448.
4. Ceylon Radio Times, September 1939, National Archives of Sri Lanka, Colombo Broadcasting Files.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.
7. Ministry of Defence Reports, 1939, Ceylon Government Archives.
8. Administrative Reports of the Government of Ceylon, 1939, section on Public Security and Broadcasting.

September 1939

Music of the World and the Mispronunciation of Sinhala: පල් කවි

In September 1939, the Colombo Broadcasting Service introduced a new Sunday afternoon programme titled Music of the World, aimed at audiences with a taste for international music.[1] This feature sought to promote global musical diversity by presenting performances from various countries, each represented by a chosen artiste. India was represented by Mrs. L. Lokasubramanium, while Ceylon's contribution came from Miss Sirimathie Perera.[2]

A distinctive characteristic of the programme was its bilingual delivery. Although the announcer was an English-speaking presenter, the requirement was to introduce each artiste and their respective performance in Sinhala. To facilitate this, the Sinhala script was transliterated into English and provided as a phonetic text for the announcer to read aloud.[3]

While the initial introductions were performed in reasonably accurate Sinhala, a notable linguistic error occurred during the announcement of the third item a Sinhala folk song. In attempting to read the phrase "මී ළඟට පල් කවි" (mee langata pal kavi, meaning "next, a traditional verse"), the announcer mispronounced it as "Mee langata pal kavi," unintentionally distorting both the meaning and phonetic integrity of the Sinhala phrase.[4]

Note:

This incident, though minor in nature, highlights early challenges in cross-linguistic broadcasting, particularly in colonial Ceylon where English-speaking personnel were often tasked with delivering content in indigenous languages without adequate training or familiarity with local phonetics. It underscores the complexities of bilingual radio broadcasting during the late 1930s, especially within a multi-ethnic and multi-lingual society.

Footnotes:

1. Ceylon Radio Times, September 1939, National Archives of Sri Lanka, Broadcasting Records Collection.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.

September 1939

"When the Red Light Glows": A Reflection on Broadcasting in Ceylon by Mr. Shirley da Silva

In September 1939, Mr. Shirley da Silva, then Superintendent of the Colombo Broadcasting Station, was invited to deliver a talk on broadcasting at a luncheon organized by the Rotary Club, held at the G.O.H. (Grand Oriental Hotel). As an employee of the government-operated broadcasting service, Mr. da Silva sought formal permission from the Postmaster General to both deliver and broadcast his speech.[1] While authorization was granted for the talk itself, approval to relay it over the airwaves was denied.[2]

Respecting the directive, Mr. da Silva adapted his speech and presented it under the title "When the Red Light Glows", a symbolic phrase in broadcasting circles referring to the illuminated red signal at a studio, indicating that a live broadcast is underway.[3] The phrase thus served as a metaphor for the medium of radio itself.

In his talk, Mr. da Silva offered a retrospective account of the history and development of broadcasting in Ceylon. He noted that, when compared to other countries in the East, broadcasting had begun relatively early in Ceylon. However, he emphasized that progress was hindered by the economic downturn associated with the global depression of the 1930s.[4]

Mr. da Silva traced the origins of broadcasting back to England, where in June 1920, Dame Nellie Melba sang into a microphone at the Marconi station in Chelmsford. In February 1922, the Marconi Company opened a new station in Essex, whose transmissions garnered significant public interest. As a result, the British Broadcasting Company (later Corporation) was formed in November 1922.[5]

Remarkably, Ceylon had mirrored this timeline. In November 1922, the Ceylon Wireless Club was founded, soon renamed in July 1923 as the Ceylon Amateur Radio Society, and later that same year as the Radio Club of Ceylon and South India.[6] This progression illustrated that a growing number of individuals in Ceylon were deeply engaged in the wireless movement. Subsequently, an application for a broadcasting license was submitted to the government.

The Government of Ceylon opted against awarding broadcasting rights to a private entity, choosing instead to operate the service under the Department of Posts and Telegraphs. The Engineering Department assembled a transmitter at the Central Telegraph Office using components gathered from various sources. Broadcasting commenced on an experimental basis, from a modest facility—half a room at the present Central Telephone Exchange.[7] Early programming consisted primarily of gramophone music, occasional talks, and limited news content. The engineering staff were responsible for the arrangement of these early broadcasts.

Mr. da Silva further remarked on the socio-economic context, observing that the population of Ceylon, though culturally inclined toward entertainment, was constrained in their ability to invest in wireless receivers due to the economic depression.[8] However, he noted a significant shift: radio receivers had since become more affordable and technically sophisticated. The expansion of audiences, along with improved programming, marked a turning point in public engagement.

He emphasized that the programme content formed the most critical component of successful broadcasting. The public, he argued, should take an active interest in contributing to and supporting broadcast programming. If such interest did not emerge organically, it would need to be cultivated through institutional and creative means.[9]

Mr. da Silva concluded optimistically, pointing to signs of economic recovery and a steady increase in the number of radio listeners. His commentary, later supplemented by the publication of listener feedback in The Tappal Bag of the Superintendent (published in the programme supplement of 1–15 November 1939), revealed a growing public consciousness and critical appreciation for broadcasting in Ceylon.[10]

Footnotes:

1. Ceylon Radio Times, September 1939, National Archives of Sri Lanka, Colombo Broadcasting Files.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Shirley da Silva, "When the Red Light Glows," address at the Rotary Club Luncheon, Grand Oriental Hotel, September 1939, cited in Ceylon Radio Times, Nov. 1–15, 1939.
5. Asa Briggs, The Birth of Broadcasting (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961), 59–62.
6. Ibid.; also see Administrative Records, Radio Club of Ceylon, 1922–1923, National Archives of Sri Lanka.
7. K. M. de Silva, A History of Sri Lanka (London: Hurst, 1981), 445.
8. Ibid., 446–447.
9. Shirley da Silva, "When the Red Light Glows," in Ceylon Radio Times, Nov. 1–15, 1939.
10. The Tappal Bag of the Superintendent, Programme Supplement, Ceylon Radio Times, Nov. 1–15, 1939.

23 November 1939

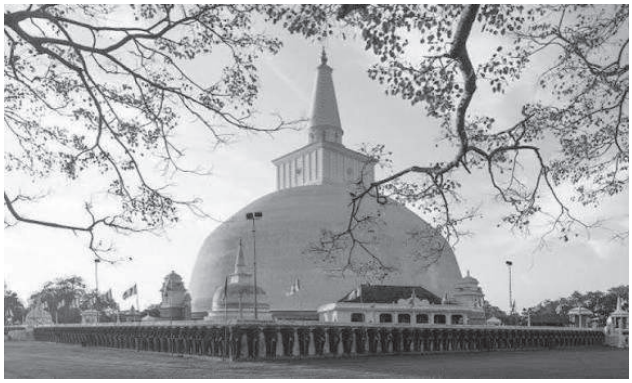
Live Broadcast of the Crowning of the Pinnacle of the Ruwanweliseya Stupa, Anuradhapura

On 23 November 1939, a landmark event in the history of Sri Lankan broadcasting occurred with the live relay of the pinnacle crowning ceremony of the Ruwanweli Maha Seya Stupa at Anuradhapura. The broadcast took place from 1:00 p.m. to 2:00 p.m. and was transmitted to Colombo via the Colombo–Anuradhapura trunk telephone line.[1]

This live broadcast, described by contemporaries as a moment of national and religious significance, was publicly advertised in the Ceylon Radio Times. The announcement particularly addressed Buddhist listeners, expressing that arrangements had been "satisfactorily made by the Station to cover the important Ruwanweliseya Pinnacle Crowning Ceremony at Anuradhapura."[2] The programme included live addresses by the presiding High Priest of the temple and Sir Baron Jayatilaka, both of which were relayed to the listening public.[3]

In addition to these formal addresses, the programme featured a specially arranged eye-witness account by H. Sri Nissanka, a figure described in the advertisement as "beyond question a very competent person for the purpose."[4] His commentary was anticipated to reach a wide audience, extending beyond Ceylon to international Buddhist communities in countries such as Burma (Myanmar) and Thailand.

As a cultural and sentimental prelude to the event, a special studio feature was broadcast on 21 November 1939. This included the performance of two poems from Mr. Sri Nissanka's playlet entitled "Our Lanka," which were set to guitar music composed by Miss Thelma Kaai and performed by a specially formed choir.[5]

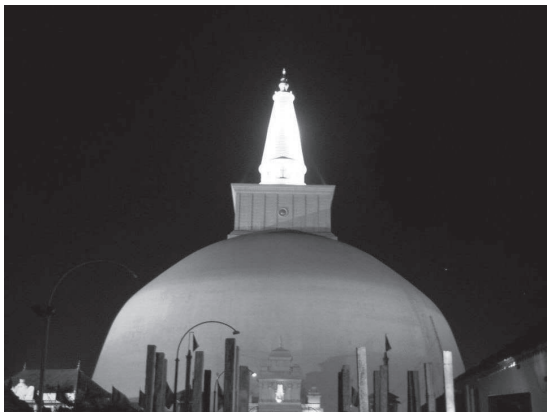


Ruwanwelisaya stupa, Anuradhapura

Ruwanwelisaya stupa, an ancient and sacred Buddhist monument located in Anuradhapura, Sri Lanka. It is one of the most prominent and sacred Buddhist sites in the country, visited by pilgrims from across the world

The stupa was built by King Dutugemunu around 140 B.C. It is considered an icon of architectural glory in ancient Sri Lanka and was once the fifth-largest monument in the world.

The structure is significant because it is believed to enshrine a large collection of relics of Lord Buddha.



Ruwanwelisaya Stupa at night.

The technical aspects of the live relay were managed under the supervision of Mr. A. W. Dharmapala, who was then serving as Inspector of Telecommunications. The success of the live broadcast was widely acknowledged for both its technical quality and symbolic significance, marking one of the earliest examples of a religious-cultural event being disseminated to a mass audience in Ceylon.[6]

The entire proceedings were recorded on disc format and preserved at the Broadcasting Station on Kotte Road, Borella, until the end of 1948.[7] This archival effort signified an early recognition of the cultural and historical value of live radio documentation in the country's broadcasting history.

Footnotes:

1. Ceylon Radio Times, November 1939, 6. National Archives of Sri Lanka, Colombo Broadcasting Files.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. Annual Broadcasting Report, Department of Posts and Telecommunications, 1939, National Archives of Sri Lanka.
7. Ibid.



Mr. A. W. Dharmapala

The technical aspects of the live relay were conducted under the supervision of Mr. A. W. Dharmapala, who was serving at the time as Inspector of Telecommunications and who subsequently held the position of Chief Engineer.

The broadcast was widely recognized for its high technical standard as well as its symbolic importance, representing one of the earliest instances in Ceylon in which a religious–cultural event was transmitted to a mass audience through radio.

November 1939

Ariyaratne Māmā and Damayanthi Akkā in Sinhala Children's Broadcasting

By August 1939, Sinhala children's programmes, which had commenced in 1936, were being broadcast every Friday from 6:00 p.m. to 6:30 p.m..[1] These thirty-minute segments marked one of the earliest regular efforts to engage younger listeners through radio in Ceylon.

By November 1939, the presentation of the children's programme had come under the stewardship of Mr. G. P. Ariyaratne, who was popularly known to his young audience as "Ariyaratne Māmā" (Uncle Ariyaratne).[2] Assisting him in both presentation and content coordination was Miss Chandra Ranhoti, who adopted the on-air persona of "Damayanthi Akkā" (Elder Sister Damayanthi).[3] The use of familial and affectionate titles such

as Māmā and Akkā not only fostered a sense of intimacy and trust between the presenters and their young audience, but also reflected the culturally embedded pedagogical style that was suited to radio as a domestic medium.

The children's programme of this era typically included storytelling, folk songs, educational segments, and moral instruction, all tailored to appeal to the cognitive and cultural sensibilities of Ceylonese children.[4] The efforts of figures like Ariyaratne and Ranhoti were instrumental in shaping an early model for educational and entertainment broadcasting for youth in Ceylon, combining elements of tradition, play, and instruction in a weekly radio format.

Footnotes:

1. Ceylon Radio Times, August 1939, National Archives of Sri Lanka, Colombo Broadcasting Files.
2. Ibid., November 1939.
3. Ibid.
4. Department of Posts and Telecommunications, Annual Broadcasting Report: 1939 (Colombo: Government Press, 1940).

November 1939

Listeners' Feedback on Sinhala and General Broadcasting Programmes of the Colombo Broadcasting Service

By late 1939, the Colombo Broadcasting Service (CBS) had begun receiving a range of listener feedback from local and international audiences regarding the quality and content of its radio programmes. These letters, some of which were published in the Ceylon Radio Times, reflect both commendations and constructive suggestions.

One Sinhala-speaking listener from Kelaniya wrote to express appreciation for the recent advancements in Sinhala-language programming:

"I think there is immense improvement of late, and the Department is making all possible efforts for further improvement of the Sinhalese programs, for which I shall be always grateful."[1]

Another letter from Miss B. Williams of Madras, addressed the general entertainment quality of CBS's programming, with particular praise for children's content:

"I have enjoyed listening to your records, music, and programs in general, especially the Children's Hour."[2]

A different kind of suggestion came from M. D. I. Sirisena of Makola, who proposed the inclusion of traditional Tom-Tom drumming before the broadcast of Bana (Buddhist sermons). He wrote:

"I would be much obliged to know whether you can arrange for about two minutes' Tom-Tom beating just before the Bana preaching from the station. The beating of the Tom-Tom can be recorded, and broadcast before the Bana preaching begins. I shall be pleased if you will put this before the public and get their opinion."[3]

This request highlights an effort by local listeners to integrate indigenous cultural elements into modern broadcasting, particularly in religious contexts.

However, not all feedback was positive. Roland V. Norris of Talawakelle criticized the station's news service for failing to report on a significant maritime incident:

"I write to ask if nothing can be done to give more recent news in the midday news bulletins from the Colombo Station. Today (October 19th) London announced in the morning news the sinking of the Yorkshire. As a regular Colombo caller the ship must have had many passengers from Ceylon on board and a valuable Ceylon cargo. And yet the station did not apparently consider this news of sufficient interest to be referred to in the 12.30 news bulletin. Surely some information must have been available locally about this ship? I note Delhi at 1.30 was able to announce that 226 persons had been picked up. Had Colombo, so much more closely concerned, no news?"[4]

A note from the Superintendent appended to the letter clarified:
"This information was not included in the morning bulletin from Reuters. The matter has been taken up."[5]
These letters collectively demonstrate an active and engaged listenership during the late 1930s, concerned not only with entertainment and cultural identity but also with the reliability and timeliness of news dissemination. Listener interaction was evidently viewed by CBS as a valuable component in refining the content and standards of its programming.

Footnotes:

1. Ceylon Radio Times, October–November 1939, National Archives of Sri Lanka, Colombo Broadcasting Files.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.

November 1939

Public Engagement and Listener Responses to the Colombo Broadcasting Service in 1939

Throughout 1939, the Colombo Broadcasting Service received considerable public feedback reflecting a growing listener base that actively engaged with programming and broadcasting policy.

Listener correspondence from this period, preserved through letters and editorial notes in the Ceylon Radio Times, provides valuable insight into audience expectations, preferences, and grievances during the pre-war period of radio in Ceylon.

A proposal from E. V. Rajapakesa of Colombo suggested enhancing the visual appeal of programme schedules by incorporating artiste photographs. He noted that such inclusions would allow listeners to better “visualize the performers themselves” and thus cultivate greater appreciation for their performances.[1]

Similarly, C. H. Grero of Kittampahuwa expressed satisfaction over recent concerts such as Mr. C.A. Fonseka’s Ramayana on October 7, 1939, praising its appeal and urging the station to maintain its newly revised policy on Poya day Bana (sermon) broadcasts. Grero supported the Department's decision to allot an hour of Bana preaching during Poya days and defended its continued presence against objections from some members of the Buddhist clergy. He asserted the listener's right to choose between temple or home-based participation and advised that clergy collaborate by installing loudspeakers to amplify the studio broadcast to temple congregations.[2]

Another letter, signed by ten individuals led by Iris Ranawaka of Maradana, collectively acknowledged the station's contributions to public entertainment. The group requested a Sinhalese repeat of the segment titled "Ralahamy’s Views on the War."[3] A cross-border appreciation came from Mrs. L. M. Walsh of South India, who described Colombo as their “best and favourite local station,” lauding its consistent Western programming and Sunday morning English church services.[4]
A Tamil listener writing under the pseudonym “Pekoe” from Namunukula praised the Superintendent’s inclusive programming approach and requested a Tamil version of the popular interactive segment “You Asked For It.”[5] Meanwhile, a British listener, A. Watkins of Madras, expressed his preference for classical over dance music and described the station’s offerings as "well worth tuning in for at all times," indicating the station’s capacity to reach and retain an international audience.[6]

Some correspondence included constructive criticism. One listener, Vernon Dissanayaka of Kotahena, expressed concern over the discontinuation of naming individuals in request programs. He argued that including names and addresses, as done in Manila and Rome, added “extra spice and flavour” and questioned the rationale behind the new editorial policy.[7]

These letters, reflecting both commendation and critique, illustrate a unique participatory culture among the listeners of the Colombo Broadcasting Service in 1939. They highlight the station’s role not just as a cultural medium but also as a democratic platform through which the public could articulate tastes, moral concerns, and programmatic suggestions.

Footnotes:

1. E. V. Rajapakesa, letter to the Editor, Ceylon Radio Times, November 1939.
2. C. H. Grero, letter to the Editor, Ceylon Radio Times, November 1939.
3. Iris Ranawaka and signatories, letter to the Editor, Ceylon Radio Times, November 1939.
4. Mrs. L. M. Walsh, letter to the Editor, Ceylon Radio Times, November 1939.
5. "Pekoe," letter to the Editor, Ceylon Radio Times, November 1939.
6. A. Watkins, letter to the Editor, Ceylon Radio Times, November 1939.
7. Vernon Dissanayaka, letter to the Editor, Ceylon Radio Times, November 1939.

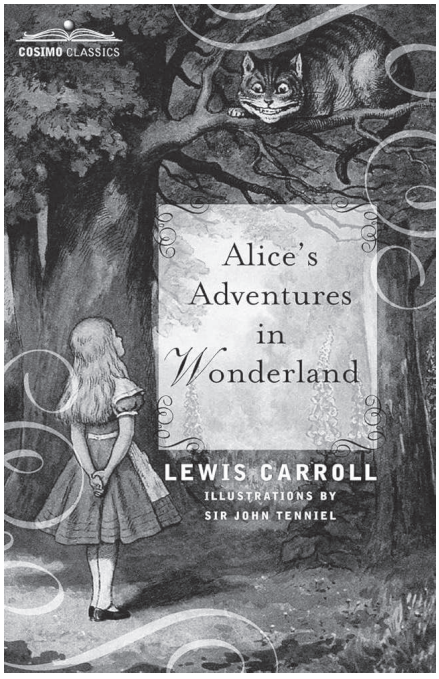
November 1939

Programme Innovations and Cultural Enrichment in the Colombo Broadcasting Service

The month of November 1939 witnessed several noteworthy additions to the programme schedule of the Colombo Broadcasting Service, reflecting both innovation in broadcasting content and a commitment to cultural and educational enrichment. These new features demonstrate a sophisticated understanding of the diverse interests of the listening public in Ceylon and abroad.

One of the major attractions for younger audiences during the month was the dramatized broadcast of **Lewis Carroll's Alice in Wonderland.** Scheduled to commence on Friday, November 3rd, this literary classic was adapted specifically for radio under the experienced direction of "Uncle Peter" and "Aunt Peggy," familiar figures in the "Children's Hour." The serialized nature of the adaptation aimed to engage both children and adults through weekly instalments, blending entertainment with literary education.[1]

Complementing this initiative was a series of educational talks in Sinhala centered on the Colombo Museum, the national repository of art and antiquities. The series, inaugurated on November 7th by Mr. H. L. Caldera, a museum staff member, sought to foster public interest in the historical and archaeological significance of museum artefacts. As the accompanying programme notes



Lewis Carroll's Alice in Wonderland has been frequently adapted into radio dramas and audio plays, transforming its nonsensical, character-driven narrative into a vivid audio experience

These productions, ranging from dramatic readings to full-cast adaptations like the 1937 version or modern BBC productions, use voice acting to bring Alice, the White Rabbit, and the Queen of Hearts to life.



Charles Lutwidge Dodgson aka Lewis Carroll

Lewis Carroll, taken by Oscar Gustav Rejlander in 1863. This photograph captures the author two years before the publication of his most famous work, Alice's Adventures in Wonderland.

Lewis Carroll's real name was Charles Lutwidge Dodgson; he was an English author, poet, and mathematician.

He used the pen name Lewis Carroll for his literary works, while publishing mathematical works under his real name.

Alice's Adventures in Wonderland was published in 1865, followed by its sequel Through the Looking-Glass in 1871.

He suffered from a stammer and a fever that left him deaf in one ear.

suggested, mundane objects such as stone implements, fossilized teeth, or ancient coins could potentially yield insights more valuable than opulent regalia.[2] These broadcasts served both as an introduction to museological awareness and as a platform for heritage education through radio.

Another noteworthy addition was the Thursday night dramatic serial The Adventures of Alonza Mactavish, a detective thriller produced in four parts by Mr. J. S. M. Paterson and his ensemble. This feature followed the success of the October production of The Prisoner of Zenda, adapted by Mr. Peter Batten and his "Radio Players," which had garnered widespread public interest. The trend toward serialized drama reflects the station's growing commitment to narrative continuity and listener engagement.[3]

In recognition of Armistice Day, the station also planned a broadcast of Malini, a dramatic work by Rabindranath Tagore. The play, rich in poetic expression and moral complexity, featured a talented cast including Miss Sheila de Soysa in the titular role, supported by prominent performers such as Nelun Devi, Leonard Peiris, Neville Wijeyekoon, and E. C. B. Wijeyesinghe. The production, structured in two acts and staged symbolically at the palace balcony and garden, showcased the station's investment in high-quality dramatic performance and its engagement with South Asian literary canon.[4]

To address feedback from Western listeners regarding the lack of suitable programming in the early evening hours, the station introduced The Twilight Hour on Mondays from 6:30 to 7:30 p.m. This new musical and spoken-word feature was explicitly created to provide continuity with the already successful Cocktail Hour. Suggestions for improving the segment were invited from the audience, signaling the station's responsiveness to listener critique and its openness to collaborative development.[5]

Footnotes:

1. "Alice in Wonderland," Ceylon Radio Times, November 1939.
2. "The Colombo Museum," Ceylon Radio Times, November 1939.
3. "Thriller on Thursdays," Ceylon Radio Times, November 1939.
4. "Malini by Tagore," Ceylon Radio Times, November 1939.
5. "The Twilight Hour," Ceylon Radio Times, November 1939.

December 1939

Growth in Radio Licensing in Ceylon:

By the end of the year 1938, a total of 6,007 radio licences had been issued in Ceylon. This figure marked a steady expansion in public access to broadcasting services.

As of December 1939, the number of licensed radio receivers had risen to 7,621 an increase of 1,614 within the span of a single year. This notable growth reflects the widening reach and influence of radio broadcasting across the island during the late 1930s.[1]

Footnote:

1. Annual Administrative Report of the Postmaster General for the Year 1939 (Colombo: Government Press, 1940).

December 1939

Colombo Broadcasting Service: Progress and Milestones 1939

I. Musical Programming and Cultural Documentation

1. Expansion of Musical Programming and Field Recording Activities

In 1939, the Colombo Broadcasting Service intensified its commitment to musical programming encompassing both classical and folk traditions. In March of the same year, systematic field recording missions were conducted in Deniyaaya, Anuradhapura, Nallulachchiya, and Horowpothana. These initiatives sought to document local folk music and oral traditions, reflecting the Service's dual mandate of cultural preservation and public education through radio.

II. Institutionalization of Indigenous Music

2. Introduction of the Sinhala Oriental Music Orchestra

A significant institutional milestone was achieved in 1939 with the establishment of the first Sinhala Oriental Music Orchestra. By bringing together traditional instrumentalists for live studio performances, the Colombo Broadcasting Service elevated indigenous music to a professional broadcast format. This initiative contributed to the popularization, standardization, and national recognition of Sinhala musical heritage.

III. Religious and Ceremonial Broadcasting

3. Consolidation of Buddhist Religious Programming

Building upon the successful introduction of Seth Pirith broadcasts in the preceding year, CBS maintained regular live and recorded sessions of Buddhist chants throughout 1939. The continued involvement of monastic performers enhanced cultural authenticity and further embedded religious programming within the station's public service broadcasting mandate.

IV. International Cultural Exchange

4. International Dissemination and Collaborative Broadcasting

The Service continued to engage in international cultural exchange by sharing recordings of ceremonial music and traditional performances with foreign broadcasters. This practice extended the precedent established in 1938 through collaboration with the BBC Empire Service and contributed to enhancing the international visibility and cultural prestige of Sri Lankan broadcasting.

V. Audience Expansion and Public Adoption

5. Growth in Radio Licensing and Listener Engagement

Public adoption of radio technology continued to expand during 1939. By the end of the year, approximately 7,200 radio licences had been issued, representing an increase of 1,193 licences over 1938. This growth underscored rising public confidence in radio broadcasting and its deepening integration into everyday social and cultural life.

VI. Technical and Administrative Consolidation

6. Technological Upgrades and Institutional Strengthening

CBS further strengthened its technical infrastructure through improved recording equipment and more systematic transmitter maintenance routines. Engineer D. P. Jayasekera continued to provide advanced training to technical staff, while procedural protocols for outside broadcasts were formalized following earlier successes, notably the Kandy Perahera transmissions.

Setbacks and Challenges

VII. Operational and Structural Limitations

1. Technical Constraints and Infrastructure Strain

Despite ongoing improvements, the station encountered intermittent transmitter faults, particularly during outside and live broadcasts. Ensuring consistent signal quality required close coordination between CBS engineers and telecommunications personnel, highlighting the continued strain on technical resources.

2. Financial and Resource Constraints

Budgetary limitations constrained the expansion of live orchestral performances and the scale of field recording initiatives. These financial pressures affected both the frequency of on-location documentation and the commissioning of additional artistes.

3. Linguistic and Programming Imbalances

Although Sinhala and Tamil announcers were well established within the broadcasting framework, English-language programming continued to dominate prime broadcasting hours. This imbalance reflected persistent colonial-era content hierarchies and resource allocation priorities.

4. Listener Participation and Editorial Oversight

Listener-interactive programmes, particularly request-based segments, occasionally generated complaints concerning content suitability. In response, the Service introduced procedural guidelines to regulate audience participation and strengthen editorial control.

Concluding Assessment

The year 1939 represents a phase of consolidation and measured expansion for the Colombo Broadcasting Service. Institutionally and socio-politically, the Service reinforced its commitment to multilingual programming and religious inclusivity. Economically, sustained growth in radio licensing reflected increasing public engagement and trust in broadcasting. Culturally, the expansion of field recordings, the establishment of a national orchestra, and continued international collaboration contributed significantly to the preservation and promotion of Sri Lankan heritage. Nevertheless, persistent technical limitations, financial constraints, and programming imbalances underscored the operational boundaries of a broadcasting institution still in the process of maturation.

Epilogue

Sound, Society, and Identity: Cultural Historiography and the Early Broadcasting Experience in Ceylon (1864–1940)

The historical development of broadcasting in Ceylon between 1864 and 1940 represents not merely the chronological emergence of a technological medium but the gradual formation of a new cultural sphere shaped through sound. When examined from a cultural historiographical perspective, early broadcasting reveals itself as an influential agent in the transformation of social communication, aesthetic expression, linguistic representation, and collective identity formation. The early decades of radio broadcasting therefore occupy a critical position within the broader cultural history of modern Sri Lanka, marking the transition from localized, orally transmitted cultural practices to technologically mediated auditory modernity.

The origins of broadcasting must be understood within the intellectual transformation initiated by nineteenth-century scientific discoveries. The theoretical work of James Clerk Maxwell and the experimental confirmation provided by Heinrich Hertz introduced the possibility of transmitting invisible waves across space, effectively redefining the spatial boundaries of human communication. However, the cultural significance of these discoveries emerged only when technological experimentation intersected with social institutions and public engagement. By the early twentieth century, wireless communication had begun to alter the ways in which knowledge, entertainment, and authority were transmitted and received.

From a historiographical standpoint, the development of broadcasting represents a crucial moment in the evolution of modern sensory experience. Whereas earlier forms of communication relied predominantly upon print culture and face-to-face oral transmission, radio introduced the possibility of simultaneous auditory participation across geographically dispersed communities. The emergence of radio thus reconfigured the relationship between voice and audience, transforming sound into a shared cultural experience capable of transcending regional and social divisions.

In the context of Ceylon, this transformation occurred within the framework of British colonial administration and imperial communication networks. The introduction of broadcasting was initially shaped by technological transfer from Britain, particularly through the influence of public service broadcasting principles developed by the British Broadcasting Corporation. Yet, while colonial broadcasting institutions often functioned as instruments of administrative coordination and cultural influence, the evolution of radio in Ceylon demonstrates a more complex process of cultural negotiation and adaptation.

The establishment of experimental broadcasting in Colombo during the early 1920s introduced new modes of cultural interaction. The early broadcasts, though limited in audience reach, symbolized the arrival of a modern communicative space in which music, speech, and ceremonial events could be experienced

collectively by listeners who were physically separated. The broadcast of the YMCA inauguration ceremony in 1924, for example, represented not merely a technical achievement but a cultural event that introduced the public to the imaginative possibilities of disembodied voice and mediated presence. Such broadcasts initiated a redefinition of public space, extending communal participation beyond physical gathering sites.

The cultural transformation initiated by broadcasting becomes particularly evident in the gradual incorporation of indigenous linguistic and musical traditions into radio programming. Initially dominated by English-language content and Western musical forms, early broadcasting reflected the social composition of colonial urban elites and expatriate communities. However, the introduction of Sinhala and Tamil programming during the late 1920s and 1930s marked a significant historiographical turning point. This transition reflected the recognition of broadcasting as a medium capable of representing diverse cultural traditions and engaging broader segments of society.

The incorporation of indigenous musical forms into broadcasting had profound cultural implications. Traditional music in Ceylon had historically been transmitted through temple rituals, village performances, and courtly patronage systems. Broadcasting transformed these localized artistic practices into publicly accessible cultural expressions. The transmission of Oriental orchestral music, folk performances, and devotional recitations created a new auditory archive that preserved, standardized, and disseminated musical traditions across regional boundaries. In this sense, broadcasting functioned both as a preserver of cultural heritage and as a catalyst for artistic modernization.

Similarly, the use of vernacular languages in broadcasting contributed to the development of linguistic standardization and literary dissemination. Radio announcers, scriptwriters, and performers played a crucial role in shaping modern spoken Sinhala and Tamil through carefully moderated pronunciation, vocabulary selection, and narrative style. The broadcast voice gradually acquired symbolic authority, influencing language usage in education, literature, and public discourse. Cultural historiography must therefore recognize broadcasting as a significant agent in the evolution of modern linguistic identity in Sri Lanka.

Another critical dimension of early broadcasting lies in its role in redefining religious and ceremonial communication. The transmission of Buddhist sermons, Hindu devotional recitations, and Christian religious services introduced a new form of spiritual engagement that extended sacred discourse beyond temple and church environments. These broadcasts contributed to the democratization of religious knowledge while simultaneously reinforcing communal identity through shared listening experiences. Radio thus functioned as a bridge between traditional spiritual authority and modern technological mediation.

From a socio-cultural perspective, early broadcasting also facilitated the formation of new listening communities. Unlike print culture, which required literacy and individual engagement, radio enabled collective listening practices that transcended educational and social barriers. Families, village groups, and urban communities gathered around receiving sets, transforming radio listening into a shared social ritual. This collective auditory experience contributed to the emergence of a shared cultural consciousness, fostering a sense of belonging among diverse populations.

The role of broadcasting in shaping colonial modernity must also be examined critically. While radio served as a platform for cultural dissemination and public education, it also functioned as a medium

through which colonial administrative values and social norms were communicated. Educational broadcasts, agricultural advisory programmes, and official announcements often reflected broader imperial objectives aimed at social regulation and administrative efficiency. Nevertheless, local broadcasters and performers frequently adapted these programmes to reflect indigenous cultural sensibilities, thereby creating a hybrid communicative environment that blended colonial policy with local cultural expression.

The historiographical significance of Edward Harper and the early broadcasting pioneers lies not only in their technical achievements but also in their contribution to the cultural institutionalization of broadcasting. By transforming experimental wireless technology into a structured broadcasting service, these pioneers facilitated the creation of a cultural institution that would influence artistic production, linguistic development, and public communication for generations. Their work illustrates how technological innovation and cultural transformation often evolve simultaneously within historical processes.

By 1940, broadcasting in Ceylon had evolved into a mature cultural institution with defined programme structures, expanding audience participation, and increasing integration of indigenous cultural content. The medium had begun to function as a national cultural forum in which music, literature, religion, and public discourse could coexist within a shared auditory space. This transformation occurred at a moment when global political developments were preparing to reshape broadcasting's social role. The onset of the Second World War would expand radio's influence dramatically, transforming it into a vital instrument of political communication and national mobilisation.

Viewed retrospectively, the early history of broadcasting in Ceylon represents the emergence of a new cultural paradigm in which technology and tradition interacted dynamically. Broadcasting did not merely transmit culture; it restructured cultural production, reception, and preservation. It created new artistic opportunities while simultaneously redefining older performance traditions. It shaped linguistic identity while expanding access to education and information. Most importantly, it introduced a shared auditory environment that contributed significantly to the formation of modern Sri Lankan cultural consciousness.

As the subsequent history of Sri Lankan broadcasting unfolds beyond 1940, the cultural foundations established during this formative period continue to influence the evolution of electronic media. The growth of national broadcasting institutions, the expansion of multilingual programming, and the development of radio drama, music, and educational broadcasting all reflect the enduring legacy of the early broadcasting era. The cultural historiography of broadcasting thus reveals radio as both a product of historical transformation and an active agent in shaping the cultural and intellectual life of Sri Lanka.

This volume, therefore, documents more than the origins of a communication technology. It records the emergence of a cultural institution that reshaped auditory experience, linguistic identity, and artistic expression within the island. The early decades of broadcasting stand as a testament to the capacity of technological innovation to redefine cultural history, illustrating how the invisible waves first theorized in nineteenth-century laboratories ultimately became carriers of collective memory, cultural continuity, and national imagination in Sri Lanka.

General Index to Volumes I, II, III & IV

Volume Series Statement

This publication constitutes Volume I of a planned four-volume scholarly series documenting the scientific origins, institutional development, socio-political context, and cultural significance of radio broadcasting in (Ceylon) Sri Lanka, culminating in the centenary year of broadcasting.The complete series is structured as follows:

Volume I:

From Electromagnetic Theory to the Consolidation of

Public Broadcasting in Ceylon (1864–1940)

Volume II:

From Wartime Broadcasting to National Transformation (1940–1972)

Volume III:

From State Broadcasting to Liberalisation and Media Expansion (1972–2000)

Volume IV:

From Digital Transition to the Centenary of Broadcasting (2000–2025)

Together, these volumes offer a comprehensive centennial account of Sri Lankan radio broadcasting within broader global, regional, and national historical frameworks.



Dr. Dhammika Dissanayaka (Ph.D.) is a distinguished Sri Lankan academic, media scholar, and film historian, and a retired Lecturer of the Department of Applied Music and Mass Communication at the University of the Visual and Performing Arts, Sri Lanka. With a professional career spanning more than four decades, he has made sustained and influential contributions to higher education, media scholarship, and cultural research in South Asia.

A graduate of the University of Sri Jayewardenepura, Dr. Dissanayaka undertook advanced academic and professional training at leading institutions, including the National Film and Television Institute of India, the National Film Archives of India (Pune), Bhopal University, and Jadavpur University (Kolkata), in addition to further studies in Malaysia. This multidisciplinary formation has informed his scholarly engagement with cinema, broadcasting, documentary practice, and audio- visual culture.

Throughout his academic career, Dr. Dissanayaka served as a lecturer, senior academic, and advisor, contributing significantly to the institutional development and intellectual consolidation of media and communication studies in Sri Lanka. His research and publications particularly on Sri Lankan and Indian cinema are widely cited for their historical depth, analytical rigor, and cultural sensitivity.

This volume represents the culmination of his long-term research on the history of radio broadcasting in Sri Lanka and stands as a significant scholarly contribution to South Asian media history.

1864 – 1940

State Panel of Radio, Newspaper and Social Media
Arts Council of Sri Lanka
Department of Cultural Affairs
Ministry of Buddhasasana, Religious and Cultural Affairs

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