

SHORT HISTORY OF THE BILLIGIRIRANGAN ESTATES.

The Pioneer of the Billigirirangans, Randolph Hayton Morris, son of Rev. William Morris of Oxford & subsequently of Muthill, near Crieff, in Scotland, was born with an adventurous spirit; & ran away to sea when he was eighteen; serving on a wind-jammer & sailing twice round the Cape. Returning home after his second voyage R.H.M. was persuaded by Chisholm, late of Coorg, to become a Coffee Planter; & arrived in India in the year of the great India famine (1877). His vivid description of the dreadful sights he saw are hard to forget. He worked under Chisholm, at a time when Donald Stuart was known as the Coffee King of Coorg. He later opened out Kedamakal Rubber Estate; & a part of Glen Coorg, both on the Sampaji ghat in Coorg. He then went to the Nilgiris, worked on Adderley Estate, near Coonoor; subsequently opened up Godannie Estate for the Mc Callums, & for a time, managed Marvuhalla Estate for Frank Groves - both these Estates are near Kotagiri. While in Coorg he struck up a great friendship with George Martin, then of Abial Estate & later of Kairbetta, Kotagiri. From the northern slopes of the Nilgiris a clear view of the Billigirirangans is obtained; & he felt an urge to visit the "Malarious Kollegal Hills" as a Coonoor doctor described the Billigiris to him; He made 3 or 4 shikar trips with Edmiston, then on Rob Roy Estate, riding across the Moyar Valley & up to Talamalai, from there over the Murkere Hills to Hassanur, & so up into the Billigirirangans. He was entranced with the heavy deciduous forest at 4000'; & even more so with the magnificent evergreen jungle (shola) at 5000' to 6000'; & with the possibilities of Coffee cultivation in both areas. The Madras & Mysore Governments granted his applications for land; & in 1888, he commenced the opening of Attikan Estate, in the Kollegal Taluk of the Coimbatore District, at an elevation of 4500' to 5500'; with the financial assistance of his uncle Henry Marks. Parts of Attikan suffered from the S.W. Monsoon gales; & it was uphill work bringing some of the fields under Coffee. Harold Oliver joined him in 1889; & both he & R.H.M. lived in a small 2 roomed house on a hill at Bellaji, 2½ miles north of Attikan; the first Planter's "bungalow" to be built on these hills. Harold Oliver was not planting for long; he developed enteric in Mysore & dies in Bangalore. In 1890 R.H.M. was joined by his younger brother C.W.G. Morris from England; & between them they continued opening up Attikan & commenced the opening of Bedaguli & Gorrayhatti Estates, in the Chamarajanagar Taluk, of the Mysore District; 3½ miles from Attikan by bridle track. The Attikan bungalow was built in the same year. In 1891 R.H.M. went to England, married Mabel Oliver & brought his bride out to the newly completed Attikan Bungalow. A daughter (now a grand-mother) in England) was born to them in Mysore in 1892; a son Eric (now the proprietor of Attikan Estate) in 1894; & a second son in 1895, Randolph or "Ralph" (now joint owner, with his wife, of Honnametti & Montgomery Estates).

The Coffee industry was passing through bad days, & R.H.M. was helped by "Creepers" from England - first Monty and Francis Follett, then Graeme Murray (who subsequently joined James Finlays on the Nelliampathies) & for a very short period, Quett-Fasalam, Mexican - born I think. The Folletts soon bought Bedaguli Estate & settled down on the place. 1890 also saw the commencement of the construction of the main ghat road up into the Billigirirangans, known as the Bedaguli - Punjur road, starting from Punjur, a village on the Mysore - Chamarajanagar - Satnyamangalam - Coimbatore main Road. This ghat road is 13 miles long; from Punjur to Bedaguli - & was continued up to Attikan - another 5 miles. In the construction of this road R.H.M. was assisted by his brother C.W.G.M. & later, by his brother-in-law Leonard Oliver (younger brother of Harold Oliver) who came out from England to learn planting. During the construction of this road R.H.M. fell out with G.P. Sanderson, the author of "Thirteen years among the Wild Beasts of India" - then in Mysore Service & engaged in elephant kheddar operations at Budipodaga, at the western foot of the Billigiris. Sanderson complained that the blasting of rocks on the new road was disturbing the elephants he was endeavouring to capture. Campbell Walker, the I.G. of Forests in Mysore, told R.H.M., however, to disregard "Mr. Sanderson's fulminations". Some time later R.H.M. & Sanderson became great friends, & on the latter's retirement he visited Attikan; having become a Buddhist in the meanwhile.

Prior to the opening of this road for carts all grain came up a zig-zag bridle path, on pack bulls, from Punjur; & other supplies & mail by a 22 miles bridle path from Chamarajanagar. The latter route was still used for mail for some years after; in fact until a Post Office was opened at, first, Punjur & subsequently at Attikan.

In 1895 R.H.M. was terribly gored by a bison, wounded by the Folletts while the three of them, together with R.H.M.'s wife, were on shikar. R.H.M. was quite unaware that the bull was laying up in a patch of long grass, & was charged & tossed in the air by the wounded animal from a distance of 5 or 6 yards. The bison's horn removed one of his lungs, smashing through his ribs - & leaving a gaping hole 6" wide in his back, through which he breathed with a hissing noise. The story of how R.H.M.'s devoted wife kept him alive dressing his terrible wound, until a doctor was procured from Bangalore - one of the Folletts riding day & night to railhead (then Mysore) for this purpose is well known. The R.A.M.C. doctor, on examination of the wound, praised R.H.M.'s wife for her efforts, but expressed the opinion that her husband's recovery was very unlikely. The latter's wonderful constitution however saved him; & recover he did; although he never regained his former strength & energy. The injury was, in fact, indirectly the cause of his death in 1981, when he contracted pneumonia &, having only one lung, had little chance. C.W.G.M., owing to the Coffee slump, had taken up employment with Middleton on Kadamane Estate (Cardamoms) shortly before the accident; but returned to Attikan on learning of the disaster. In 1900 both the Folletts joined Lumsden's Horse, & went to South Africa to fight the Boers. Monty died of enteric; which Francis accepted a commission in the Worcestershire Regt; & became a soldier for the rest of his working life. Coffee was still in a bad way in 1901, & C.W.G.M. went Home to England, handing over Bedaguli & Gorrayhatti to Claude Martin, younger brother of George Martin, of Coorg. Claude Martin was planting on the Billigirirangans for 6 years; & subsequently took over Dalquarren Estate in Coorg, which he had purchased. R.H.M. slowly recovered; & his wife assisted by her brother, Leonard Oliver, looked after Attikan. When he was fit enough R.H.M. took up prospecting for gold on behalf of John Taylor & Sons, the Company who work the Kolar Gold Fields. Among the many old workings he re-discovered the North Ananthapur & Jibutil gold mines were the most successful. In this work, Leonard Oliver assisted him, developed into a Mining Engineer; & became eventually the Superintendent of the North Anantapur Gold Mines. The Post Office for North Anantapur & Jubutil was named Morrison after R.H.M. Meanwhile, George Martin helped to run Attikan, assisted by Greenprice for part of the time; & the opening of Honnametti Estate, originally for rubber, was commenced in 1908. By 1910 it was obvious that rubber would not do; & Coffee was planted; through only over a small acreage initially. Harry Tippetts, who has recently died, & Douglass Jackson worked for a short period on Honnametti & Gorrayhatti respectively; & the latter assisted in the opening of Kartikerri Estate. In 1908 C.W.G.M. returned to India, after two periods in Africa, & took over the management of Attikan, Gorrayhatti & Kartikerri; the last Estate having now been purchased by Leonard Oliver in partnership with Ruddle (late of Best & Co. Ltd.) & C.W.G.M. In the meantime Jim Fremlin purchased, & took over, Bedaguli Estate. In 1914 C.W.G.M. purchased Gorrayhatti estate; & the following year married Gladys Lind. Later the management of Attikan was taken over by E.H. Thompson.

In 1913, Ralph Morris (R.H.M.'s second son) came out to Honnametti & for a period, later, managed Bedaguli, Kartikerri & Attikan; taking over from Thompson. In 1914 his elder brother Eric Morris joined the Jibutil Gold Mines (Ramagiri Division) as a Mining Engineer; & later received a commission in the First World War. Jim Fremlin also joined the Indian Army; & during his service got malaria badly; and developed incipient anaemia. From then on until 1927, the year of his death his health slowly declined. By 1912 R.H.M. had returned from prospecting work; & settled on Honnametti; but his health was not too good. His wife attended to the Attikan Estate Office work from 1915 onwards. Railhead was now at Nanjangud; & the journey from here to the Billigirirangans occupied 2 nights by bullock cart, a day's halt in Chamarajanagar; & half day's ride up from Punjur; or alternatively a long ride up from Chamarajanagar by short cut to the Estates, after the night journey by cart from Nanjangud.

In 1918 R.H.M. died, following a chill caught while on a fishing trip; pneumonia supervened; & his one lung gave him little chance. In 1919 Peter Kinloch came to Attikan; & later in the same year his sister, Heather, married Ralph Morris. A year later Peter Kinloch was medically advised to work at a lower elevation; severely wounded in the 1914-18 War, he was handicapped with only one lung. S.A. Smith came to Attikan from the Anantapur Gold Mines. He soon purchased Kuddle's interest in Kartikerri; &, on the death of Jim Fremlin, bought Bedaguli; later selling to Leonard Oliver his share in Kartikerri. Leonard Oliver thus became sole proprietor of this Estate, having also acquired C.W.G.M.'s share in the place. S.A. Smith married & settled on Bedaguli; &, in his place first Sinclair Grove &, later, on poor Grove developing dropsy, Ranking came to Attikan. Towards the end of the War J.D. Brewer came to Kartikerri; &, on Leonard Oliver's retirement from the Gold Mines to manage his Estate, committed suicide, being convinced that there was no chance of his getting another billet at his age. Had he waited another day he would have received a letter offering him a job in the Mysore Planting District; poor fellow.

From then on, until his death in 1945, Leonard Oliver managed his Kartikerri Estate. Ranking left Attikan after 18 months to take up a post on the Nilgiris, & his place was taken by C.G. Stonehouse; who worked on Attikan until the outbreak of the second world War. Smith left Bedaguli for England in 1938, leaving H.M. Barnard in charge of the Estate; but returned when war broke out; & Barnard took over Attikan. On Kartikerri first Bill Scott (later of the Tea Licensing Committee, Coonoor) & then Morrison became assistants; the latter having previously worked with C.W.G.M. on Gorrayhatti. For 2 periods before the War Nigel Scott worked as assistant on Honnametti & Gorrayhatti. On Stonehouse's departure from Attikan, Hopkinson (from North Mysore) came for a few days & was then called up; Hopkinson was the first British Officer to be killed in Wavell's victorious push in the Western Desert. He met his death at Sidi Barrani, while rounding up Italian prisoners. In 1934 Heather Morris managed Honnametti while her husband was away in Burma & Malaya on Natural History expeditions. Shortly after his return his mother died suddenly while visiting Mysore. Mabel Camroux Morris had continued to give able assistance & ~~xxx~~ advice to the Managers of Attikan for many years, before returning to England. Her death occurred during a visit to India. Eric Morris had, after the first World War, joined the Mysore Government Service; & erected the Kemmangundi Ropeway on the Bababudans. He subsequently married Elizabeth Marriott Dodington; & joined an Engineering firm, McKenzies, & became Manager of their Madras branch, & also, for a time, of their Head Office in Bombay. In 1937-38 Ralph Morris was elected President of U.P.A.S.I., which office he held for 18 months.

In 1939 John Morris (C.W.G.M.'s son) came out to his father on Gorrayhatti; & joined up in 1940 for the duration of the War. Both Eric & Ralph Morris, being officers in the A.I. Reserve, were called up (in 1939 & 1940 respectively) the former serving in India, Assam & Manipur & the latter in the Western Desert (including the siege of Tobruk) & Ceylon. During the War years Heather Morris managed Honnametti; until her husband's demobilisation in 1945. Barnard, of Attikan, died in Mysore early in 1944. On Leonard Oliver's death in Bangalore in 1945 Morrison became Manager of Kartikerri, with Eric Morris as Managing Trustee - on the latter's demobilisation in 1946. Eric Morris also then took over his Attikan Estate, engaged Mr. K.W. Kushalappa as assistant, & has considerably extended the acreage under Coffee. In 1946 John Morris was also released from the Army, & returned to Gorrayhatti. Later he & his father purchased Bedaguli Gorrayhatti Estate from his father owing to the latter's ill-health. His marriage to Barbara Hardman took place in May 1952. In 1946 Heather Morris again managed Honnametti while her husband was a member of the European Group in the Central Assembly, New Delhi. 1948 saw the opening of a new coffee estate, Montgomery Estate, bordering Honnametti. This has now been completed. This Estate is named after a Col. Montgomery who, 100 years ago, was a member of the Mysore Commission; & had built a hot weather residence for himself, his harem, servants, syces, mahouts etc., on the hill-top adjoining the present Honnametti bungalow. He also constructed a road for his elephants & horses from Yelandur up to the place. Though the walls have long since disappeared the basement is still in a fair state of preservation; & the numerous smaller sites are evidence of the staff he had with him. The hill is still called "Mangomiery Betta" by the aborigines (the Solagas).

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Col: Montgomery probably "discovered" the Biligiris & selected the bungalow site, at an elevation of nearly 6000' when on a frontier commission. His name is mentioned in the old Coimbatore District Gazetee as having pronounced in favour of a dam on the Bhavani River, at the confluence of the Bhavani & Moyar; a project which has now been fulfilled. Montgomery was therefore probably the first European to visit or, certainly, reside on these hills. The Billigirirangans, rise from the Mysore Plateau; & run, approximately, north & south for about 50 miles, from Hassanur to Kollegal. The hills, comprising 3 ranges, are thus situated at right angles to & north-east of the Nilgiris. The average rainfall is 70" for the upper three Estates & 10" less for the lower 3 Estates.

In addition to the main Punjur-Bedaguli ghat road R.H.M. constructed the trace of three other outlets - a forest cart -road to the Chamarajanagar side on the west; another to Kollegal running north from Honnametti; & our eastern ghat road; & these were completed at a later stage. The eastern ghat cuts off 40 miles to Bangalore, via Kollegal Chamarajanagar is now the railhead.

John Morris has now added another 60 acres of young clearings to Gorryhatti Estate.

Since the above was written C.W.G. Morris passed away at his residence "Garstead" (Gorryhatti Estate) on December 12th 1952.

Honnametti Estate,

Attikan EE Post.

Via. Mysore.

South India.