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SRI LANKA

H. E. Ambassador Dayantha Laksiri Mendis
and Dr. Prashanthi Mendis



Mackwoods Tea



Mackwoods Connoisseur Teas

It's a long way to Labookellie - but not too long for connoisseurs of fine tea

Ceylon, as such, ceased to exist in 1972, when the name of the country was changed to Sri Lanka, but "Ceylon" tea persists as the embodiment of one of the world's finest beverages, and indelibly associated in international circles with Ceylon tea is the name Mackwoods. Cercle Diplomatique et Economique International looked into the reason for this long-standing link and found the answer in a Interview with Mrs. Sriyani Nonis, Chairperson of Mackwoods.

Founded in 1841 by the British "Merchant & Agent" Captain William Mackwood, Mackwoods Limited has the distinction of being the second oldest company in Sri Lanka. Surviving two world wars, the Company remained with the Mackwood family until 1956 when its ownership passed into the hands of the visionary Sri Lankan entrepreneur N.S.O. Mendis. Under his inspired leadership the

company expanded into many areas, and, today, Mackwoods is a conglomerate of several companies engaged in such diverse activities as Agribusiness and Plantations, Healthcare, Manufacturing, Information Technology and Import/Export Trading. The present Chairperson of the company is

which destroyed plantations through the country. Experiments were made with tea planting using seeds imported from China and Assam. However, it was not until 1867 that the first commercial scale tea plantings - by James Taylor on Loolcondara Estate and also by brothers Solomon & Gabriel De Worms on Labookellie Estate in the Ramboda District - were undertaken. They were an instant success. Six years later the first teas exported from Ceylon (albeit a mere 23 lbs) arrived in London. The exports increased to a staggering 82 million lbs within 20 years.

elevation of 2000 metres, on the western slopes of the Pidurutalagala mountains range of Sri Lanka is a part of Mackwood plantations. It is in the Nuwara Eliya region which, for connoisseurs, is to Ceylon tea what a Chateau Mouton Rothschild or Chateau Lafite is to French wine. However, the Mackwoods range of fine teas is not restricted to high-grown teas alone. The company has a total of 27,000 acres of quality tea & rubber plantations, including low country tea estates which produce thick and coloury teas. The availability of both high-grown and low-grown teas enables Mackwoods to cater to the discerning tastes of consumers throughout the world.

A Tea Centre in the Hills of Ceylon

The legendary Labookellie Estate, at an

In keeping with its philosophy of commitment to quality, Mackwoods runs a



Mrs. Sriyani Nonis, Chairperson, Mackwoods

the daughter of N.S.O. Mendis, Mrs. Sriyani Nonis, and in the third generation her daughter Mrs. Nirmali Samaratinga, and her son, Dr. Chris Nonis, are on the Board of Directors.

Whereas in the first part of the 19th century Ceylon was a major grower and exporter of coffee, in the 1860s a great crash occurred following the coffee blight



Mackwoods Labookellie Tea Estate



charming Tea Centre at Labookellie estate in the picturesque hill country of Nuwara Eliya. There is a standing invitation to international visitors (700-800 of them come on average weekly around the year) to stop over here for a cup of garden fresh single estate tea and for an instructive tour around the tea factory, which will infuse even the most innocent traveller with the finer points of tea production and tea culture. As Mackwoods Chairperson, Mrs. Sriyani Nonis says; "This is what we see as the best way of educating visitors on the entire spectrum of the tea industry, and it gives them an opportunity to experience at first hand the virtues of tea, from the leaf to the cup. In



Mr.Fonseka, Director, Mackwoods, Sir Colin Imray, Chairman, ROSL, Mrs.Sriyani Nonis, Chairperson, Mackwoods, Miss. Shendira Nonis and Dr.Chris Nonis, Director, Mackwoods, at the Mackwoods Fine Tea Tasting and Opera Event in London.

addition, we also create particular blends of rare teas for private clients, thus moving away from the commoditisation of tea. At the same time, Mackwoods is an eco-friendly company and our mini hydro-power projects which harness our natural streams, our extensive replantation programmes, and our agro Forestry reserves stand as ample testimony of our commitment to the environment. In concert with our deep commitment to our community, we have an extensive ongoing programme of housing, education, healthcare and recreation facilities, for our 10,200 employees. The Labookellie Estate Tea factory was recently awarded ISO 9001:2000 certification by the Societe Generale de Surveillance of UK, as the first black tea factory in Sri Lanka to be accredited in this manner for the manufacture of black tea. Mackwoods Plantations have also received the Forest Ste-

wardship Council Certification for the sustainable management of Estates.

Pioneering the concept of Fine Tea Tasting and Opera in Europe

In a conscious move to internationalise the awareness of Ceylon teas, and in particular Mackwoods Single Estate Fine Teas, several pioneering tea tasting and opera events have been staged over the past few years in Europe, especially in England and Austria, thus elevating the appreciation of fine teas to an art form. The venues have been several exclusive Clubs in Mayfair, London whose patron is Her Majesty the Queen. The events have been attended by luminaries such as Sir Peter Wakefield, Sir Michael McWilliam, the Hon. Ivor Lucas, Vyvyan Harmsworth, and Sir Colin and Lady Imray.

Mackwoods was also accorded the unique privilege of presenting the Mackwoods 'Queens Golden Jubilee Blend' at Buckingham Palace, London. This connoisseur's blend, which was accorded the right to bear the official Golden Jubilee logo, was specially created to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of Elizabeth's accession to the British throne. In Vienna last year, the Sri Lankan Ambassador Dayantha Laksiri Mendis hosted another event attended by numerous European diplomats and representatives of the Austrian tea trade, to an afternoon of Mackwoods Fine Tea Tasting. This time around, the gourmet tasting of Mackwoods Fine Single Estate Teas and of the company's 160th Anniversary Blend (a mixture of Orange Pekoe and Silver Tips for "The Discerning Tea Connoisseur") was undertaken to the accompaniment of music by Johann Strauss, being played by Prashanthi Mendis on the Violin and Shendira Nonis accompanying on the Piano. As Mackwoods Director, Dr. Chris Nonis puts it: "We pride ourselves in the fact that in addition to our loose leaf teas and connoisseurs blends, we have become one of the first companies to provide single estate unblended teas in a tea bag form, since we are producer and exporter in one we can reach discerning clientele in Europe directly. In this way, we are able to pack garden fresh tea on our plantations, thereby guaranteeing consistency



Captain William Mackwood, Founder

of quality. You see, we specialise in unique teas whose roots can be traced, and tasted, right down to a particular estate, in keeping with our 160 year old commitment to excellence".

A Social Conscience

An ongoing concern for Dr. Nonis are several initiatives carried out for the environment and the community in Sri Lanka itself with a keen desire for education, technology transfer and capacity building. His grandfather, N.S.O. Mendis, was deeply conscious of the need for fulfilling a social role in the context of the country's needy and deprived people. The tradition has been maintained by the family, so that the Mendis-Mackwoods Charity Fund, a non profit organization continues to grow year by year, and today provides annual financial support to over 40 charitable institutions in Sri Lanka, irrespective of Class, Creed, Race or Religion. In particular, assistance is given to the marginalized and underprivileged, with a special emphasis at grass roots level, on the disabled, mentally infirm, homeless and the elderly. In the past few years, in addition, Mackwoods has entered the arena of Information Technology Education, to provide youth who would otherwise not be employable, with an unique skill, and an employment opportunity. This has been further consolidated by Mackwoods I.T. arm which now provides Offshore Software Development and Business Process Outsourcing. The same principles underpin Mackwoods current diversification thrust into eco-tourism and health, with plans to build eco-sensitive boutique hotel resorts, and on a larger scale, a hospital based on a socially sustainable idiom, which will give something back to the community.



Ambassador Laksiri Mendis & Mrs.S.Nonis at the Mackwoods Fine Tea Tasting Event in Vienna