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THE MAITLAND TIES WITH CEYLON/SRI LANKA
LIVE ON AFTER OVER 200 YEARS

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I have in my dining room in London a portrait of Lieut. General Sir Thomas Maitland's brother, the 8th Earl of Lauderdale. He was extremely close to his six younger brothers including 'King Tom,' Governor of Ceylon 1805 – 1811, and insisted that all his brothers had their portraits painted.

In fact, two very significant ones were painted of Sir Thomas Maitland which now hang in the Maitland ancestral home, Thirlstane Castle, in Lauder, Berwickshire, Scotland. The very romantic looking Thirlstane Castle in pink sandstone dates back to the 14th century. The Maitlands originally came over from France to Britain with William the Conqueror in 1066.

I fit into the picture as a descendant of Sir Thomas 'brother the 8th Earl of Lauderdale. My father was the 17th Earl and my brother Ian, inherited the title to become the 18th Earl of Lauderdale. Sir Thomas never married and had no direct heirs.

Nothing gives me greater pride than to hear reference to the time when 'King Tom' as he is familiarly known was Governor of Ceylon. He was a wily and shrewd Scot, who had had a distinguished military career before he arrived to take up his new role. He is remembered for his skilful management in Ceylon, his early encouragement of Chinese to settle and work in Ceylon on the basis they were 'productive and industrious' possibly laid the foundations for good relations 200 years later. He introduced an independent voting system to the Emerald Isle. In short he has been described as a 'great human force, controlled by an iron will.'

In terms of culture, he introduced cricket to the island. A lasting symbol which has brought huge success to the Sri Lanka cricket teams.

And of course, 'King Tom' is remembered for his style, love of good parties and then his passionate love for Lovina Aponsuwa, an extraordinarily beautiful dancer of mixed Portuguese and Sinhala Rodi ancestry. They met for the first time at the welcoming party

held in his honour his arrival on the island, when Lovina danced in a troupe organised by her father. They were the days of masked balls, top hats and flowing evening gowns.

Sir Thomas was smitten by the lovely Lovina. He could not keep away from her smiles and charms. So much so, that when he built the Governor's mansion, Mount Lavinia, he instructed the builder to construct a secret tunnel direct to Lovina's house. One end of the opening was inside the drinking well of Lovina's housing compound, the other led from the wine cellar in the Mansion, Mount Lavinia as it became known.

But inevitably the love affair became public and flew in the face of the stiff upper lip image of Britain's colonial masters, who ruled with a firm grip and looked sternly down on such behaviour. The social gap was too vast to be bridged. In the end, in 1811 after six years in post, King Tom was 'routinely transferred' to another posting far away, Malta which also covered responsibilities for the Greek Islands of Ionia, and in particular Corfu. To those islands he brought cricket, but sadly he had to leave the love of his life, Lovina behind. Both their hearts were broken by this. He died a bachelor in Malta, and it is believed that Lovina committed suicide by jumping off a cliff as she could not bear the pain of her lover's departure.

Their memories still lie in Mount Lavinia, in the Maitland State Room, where his and her portraits are hung, plus his uniform. His statue stands in central Colombo, and nearby is Maitland crescent.

The years may have rolled by but our family interest in the Emerald Isle did not wane. I had the opportunity as a Member of the British Parliament, representing the Conservatives for Sutton and Cheam to join an official delegation to Sri Lanka in 1993. This visit made a huge impression on me. I had the privilege of meeting the then Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe, and again of course today, and also Mrs Sirimavo Bandaranaike, who subsequently became Prime Minister and her daughter Chandrika Kumartunga who later became President among many leading politicians.

The one thing that impressed me about them all, irrespective of political allegiance was their undeniable courage and fortitude with many personal sacrifices along the way. Some of the politicians personal recollections of being in the line of fire were deeply moving, more so because there was no sense of self-pity, more a dignity

As a result of that visit, I arranged my husband and three children to join me after the formal programme was over for a month to tour around and explore this wonderful country.

I became an MP at the same time as the very distinguished Sri Lankan Nirajan Deva-Aditiya became the first Sri Lankan to become a British Member of Parliament. He is better known in the UK as Nirj Deva, now a Member of the European Parliament. We became firm friends, a friendship which I am proud to say is long lasting.

It was entirely due to him that I began to understand the wondrous 4,000 year history of Ceylon and in particular made what can only be described as a pilgrimage to

Anuradhapura and Sigiriya. The sheer scale of the civilisation of those long gone days left a huge mark on me, so much so, I had to return on this latest visit.

Imagine though the contrast of visiting Trincommalee, much besieged by the LTTE. I visited it at a time when tension was high. There were frequent check points and a strong military presence. A number of naval frigates had been attacked and sunk by suicide terrorists, bombs had been exploded in markets killing dozens. It was a tough time. The town felt deserted. The Naval Commander at the historic Navy House talked us through the challenges. Somehow looking at the huge potential for development which was yet to come, it was hard to imagine how life would go back to normal.

We stayed at Uppuveli Beach, a paradise, but in those days totally deserted with only the leaping monkeys for company. And in the distance the boom of artillery. I am glad we went. It was a way of sharing with Sri Lanka's pain. We could sense the troubled times and the more to come.

A more relaxed scenario was up in Nuwara Eliya. We went to the Hill Club, built in 1876 by colonial coffee planters as a private club for gentlemen of likeminded disposition. It was a revelation to see a recreation of a traditional English Surrey house, with mock Tudor beams and surrounded by an abundance of rose bushes. Inside, the rules still pertained. Strict dress code for all, and above all, when we asked for our favourite arak cocktail were told, 'Sir, we do not serve native drinks. It is gin and tonic or whisky here.!' I had a chance to tour the club and admire the superb old English furniture which had somehow been transported over all the oceans to take up residence there. I was glad to see that one Club Secretary had been a Maitland!

We moved south to Tangalle, where I have to say we were swept away with the natural beauty and amazing beaches. We stayed in a small hotel owned by German couple. It was right on the beach, with little chalets in the palm grove. The waves pounded high on the sands – they were truly dramatic. Sadly I have a feeling this ideallic hotel would have been swept away with the Tsunami because I have not been able to find trace of it.

And of course we had to visit the Yala National Park.. We went on a dawn drive, and caught the elephants moving to a watering hole, the peacocks flying up into the trees, the monkeys flying from branch to branch, from tree to tree. And if the car engine was revved up, they flew even faster!

I have another fond connection with the distinguished international lawyer Rt Hon. Sir Demond de Silva, QC , PC. We have known each other since I was a young journalist making my way in Fleet Street in the 1960s. Subsequently our links grew closer when he married Princess Katarina of Yugoslavia, with whom the Serbian side of my family have had generations of friendship.

His sister Helga lives in Kandy running her gloriously exotic boutique hotel, Helga's Folly. We stayed there on our recent visit, and just loved not only our hostess, but also the sheer fun and style of the establishment with vivid murals everywhere. The hotel lies high up

on the hill, under the very shadow of the forest which wraps itself round the building. We were warned to be beware of the leopards who come down to drink the swimming pool water. And then told of the day a leopard fell in through a roof with a tremendous crash landing in the bath of a guest! The guest horribly locked the door and yelled for help. The door was opened and the terrified animal somehow found its way out of the house in a flash. Never a dull moment.

I returned to Sri Lanka with two of my children and six grandchildren for a Christmas holiday in 2013 when we took a lovely house near Galle. From there, we visited the cinnamon plantation owned by a long standing personal friend Miles Young, chairman of Ogilvy Mather World Wide, called Mount Cinnamon at Mirissa Hills. Miles Young had the vision to rebuild the cinnamon plantation, create the only cinnamon museum in Sri Lanka, and construct a superb modern house designed by the leading Sri Lankan architect C. Anjalendran, which has all the air and elegance of local culture.

In London, I got to know Dr Chris Nonis, the Sri Lankan High Commissioner until 2015. He was an enormously popular and effective diplomat and much missed from the London scene. It was due to him that I had the opportunity to return to Sri Lanka for the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in 2013. This was an important time post the closure of the war with the LTTE. Prime Minister David Cameron attended, and for the first time HRH Prince Charles represented H.M. the Queen, who at 87 had decided she would no longer undertake long haul journeys. Prince Charles, accompanied by the Duchess of Cornwall clearly enjoyed their time, and even managed to visit the Mackwood tea estate at Labookellie, Nuwara Eliya where I was presented to him.

It was thus that I came to be invited to be a speaker at the Ministry of Defence conference the Colombo Defence Seminar 2015 with 350 participants from 55 countries. This was the fifth in the series. This time, in my role as President of Defence and Security Forum, a defence and foreign affairs think tank which I launched in 1983. The conference was hosted by Lieut. General Crishanthe de Silva, Commander of the Sri Lanka Army with the theme, 'National Security in the context of emerging Global Threats'. The keynote speech was delivered by the former President of Afghanistan, H.E. Hamid Karzai. His presence was powerful as he stood there in his signature green robe. But afterwards when I was introduced to him, I was struck by his quiet and reflective manner, and he reminded me that visiting Britain gives him huge pleasure because he can get away from the public glare.

My own contribution was entitled, 'Geo-politics and the World Order', in this I gave a UK perspective. I had been involved in defence and security issues since 1983, and had served as Parliamentary Private Secretary to Rt. Hon. Sir John Wheeler, MP, Minister of State for Northern Ireland with responsibility for counter terrorism.

This year, 2016, I had the very great honour to be invited back to a much larger event. So great had been the demand to attend that the location had to be moved from the Galadari Hotel to the Bandaranaike International Conference Hall to accommodate 850 delegates from 67 countries. Under the leadership of General de Silva, this time the theme was, 'Soft

Power and Its Influence on Global Issues'. My own contribution was somewhat controversial, 'The Perils of Soft Power'.

The conference had a different tone, very reflective and with extremely high level contributions from a whole range of international academics, international figures from USA, to Canada, to UK represented by Professor Adrian Kendry who has spent many years working closely with Secretary Generals of NATO, to United Nations representatives, Bangladesh, Australia represented by General Greg Bilton, who lead a rigorous panel discussion. Finally came the Chinese Ambassador to Sri Lanka , H.E. Yi Xianliang who gave a very professional overview , accompanied by slides, reflecting China's consciousness to contribute positively to soft power. Last year, he was equally powerful describing China's outlook on maritime security.

Finally and regretfully my husband Robin Hay, and I took our leave. We had spent this time eight days in Sri Lanka, and thanks to the gracious support of the Sri Lanka Army, we were able to move around the country from north to south. All made possible by the superb logistical and management skills of our liaison officer, Major Indika Dalugama, Second in Command, 1st Reconnaissance Regiment. A natural diplomat as well as a very professional soldier, we are indeed grateful to him. We also shared some excellent Arak cocktails!

The Emerald Isle holds wonderful and dear memories. The family ties make it even closer. My brother the present Earl of Lauderdale took superb photographs of Colombo when he was invited to attend the 200 Anniversary of the Governorship of Sir Thomas Maitland. Like me, he loved staying at Mount Lavinia. It seemed to be the full circle.