

THE CRICKETING KELAARTS

Henricus Gerhardus (anglicised to Henry George) Kelaart (19.5.1830 – 18.9.1930) who was a Notary Public, married Maria Sophia Le Dulx (b. 21.7.1840). They lived all their life in Colombo. They had thirteen children. The eldest was born in 1857 and the youngest 22 years later in 1879. Colvin was no. 5, Banda no.9 and Tommy no. 11.

Harris Colvin Kelaart (1862-1930), James Allanson Ebenezer “Banda” Kelaart (1867-1919) and Walter Thomas “Tommy” Kelaart (1871-1950) played for the Colts in the late eighteenth century. Colvin and Tommy attended Royal College.

Tommy Kelaart (seated on ground second from left) and Colvin Kelaart (seated fifth from left), in the group picture below, were two of the four native born cricketers in the Ceylon XI that played against Australia. The rest were Englishman. The picture captures some of the founding members of Australian cricket, namely, Harry Boyle, Jack Blackham, Bill Murdoch, Sid Gregory and Harry Trott.

CEYLON VS. THE AUSTRALIANS 1890



Picture courtesy of the genealogy of the Kelaart family

Colvin’s cricketing abilities are described in Kelaart (2003: 210). He was a right-handed hurricane hitter with a peculiar manner of gripping the bat and was wont to bat with only a pad on his left leg against even the fastest of bowlers. He bowled right arm fast and delivered many yorkers. His long stop, Paddy Thomasz, used to retreat 8 to 10 yards when Colvin came on and chested the ball whenever he failed to grab it with his hands. He kept wickets and had a knack of indicating a batsman’s weakness to the bowler. But he could field anywhere and wore a brown felt on the field.

Colvin captained the Colts in the years 1886, 1887, 1890-94. He also captained the Ceylonese in four local tests against the Europeans between 1887 and 1893. He also captained the Colts team against Lord Hawke’s English amateurs in 1892.

His best bowling performance was against the Europeans was in 1888 when had figures of 25-8-59-10, all bowled. It was after this match which the Ceylonese won by 5 wickets that made the Europeans realise that Ceylonese cricket had progressed to a stage where regular encounters were possible.

Colvin captained the Colts in the 1893 game which ended in controversial circumstances which resulted in the C.C.C. breaking off relations with the Colts and no encounters taking place between the clubs for 12 years. To quote Foenander (1941: 85-86) –

” In 1893 a misunderstanding arose between these two Clubs owing to a dispute over an umpire’s decision in the match between the Colts and a European team led by Colonel Churchill on the Barrack Square. There was a case for defamation of character brought by the Ceylonese umpire against the “Times of Ceylon”, whose Editor at the time, Mr. H.H. Capper, was also Hony. Secretary of the C.C.C. The late Mr. C.L. Ferdinands, President of the Colts, appeared for Mr. van Geyzel, while the late Sir C.P. Layard was counsel for the “Times”, who lost the action and had to pay damages to the Ceylonese umpire”

The centenary souvenir (1973: 59) devotes an entire page to this episode penned by M.M.T. To quote –

“Set with 148 to make the Europeans lost J.A. McDonald, out L.B.W. to Tommy Kelaart. Then the next batsman in Lt. Biggs was snapped up by L. Thomasz off Raffel.

But the European captain, Colonel Churchill questioned the catch and had hot words with the Colts umpire W. Van Geyzel, who refused to be cowed down by the stentorian parade ground brawl of the Colonel, who maintained that Lt. Biggs was not out!

Tempers were frayed and things were hotting up when the Colts Captain led his team off the field in disgust. But in the “pavilion” was an interested spectator, the Rt. Rev. Dr. R.E. Copleston, Bishop of Colombo. He talked the fiery Colonel Churchill down to sweet reason.

The Europeans scored 140 and lost by 8 runs. Tommy Kelaart took 7 for 50.

The Colts umpire, Van Geyzel successfully instituted a libel action against the “Times of Ceylon” which had criticized him”

Both captains respected the Bishop’s advice and resumed the match because a loud crowd was in attendance (Kelaart: 2003: 210). The Bishop is reported as saying to Col. Churchill – inter alia – that the spectators had come to witness a game of cricket rather than Col. Churchill’s petulant display.

James Kelaart’s nickname “Banda” originated from his association with his fireman (Kelaart 2003: 214). As an engine driver he never took a train without his faithful fireman “Banda”. They were linked inextricably together as “Banda 1” and “Banda 2”.

Banda was a right-handed batsman and his highest score was the 76 he made against the Planters in 1888 which included two sixers hit over Christ Church and into the lake. He used his feet to bowlers and when he missed the ball he was so quick at getting his right foot back into the crease that the even the best wicket keepers of the time were unable to stump him.

Banda was a magnificent fielder at cover point and hit the wicket with unerring accuracy from any part of the field. Banda represented the Colts between 1886 and 1898, when the team under Colvin's captaincy were dubbed the "invincibles".

The demon bowler

Tommy Kelaart died in Chilaw in 1950 aged 78 years¹. He was born in 1872; a year before the Colts was born. Playing for Royal vs. St. Thomas' College in 1889 Tommy had the figures of 22-7-29-10 and a great future was predicted for him. (In the same game he created another record by being the first person in Ceylon cricket to be dismissed hitting the ball twice.) Tommy is considered Ceylon's greatest left-handed medium paced bowler (at least until the advent of Vaas) and was known as "the demon bowler of Ceylon" and or the "Rhodes of Ceylon". His feats with the ball were unparalleled in the annals of Ceylon cricket.

The references to Tommy Kelaart which the chronicler has access to are as follows: Ceylon Review 1897, Foenander 1910, On-Looker 1910, Foenander⁴ 1924, Foenander 1941: 9-10, 75, the DBU 1950, Colts centenary 1973, Lorenz-Andree 1973, and Kelaart 2003. Foenander 1910, On-Looker 1910 and Foenander (1941: 76) carry statistics on Kelaart's career. The On-Looker is Foenander writing under a pseudonym and that many of the references to Kelaart are derived from Foenander's writings. The tribute which appeared in the DBU of 1950 under the editor's name also bears Foenander's hallmark.

The Onlooker article and Foenander's Sketch of Tommy Kelaart will be transcribed and presented in the appendices along with the statistical summaries of his career in the final draft.

¹ Refer appendix 2 for notices on his death.



The editor of Journal of the Dutch Burgher Union, July 1950, penned the following tribute to Tommy Kelaart titled "The birthplace of Ceylonese cricket".

"Some half-century ago I was taken by my father to see Wilson's Circus on the Racquet Court. For the information of the many to whom this name conveys nothing I would explain that it was a park sandwiched, between the Fort and the Pettah of Colombo, where the Burghers, Sinhalese, Tamils, Mohamedans and Malays foregathered for recreation and relaxation. It's umbrageous almond (*kotang*), and banyan trees, gradually made way for two buildings—the Colombo Y.M.C.A., and the Pettah Library. Later, a shack of corrugated steel bearing the legend "Empire Theatre," marked the early attempt by Warwick Major to educate and entertain the public by silent movie.

What was left of the trees, together with the buildings, and the open spaces, has since been obliterated by the rat-proof grain-stores described on the city's map as the Chalmer's Granary. Unless my memory fails me, or my information about the past is imperfect, the Racquet Court was both the birthplace and nursery of Ceylonese cricket. Its only rival was an open piece of ground, now called the Gordon Gardens where the first Royal College vs. St. Thomas' College match was played.

Among those early cricketers of the eighteen seventies were: Dr T. F. Garvin, E. Ohlmus the Chief Inspector of Police, Charles, Horace and Edward de Kretser, Harry Ball and F. O. van Langenburg. Charles de Kretser an under-arm exponent, was their famous bowler, and " Eddo " Ohlmus their hardest hitter. The matches played in those early days were chiefly against the different "Regiments" that were from time to time stationed at Colombo.

Such was the beginning of the Colts Club in 1873, and there came to be added to the pioneers of Ceylon cricket Edwin and Walter van Geyzel, Collie and "Banda" Kelaart, A. O. van Cuylenburg, V. VanDort, B. and F. Thomas. The captains of the club were Collie Kelaart, Ossie van Hoff, Dr. E. H. Ohlmus, Dr. C. T. van Geyzel, and W. de Fransz.

On this background in the year 1889 " Tommie " Kelaart joined the Colts, fresh from the Royal College. Earlier the same year, he had made his one and only appearance for the college against St. Thomas', and had 7 wickets for 14 runs to his credit on the first innings, and 3 for 15 in the second innings. Is there any wonder' that it only took this young Colt two years to stake a claim among cricket's immortals. In 1891, in a match between Ceylon and Lord Sheffield's team, he had the distinction of bowling out the world-renowned Dr. W. G. Grace².

² Dr. Grace was a member of Lord Stoddart's team which played the Colts in a one-day fixture at Galle Face. According to A.W. Lorenz Andree, Dr. Grace was seldom clean bowled, and he shook hands with Kelaart before returning to the pavilion. Rumour has it that Dr. Grace gifted his bat to Kelaart.

There was perhaps no more popular sportsman of his age than "Tommy" Kelaart, whose death was announced on the 25th of May last. Those few left who knew him personally will not find it hard to account for his popularity, even without that wizardry which had brought him the applause and enthusiasm of the thousands who watched him on the cricket field. He was undoubtedly the greatest left hand bowler Ceylon has yet produced, and "one of cricket's finest gentlemen."

It was in that same year "Tommy" bowled Dr. Grace that the Colts made their first appearance against its rival club, the Nondescripts. This club came to be formed after the Burgher families had migrated from their "Gibraltar"— the Pettah, to the environs and suburbs of the city. A total of 11 runs was all that the Cinnamon Gardens cricketers were able to put together in the first innings. The bowling analysis of Kelaart and C. Heyn were consequently grand. The former had 6 for 3, the latter 4 for 6.

For five consecutive years prior to 1893, the European cricketers had to face defeat in the annual encounters against the Ceylonese team — at that time virtually the Colts. It followed that on this occasion when Colonel Churchill led a picked team of European players against them, the feelings on both sides ran very high. The incidents of this match which are better forgotten, and the extraordinary results, where Tommy Kelaart's coolness alone saved the game for the Colts who won by the narrow margin of 8 runs, are high-lights in Ceylon's cricket history. It even inspired a poet, who happily still splashes below prologue and verse both grave and gay the letters BEL, to commemorate the event with these lines:

Once more hath fickle victory crown'd
 The courage of our boys;
 One loud acclaim of praise has drown'd
 The envious quibbler's noise
 The palm of merit. Sirs, must fall
 To those to whom 'tis due;
 Here's luck to each, here's luck to all,
 And, Tommy, luck to you!"

For well each active Colt maintain'd
 The fame of young Ceylon:
 Each point was finely lost or gained,
 The triumph finely won.
 But who from first to last was seen
 to play it steady through?—
 Who never falter'd on the green?
 Ah, Tommy! that was you!

So here's to gallant Churchill then,
 An honest, manly heart!
 And here's to all his Englishmen,
 Who fitly bore their part!
 Here's to our Captain, and his band
 Of merry players too!
 And to our coolest heart and hand—
 Rare Tommy, — here's to you!

To write of the several other remarkable performances of Tommy "Kelaart" will prove a great task. One, among the numerous others, cannot very well be, overlooked, namely that of the Colombo Club match, in 1892, when with four successive balls he cleaned bowled M. H. Payne, G. Vanderspar, G. Alston, and W. B. Kingsbury.

Writ large on the panels of that age which has handed to Ceylon cricket of today its traditions, there are other names, A. Raffel, batsman and bowler, J. O. McHeyzer and Sydney Joseph who long held the finest first-wicket stand of 128 runs, Laurie Thomasz, and O. Weinman.

It is interesting to note to what extent the progeny of these die hards of the game have kept to their standards and ideals."

The statistics behind the Tommy gun

Tommy Kelaart was the greatest left hand bowler Ceylon had before 1906 (Foenander 1924: 181). Up to that year he had taken 1234 wickets at 5.9 runs each. This came off 4,786 overs and 1,821 maidens.

Between 1905 and 1911 he took nearly 409 wickets, and his career aggregate, from 1889 to 1918, was 1,736 wickets at an average of 6.816 (Kelaart 2003: 216). He took nine, eight and seven wickets in an innings, six, five and eleven times, respectively. He took twelve wickets or over in a match on 28 occasions (ibid).

Foenander (1924: 182) describes Tommy Kelaart –

"... bowling left hand medium pace over the wicket, Kelaart was a remarkably accurate bowler, keeping an almost perfect length and being very fast of the pitch owing to the spin he put on the ball. He had a beautiful easy action and could bowl for hours on a stretch and with his elder brother and captain Colvin Kelaart, and team mate, Allen Raffel, formed the greatest bowling combination Ceylon has ever had ..."

Ivor Kelaart quotes a scribe of the time (probably Foenander) –

"Bowling with an easy action, the varying of his pace and perfect length contributed to his success. He could bowl on any wicket. Kelaart gave credit for his success as a bowler to his brother, Colvin, who coached him. He could ring the changes in pace and spin with clever disguise and accurate control of length. He could also make a new ball swerve but it was his mastery of the off-break, delivered sometimes at unexpected speed, in addition to the left hander's stock-in-trade leg break, and his skill in mixing them both that made him a veritable Lord High Executioner."

Ivor Kelaart (2003: 216) cites two paragraphs from a sketch on Tommy Kelaart which were published in 1910. It was probably taken out of Foenander's book titled *Ceylon's champion bowler: A sketch of Tommy Kelaart*, which came out that very year –

"Max O'Rell has been made responsible for the remark that, while not one person in a hundred is familiar with the appearance of every member of the Cabinet, it would be impossible for any one of the dozen leading Cricketers of England to walk through a crowded thoroughfare in London, or any one of the big provincial cities, without being recognized by every person who passes him. This statement is hardly a rhetorical exaggeration even when applied to Ceylon, for I doubt if even H.E. the Governor himself is better known to the man in the street than the subject of my sketch today.

Look in the crowd of passengers that alight at the Fort railway station by one of the office trains in the morning for a dapper little man invariably wearing a pair of flannel trousers and an Elwood topee with a narrow blue and cold band round it, you cannot be mistaken in identifying Ceylon's champion bowler"

The chronicler grew up in a Colombo where, in specific areas, everyone knew each other. Colombo in the early 1900s would have been even more of a small-town community. Large parts of Colombo were still occupied by plantations with most dwellers concentrated in the Pettah and Fort area. English would have linked the middle class more than it does today. It would have been no different to Sydney until the mid-forties where Ernie Toshack walked to the Sydney cricket ground and was greeted by name by householders and business owners all along the way.

Tommy's 25-year career with the Colts would have ended by 1916. Bradman was six years old then. He lived long enough to follow the entire cricket career of Bradman who was forty-two when Tommy died. Tommy had five children.

A distinguishing feature of Tommy's attire was his Ellwood hat which he never bowled without (Kelaart 2003: 217). He raised and pressed it down on his head before delivering every ball. In 1963 his Ellwood hat was presented by S.P. Foenander to the secretary of M.C.C. and the curator of the Lord's Cricket Museum where it can be viewed today. Tommy Jnr took the photograph of the hat that is presented below.



Courtesy of Richard Kelaart

Interestingly, his son, also called Tommy (Thomas Hubert), was considered an even more remarkable cricketer by some, although he would no doubt have flinched at the comparison. Harold de Andrado penned a tribute to him after he died in 1989 which was reproduced in the Journal of the Dutch Burgher Union of 1990. The tribute should be read in its entirety to realise what a remarkable all-rounder he was - a hard hitting batsman and a tight off spinner³. Like many sons of Colts stalwarts, A. Van Geyzel's sons included, Tommy Jnr didn't play for the Colts. He played instead for the Police, N.C.C. and Panadura SC (when he was stationed there). However, his son Richard Kelaart reconnected with the club of his illustrious grandfather. Richard was the contemporary of the chronicler and in 1968 they played against each other, he for St. Joseph's. After that they became team-mates, and they both featured in the team that won the Donovan Andree trophy for the first time in the club's history. As well, Richard Kelaart was a senior member of the Colts teams which won the same trophy in 1974-5, under Laxshman Doolwela.

The features below Tommy Jnr in a school photograph, and along with his cousins in a Ceylon team of 1933 which played against Madras.

St. JOSEPH'S CRICKET TEAM, 1925 SCHOOL CHAMPIONS



Standing L to R: Mr. Aloy Perera, M. Kelaart, T.H. Kelaart, H. Sproule, F.R. de Soysa, A. de Silva, P. Halackone, Mr. M.K. Albert (coach)

Seated L to R: C.D. Mayo, H. Halackone, Rev. Father J. MacCarthy (Prefect of Games), C.M. Fernando, C. de Croos

On the ground L to R: W. Abeysekera, C. Arsecularatne, G. Senanayake

Courtesy of Foenander 1926

Tommy Kelaart Jnr is standing third from the left. Second from left is Mervyn, the son of Colvin Kelaart.

³ De Andrado (1989) explains - He represented St. Josephs in 1924 and 1925 when they were wellnigh invincible. He left school early to join the Police and lost two years of cricket and probably the school captaincy. Few batsmen have treated Sri Lanka's greatest fast bowler D. S. Jayasundera as mercilessly as Kelaart had done in the thirties and forties. Tommy Kelaart has also an unique record for the greatest number of hat-tricks in Sri Lanka cricket a feat probably equaled by Jayasundera but never surpassed. He was a live wire of Police cricket right up to his retirement. He was responsible in a large measure in the Police being in the top rung of the cricket ladder.

**THOMAS HUBERT
KELAART**



Courtesy of Ivor Kelaart

In the photo below are two of Colvin Kelaart's sons (Mervyn and Edward) and Tommy Kelaart Jnr. In addition, there are some legendary Ceylon cricketers, Chippy Gunasekera, Sargo Jayawickrema and Neil Joseph, all ex-Royalists.⁴

THE FIRST CEYLON TEAM TO TOUR INDIA



Standing L to R: N.D de S. Wijesekera, H.E. Poulier, C. van der Straaten, N.S. Joseph, S.S. Jayawickrema, T.H. Kelaart, M. Kelaart, L.E. Bakelman
Seated L to R: V.C. Shockman, M.K. Albert, Dr. C.H. Gunasekera, P.J. Parsons (President C.C.A.)
Edward Kelaart, S.B.L. Perera (Manager), L.D.S. Gunasekera
On ground L to R: B.S. Perera, G.S. Hubert

⁴ Chippy Gunasekera was highly regarded by the chronicler's father, who played alongside Jayawickrema in the 1927 Royal team, and partnered Neil Joseph when the latter scored a century in the 1926 Royal-Thomian.

THE CEYLONESE IN INDIA, 1932-33



C. H. Gunasekara

The first overseas tour after the formation of the Ceylon Cricket Association in 1922 was the tour to India in December 1932. The Ceylon team on this inaugural tour of India was chosen by the selectors I. Rasanayagam, P. J. Parson, V. S. de Kretser, S. B. L. Perera and C. H. Gunasekara. Edward Kelaart took over the captaincy when Dr C. H. Gunasekara, who was the Chief Medical Officer of Health, returned to Colombo because of an epidemic of smallpox.

The touring party and the ages when they left for India: C. H. Gunasekara (captain), 38, Edward Kelaart, 32, M. K. Albert, 37, L. D. S. Gunasekara, 27, G. S. Hubert, 20, S. Jayawickrama, 25, Mervyn Kelaart, 24, C. Vanderstraaten, 27, H. Poulier, 21, N. S. Joseph, 26, N. D. de S Wijesekera, 23, V.

C. Schokman, 28, L. E. Bakelman, 31, B. S. Perera, 27, and T. H. Kelaart, 26, with S. B. L. Perera (manager).

The Colombo Cricket Club informed the C.C.A. that their players were not available, which meant that such fine players as F. A. Waldock, W. T. Brindley and C. Clover-Brown did not make the trip. The Ceylon team left by P & O *Corfu* on 30 November. Edward Kelaart and M. K. Albert travelled overland by train to Bombay. The tour commenced with a match against Bombay.

The three-day "unofficial" Test between Ceylon and India was played at Feroz Shah Kotla, Delhi, on 30, 31 December 1932 and 1 January 1933.



C. K. Nayudu

Courtesy of Alston Mahadevan

The following article was written by Harold de Andrado, about Edward Kelaart and appeared in the Sun newspaper of 19th September 1978.

Saga of cricketing Kelaarts

Edward: 'A Sobers of early generation'

BY HAROLD DE ANDRADO

The presence of Edward Kelaart in Sri Lanka after a couple of decades finds one in a nostalgic and reminiscent mood. Incidentally Kelaart is a household word in Sri Lanka cricket as much as Grace or Edrich, Smith or Brown is in the international sphere.

If we accept the greatness of the Gunasekeras and De Sarams then we cannot but admit the rights of the Kelaarts in the hemisphere of great all-round sportsmen.

Edward's father Colvin and his uncle Tommy (Snr.) were among the pioneers of sport in Sri Lanka. His brothers Bertie, Carl and Mervyn performed great deeds, both for the BRC and in representative Sri Lanka sport be it cricket, hockey or soccer. His cousin Tommy (jnr.) and his nephew Ernie were both cricketing internationals and famous all-rounders of Sri Lanka cricket right up to the 1950s. Now there is a fourth generation of Kelaarts shining in Melbourne grade cricket that includes his grandsons and grand nephews and it won't be long before a Kelaart wears the big baggy Green Aussie cap.

In this galaxy of names, Edward stood out as the greatest. There are many more knowledgeable than me, who suggest that Edward Kelaart was the greatest all-rounder ever produced by Sri Lanka. It would be foolish to refute that argument as there are sufficient statistics to substantiate that claim.

Anyone who knew his cricket and played it as well as Edward who had developed the fundamentals to such a pitch of perfection could be anything less than a champion.

In fact, he was a Sobers of an earlier generation, a true three-in-one cricketer. He was a great cricket coach too whose approach to the game was of the highest order. He never interfered with natural talent and most of his products reached the top not only here but some have done so in Australia too. He played cricket in Australia well past his 60th year and, now follows the game 'Down Under' very closely. He is no doubt from the traditional old school. So he is as expected very pro-Establishment and anti-Packer.

When India were first admitted to the ICC and sent their first official team to England in 1932, they almost kidnapped Edward Kelaart into their team as Indian selectors unashamedly admitted that they lacked an all-rounder of Kelaart's class. Mind you, this was the era of Amarsingh and of Nissar.

As a slip fieldsman Edward was a glorious 'taker' of catches whether high or low with certainty on either hand. In any position he was as safe, superb, agile and fascinating as the best as they come. A glorious left-hand batsman his century in India for Vizianagram's team is still spoken of. He could bowl all day and was always the master of artifices of flight and the variation of length.

The cricketing public sometimes can be fickle and forgetful for heroes in fact die with one's own youth. They are pinned like butterflies to the setting board of early memories. Even today when you look at him reaching his fourth score the glimpse of greatness is still there.

With these amazing natural gifts he has had few superiors in skill as a sportsman and he should not be easily forgotten though some of our 'locals' appear to have forgotten him.

For, I am reliably told that verily it was a joyous sight whether one was merely a spectator or more seriously an opponent to see Edward Kelaart in action performing in order that his side should prevail.

As a young schoolboy cricketer Edward Kelaart had his critics. He was seen as bringing the Kelaart name into disrepute. His son Ivor, the author of a book on the family, paid the following tribute to his father, which appeared in the book.

Dedication

To the memory of my father
Edward George Samuel Kelaart

The greatest all-round cricketer produced by the clan.

In a school cricket match for Royal College, he dropped three catches in the outfield, this was witnessed by Dr Allie Raffel, a former distinguished All Ceylon and Colts cricketer and team mate of Colvin Kelaart, who promptly relayed the news with this remark:

"Collie, that boy of yours will be a disgrace to the name he bears"

On arriving home the boy was called aside and sternly rebuked:

"Son, if you can't play the game well, don't spoil my good name or that of the family"

This remark spurred my father on to become the finest slips fielder in the land, his catch to dismiss the **Australian captain, Bill Woodfull**, in the 1930 International in Colombo brought this accolade from the great man:

*"We thought your fielding was first rate as nothing was given away.
You have a splendid spin bowler in Kelaart, whose catch in dismissing me
was one of the finest I have ever seen"*

and

in memory of all those who have gone before.

The passing of a legend

Tommy Kelaart passed away in 1950. His passing didn't go unnoticed. Here are some of the tributes taken from Tommy Jnr's scrapbook. One tribute was penned by the legendary S.P. Foenander and another by the legendary English cricketer, W.T. Greswell.



Observer 26.5.50

Daily News, 26.5.1950

Courtesy of Richard Kelaart

A SPORTS CAUSERIE

JUNE 8th 1950

By ITINERANT

THE PASSING OF TOMMY KELAART

THE most famous of the Kelaart family, who so greatly distinguished themselves in Ceylon cricket during the last sixty years, was undoubtedly the demon left-hand bowler of his day, Tommy Kelaart, whose death in his seventy-ninth year took place at Chilaw, on May 25. Few of his contemporaries are still alive, but a great many of the older generation still remember with pride the dapper little man who was a terror in his day and one who always commanded the greatest respect from the best batsmen that faced him. And there were excellent batsmen in those far off days among the Europeans, some of whom had played in English County cricket and for the two leading English Universities.

It is rarely that so outstanding a left-hand bowler as Tommy Kelaart is discovered in a generation, but as those old enough could remember, Royal College counted two such prodigies at the same time, the other being Allan Raffel. When these two demon bowlers appeared for the Colts in the early nineties and figured in the big matches of that period they carried all before them. They will always be regarded as the greatest pair of bowlers the Colts or any other first-class club in Ceylon ever possessed. There were two celebrated slow left-handers causing havoc in English County cricket about the same time that Tommy Kelaart was at the zenith of his fame in Ceylon. One was Bob Peel of Yorkshire and the other Johnny Briggs of Lancashire. Both these bowlers were seen in Ceylon when Lord Sheffield's team played in Colombo, in 1891. Ceylon was represented by eighteen in that game and Briggs took 6 wickets for 30 runs. For Ceylon Raffel got 4 for 41 and Tommy Kelaart 3 for 25. It was in this match that the latter clean bowled the famous Dr. W. G. Grace.

Tommy Kelaart's deadliness as a bowler can be imagined when it is said that up to 1906 he had captured 1,234 wickets at a cost of only five runs each. He was at his best

between the years 1889 and 1906 and he continued to figure in first-class cricket till 1913. He had the honour of playing against some of the world's greatest cricketers, both English and Australian, and he won distinction in many of his appearances against these world-famed teams. When Tommy Kelaart completed twenty-five years of first-class cricket in the island, the present scribe inaugurated a Rupee Testimonial Fund for the great left-hander and the presentation was made by His Excellency Sir Henry McCallum, Governor of Ceylon, at the conclu-



The late Tommy Kelaart

sion of a match played at the Racquet Court, the scene of some of Kelaart's greatest bowling feats. It was quite a unique match—Left-handers vs. Right-handers, which ended in the latter winning by 19 runs. Our Prime Minister was one of those who played in this match, keeping wickets for the Right-handers.

One of the famous left-hander's sons, T. H. Kelaart, Asst. Supdt. of Police, fared well as an all-rounder since he played for St. Joseph's and won representative honours more than once.

* * *

A GREAT LOSS TO CEYLON SPORT

THE death of Mr. P. Saravanamuttu, President of the Ceylon Cricket Board of Control, is a great loss to Ceylon sport. In his day he excelled as a cricketer, athlete and soccer full-back, rendering valuable service

CEYLON FORTNIGHTLY REVIEW

23.6.50

PEOPLE

THE following tribute to the late Tommy Kelaart is from another famous Ceylon bowler, W. T. Greswell.—“I have just received your letter of 29th May and am shocked to hear that Tommy Kelaart has had to leave the field of play at the up-raised finger of the Great Umpire. It could have been for no infringement of the rules but only because he was deemed to have done his share and completed his task over a long enough span of years. May he now rest in the Pavilion happy in the memory of all he did for Ceylon cricket. His was indeed a great name in bygone years. In fact his was the first name I heard mentioned in connection with Ceylon cricket.

“When I was a boy my father, who was in Ceylon in the '80's and played at Radella with Bill Halliley, spoke to me of Ceylon's great bowler Tommy Kelaart. He told me he was a wizard with the ball, but I was full of my own youthful struggles at the game and it was not until I met and experienced Tommy in 1910 that I found out that my father's words were less than the truth.

“Tommy was a bowling genius of unruffled temperament. I can see him now, small and wiry of build, wearing a white cotton shirt and sun-tanned flannel trousers with an Elwood topee on his head. As if it was only yesterday I see his short run to the wicket and the ball delivered with rhythmic and mechanical ease and with perfect flight and length.

“No batsman could take liberties with his bowling. He could bowl for ever but was not required to, for he had no trouble with most batting sides. A truly great little bowler Ceylon cannot afford to forget him. I am so glad you sent me a message from him so recently.”

FINAL RESTING PLACE OF TOMMY KELAART



Courtesy of Eardley Lieversz

Tommy Kelaart is interred at the Catholic section of Kanatte cemetery, along with his wife Lena, in the plot of the latter's brother, Hugh Percival Joseph.

Tommy Kelaart's second son, Thomas Hubert, who passed away on 10 May 1989, is buried in the same plot along with his wife's ashes which were brought from Western Australia.