

Plantation Agriculture & Land-Sales Policy in Ceylon-The first Phase, 1836-1886; Part I

PRIOR to the British administration, the alienation of land by the governing authority was seldom a commercial transaction. Such alienation as did take place was usually for services rendered, and falls more properly into the category of "land grants" than into that of "land sales".¹

The British period witnessed the rapid growth of capitalism—a phenomenon which owed much to plantation agriculture. The plantation served as the agent which did most to introduce capitalist concepts, and it was equally so, the vehicle through which these ideas continued to expand throughout the 19th century. Land consequently began to take on a new meaning. It came increasingly to be, not merely the basis of socio-economic function, but a factor of production demanded by investors for the role it played in ordinary capitalist enterprise.

Plantation agriculture became significant in Ceylon's economy after 1836. From that date until 1886 lasted what might well be termed "the first phase" of plantation development, i.e. the period during which coffee cultivation dominated Ceylon's economic growth. The land sales policy of the Government was throughout these years confronted by two distinct sets of problems; the one arose out of the administration's efforts to evolve an efficient method of land disposal; the other resulted from the impact of these activities on the indigenous population. It is the purpose of this article to deal with the first.

1. Knox describes the system under the Sinhalese Kings thus:

"The Country being wholly His, the King farms out his land, not for money, but service. And the people enjoy portions of land from the King, and instead of rent, they have several appointments, some are to serve the King in his wars, some in their Trades, some serve him for Labourers, and others are as Farmers to furnish his House with the fruits of the Ground"—R. Knox. "An Historical Relation of the Island Ceylon"—Part II. Chapter III, p. 43. Also see Codrington: "Ancient Land Tenure and Revenue in Ceylon." pp. 27 and 28. The Portuguese and Dutch (rulers of parts of the Maritime areas from 1505-1658 and 1658-1795 respectively), made hardly any changes in this system. Codrington op. cit. p. 19 and pp. 59-61.

The early British period, too, brought no substantial changes until 1833. In that year a Commission set up to inquire into the state of the colony, recommended "the sale of crown lands, in full property and free of direct taxation" at 5 shillings an acre. The policy was instituted in July 1833 and periodical sales of Crown Land were begun—C. R. de Silva—Ceylon Under the British Occupation, pp. 372-373.

Between 1834 and 1837, a variety of causes combined to render coffee cultivation in Ceylon, a profitable venture. R. B. Tytler introduced to the Island methods of coffee cultivation perfected in the West Indies: the demand for coffee in Europe and Great Britain continued to increase rapidly; import duties on Ceylon and West Indian coffee, hitherto favourable to the latter were equalized, and the abolition of slavery led to the decline of the coffee industry in Jamaica, Dominica and Guiana. Many of the circumstances which had hindered the development of coffee cultivation in Ceylon were thus removed in the short space of three years. Coffee growing consequently assumed a new importance, and what has been termed the "Coffee mania" commenced.²

(1) *Land Sales—Distribution and Location of*

The improvement in the prospects of Ceylon's coffee industry found an immediate expression in the demand for land. Prior to 1836, land sales were of a limited nature, and only a small proportion of the land sold was utilized for coffee cultivation. In 1836, however, soon after the import duties on Ceylon and West Indian coffee were equalized in the United Kingdom, land sales began to increase. This growing demand received a further stimulus in 1838, when the new methods of cultivation introduced by Tytler began to prove their worth, and then, with the onset of the coffee mania in 1840, land sales moved rapidly up to many times their previous volume.³

Year	Land Sold	Year	Land Sold	Year	Land Sold	Year	Land Sold	
1833	146 acres	1836	3,920 acres	1839	9,570 acres	1842	48,534 acres.	
1834	337 acres	1837	3,662 acres	1840	42,582 acres	1843	59,800 acres.	
1835	434 acres	1838	10,401 acres	1841	78,686 acres			
							Total	258,072 acres.

It is difficult, owing to the lack of evidence, to state in precise terms, what proportion of the land sold in these early years was put under coffee, or what quantities of land were purchased by European planters and the indigenous population respectively. But it is certain that the bulk of the land sold in this period was taken up for coffee cultivation, and that the major portion of it passed into the hands of European planters, since numerous

2. For a full treatment of the "Coffee Mania" and the circumstances that gave it birth see Vanden Driesen—"the History of Coffee Culture in Ceylon"—Part I pp. 41-44 in *The Ceylon Historical Journal*, July 1953.

3. C.O. 57, 28; also Ceylon Blue Book, C.O. 59 Series.

statements to this effect were made by Governors Stuart Mackenzie and Colin Campbell, between 1837 and 1843.⁴

The type of soil and climate best suited to the cultivation of the coffee shrub, was to be found in Ceylon's mountainous Central Province, and in the foothills on the borders of the Western, Southern and Eastern Provinces. It was accordingly in these regions that the demand for land was heaviest. The statistics relating to land sales between 1833 and 1843 (quoted above) do not indicate the exact localities in which these sales were made; only the total quantities annually bought from the Government being given.⁵ But the official correspondence of the period makes it clear that it was in the hilly regions in the centre of the Island that most land was sold.⁶

The reports of the Surveyor-General's Department for the years 1844-60, contain more definite returns on the subject of land sales. Between those dates, a total of 105,486 acres was alienated to European investors, and of this, 79,172 acres were located in the Central Province, 9,782 acres in the Western Province, 2,183 acres in the Southern province, and 8,437 acres in the Eastern Province. During the same period, 44,400 acres were purchased by the indigenous population, and in this instance too, the bulk of the land was disposed of in the coffee-growing areas e.g. 10,471 acres in the Central Province, 19,243 acres in the Western Province, 1,960 acres in the Southern Province, and 8,126 acres in the Eastern Province.⁷

The annual returns relating to the location of land sales between 1860 and the end of our period, do not appear to have been regularly kept, and detailed statistics are available for only the years 1867, 1872, 1877, 1878, 1881, 1882 and 1884. These few returns, however, also show that land sales were heaviest in the mountainous regions, e.g. In the years mentioned above, 59,104 acres in all, were alienated to European investors, and of this, a total of 58,094 acres was sold in the Central, Western, Southern and Eastern Provinces.⁸ It should not be forgotten, however, that the acreage under coffee began to fall off after 1882, and that cinchona, tea and cocoa began to take its place as Ceylon's staple crops. The lands were accordingly being put under the new crops and not under coffee.⁹

4. C.O. 54, 171. 16th July 1839; C.O. 54, 179. 9th April 1840; C.O. 59, 190. 22nd November 1842; C.O. 54, 203. 23rd March 1843.

5. C.O. 57, 28.

6. C.O. 54, 154. 7th April 1837; C.O. 54, 171. 16th July 1839; C.O. 54, 203. 23rd March 1843.

7. C.O. 57, 28.

8. Ceylon Blue Book, C.O. 59 Series.

9. See VandenDriessen: "The History of Coffee Culture in Ceylon" Part II, pp. 169-172 in the Ceylon Historical Journal: October 1953.

The indigenous population also made large purchases of land in the years mentioned above, but their activity in the land-market was in the main, unconnected with the cultivation of coffee or the new crops.¹⁰ From 1855 increasing attention had been paid by the Government to the restoration of the irrigation tanks constructed by the Sinhalese Kings, and since the repair of these works ensured to the cultivator that regular supply of water, so necessary for rice-growing, the acreage under the crop began rapidly to increase. Of a total of 121,664 acres sold to the indigenous population during these years, nearly 118,000 acres were located in the areas where tank restoration was being carried, on and it is significant that the climatic and soil conditions in these areas were quite unsuitable for the cultivation of coffee, tea, cocoa or cinchona.¹¹

Little use can be made of the statistics supplied by the Surveyor-General's department for calculating the average size of the two types of coffee-growing unit prevalent in Ceylon in the 19th century, i.e. peasant-holding and plantation. The figures do not show how much of the land bought by the peasant population was put under coffee, or how many individuals entered the industry. In the case of the plantations though, a rough calculation can be attempted. It is a fact that almost every European who bought land in the Colony, set up as a coffee grower, and that almost all the plantations in Ceylon were European-owned.¹² A comparison of the number of lots purchased by Europeans, divided by the total acreage sold to them, might therefore be used to get some rough indication of the size of an average plantation.

According to the returns of the Surveyor-General's department for the period 1833 to September 1860,¹³ 3,831 lots comprising 372,859.1.14 acres were sold to European investors,—an average of a little over 97 acres per person.

One cannot, however, take this figure too seriously, for it cannot possibly be assumed that every lot sold, represented the setting up of a plantation. Many of the sales were for very small areas of land,—just an acre or two, which planters often bought to facilitate the opening up of

10. An increase in the area under peasant coffee took place during the coffee boom 1850-79. The total acreage involved however, could not have been large, since the individual holdings were very limited in extent.

11. C.O. 57, 28.

12. C.O. 54, 412. 23rd April 1866; B.P.P. of 1867-8. Vol. XLVIII: C.O. 54, 551. 5th September 1883.

13. Statistics for the years 1860-86, are too scanty to base any calculations on.

estate roads, the construction of coffee-mills in favourable locations, etc. Yet, even if this were to be allowed for the resulting figure would still suffer from all the shortcomings of an "average,"—the picture could so easily be distorted by the existence of a handful of very large plantations or an infinity of small ones. It would be best (in this instance at least) to depend, not on the returns of the Surveyor-General's Department, but on the statements of contemporary writers. All the latter are agreed that the peasant-grower restricted his cultivation of the shrub, to the little garden surrounding his house, or to a tiny small-holding, and that the normal plantation was about 200 acres in extent.¹⁴ In short, coffee-growing to the peasant was usually a by-employment of a rather restricted nature, while the plantation-owner was very like the English middle-farmer, possessed of a medium-sized estate, and operating on a capital of moderate proportions.

(2) *Land Sales ; Method of*

When the Kandyan Kingdom passed into British hands in 1815, the ownership of all lands then unoccupied, was vested in the new Government, and known thenceforth as Crown or public property. These newly-acquired Crown lands, were comprised, for the most part, of great forest belts, and it was the latter that furnished the land upon which coffee cultivation began on a large scale, after 1836.

The laws pertaining to the sale of Crown lands, were not in any way unfavourable to investors. Any lands in the Colony, "not hitherto granted, and not appropriated for public purposes" were put up for sale at an upset price of 5 sh. the acre, and persons desirous of making purchases, were allowed to select, within certain defined limits, such portions of land as they wished to acquire. These portions of land were then advertised for sale for three calendar months, after which they were sold to the highest bidder, provided that such bidding amounted at least, to the upset price of 5 sh. per acre. Moreover, the costs of the survey were defrayed by the Government. The buyer had merely to pay a deposit of ten per cent, upon the total value of the purchase, at the time of sale, and pay the remainder within a year.¹⁵ In the case of payment not being made within this prescribed period, the sale was considered void, the deposit forfeited, and the purchaser liable to be ejected. If, on the other hand, the money was paid

14. Tennent, "Ceylon." Vol. I. pp. 238-243 ; Speculum. "Ceylon—Her present condition ;" Sabonadiere, in his book "The Coffee Planter in Ceylon" bases all his calculations on an 'average' estate of 200 acres. On peasant cultivation of coffee, see Vanden Driesen, op. Cit., Parts I and II.

15. C.O. 54, 130. 2nd November 1833. This period was reduced in May 1839, to one month, for uncultivated crown lands,—C.O. 54, 170. 2nd May 1839 ; C.O. 54, 188. 30th June 1841.

within the prescribed period, a grant was made out to purchaser, "in fee simple, at the nominal quit-rent of a pepper corn." On all land purchased in this manner, the Crown reserved to itself, all mines of precious metals, the right of making and constructing, "...such roads and bridges as may be necessary for public purposes, and also such indigenous timber, stone and other materials, the produce of the land, as may be required for making and keeping the said roads and bridges in repair and for any other public works."¹⁶

Though land-sales policy placed no obstacles in their way, the early investors in the coffee industry soon found themselves beset with other difficulties. The Government apparently did not expect the demand for land to reach the proportions which it did in 1837 and immediately after. Consequently the quantities of surveyed land available for sale were limited, and only a small number of Surveyors were in Governmental employ.¹⁷ Faced with a heavy demand for land, and anxious not to lose the advantage of the applicants settling in the Island, the Government was obliged to devise a rather hasty solution. Land was therefore disposed of whenever it was asked for, and the surveys left to be made out afterwards. Land seekers were allowed to select whatever lots they pleased, and by means of a provisional survey, (made by employing the services of one of the few private surveyors in the Island) run such boundaries as they chose, on condition that they paid all the expenses of cutting boundaries and surveying, in addition to the price per acre.¹⁸ To this indulgence, certain conditions were attached, the most important of which specified that the purchaser was considered "bound to satisfy Government eventually, for the extent which may be ascertained by a Government Surveyor to be the exact content of the lands in question." The buyer had also to pay the legal charge recognized by the Surveyor-General, without any claim of reduction in consideration of the provisional survey, in addition to the fees due to the Government Surveyor.¹⁹ The inevitable consequence of this rather lax arrangement, was that boundaries were very ill-defined, and the area they contained very inaccurately ascertained. Doubts were also soon entertained as to the accuracy of the provisional surveys, particularly when it was discovered that some surveyors had endorsed measurements which

16. C.O. 54, 130. 2nd November 1833.

17. C.O. 54, 171. 16th July 1839 ; C.O. 54, 179. 9th April 1840 ; C.O. 54, 189. 9th August 1841 ; C.O. 54, 199. 22nd December 1842.

18. C.O. 54, 179. 9th April 1840 ; C.O. 54, 199. 22nd December 1842.

19. C.O. 54, 179. 9th April 1840.

had not been taken in their presence. Confusion, and unnecessary, but expensive, litigation proved in time to be the result of such practice.²⁰

Moreover, vegetation in Ceylon's tropical climate was so rapid in its growth, that the boundaries cut through the forests for the provisional survey speedily disappeared, and many proprietors, even of cultivated estates, could not discover their precise limits. Other purchasers, who had bought land with the intention of re-selling at a profit, gave themselves no trouble in the interval as to their boundaries, and, as a result, many persons quite unintentionally came to cultivate lands which were in reality the property of others. It was not uncommon, at that time, to hear of suits instituted at the instance of parties who some years before had purchased land, and having taken no steps towards its cultivation, found on their return from England, that others had purchased a portion of it again from the Crown and expended large sums upon improvement.²¹

The method by which land was sold during the early coffee period, tended in practice, to work against the interests of the Government. Applicants had first to search for a suitable plot, then furnish the Government Agent of the Province with details regarding the district and village in which the land lay, its distance from the chief towns, the nearest high road, navigable river or canal etc. The village headmen, on instructions from the Agent, had then to submit a report on whether the land was Crown property or not. Once this was established, a survey was conducted officially, at the applicant's expense, and the map forwarded to the Surveyor-General's office, where a General Register of such claims was kept. After this rather involved procedure, the land was publicly auctioned, but since each plot put up for sale had been selected and surveyed at the expense of particular individuals, it was looked upon by the public, as almost an act of fraud, to bid against the original applicant at the auction.²² In so far as these plots of land were alienated to genuine cultivators, the Government had little cause for complaint, since its policy was to aid, as best it could, the economic development of the Island. Often, however, large tracts of waste land, sold at the upset price of 5 sh. the acre, were resold soon after, at three or

20. C.O. 54, 188. 5th June 1841 ; C.O. 54, 199. 18th November 1842 ; C.O. 54, 199. 22nd December 1842 ; C.O. 54, 203. 18th February 1843 ; C.O. 54, 282. 8th November 1851.

21. Pridham : " An Historical, Political and Statistical Account of Ceylon," Vol. I. pp. 400-401 ; C.O. 54, 210. 24th January 1844.

22. C.O. 54, 199. 22nd December 1842 ; C.O. 54, 210. 22nd March 1844 ; C.O. 54, 212. 9th August 1844 ; C.O. 54, 214. 3rd February 1844 ; C.O. 54, 282. 8th November 1851 ; Pridham. op. cit. Vol. I. p. 400.

four times the price.²³ This was possible since the difficulties attendant on the purchase of virgin crown land had made it current opinion in the colony that land, ready for cultivation, was cheap at £1 the acre if it could be procured by an immigrant immediately on his arrival. In fact, the immigrants themselves preferred paying more for such land, in order to save both time and trouble.²⁴ The development of a private land market was the consequence, and the Government was prevented from getting anything like the true value of the property it put up for auction. Certain persons thus began to earn lucrative profits, by merely performing those services which the Government would have been able to provide, if it had in its employ an adequate number of surveyors. The Government in short, was paying the price of its own unpreparedness.

By 1842, the coffee mania was at its height, and the number of persons engaged in the re-selling of Crown land apparently reached proportions large enough to induce the Government to take serious notice of the practice. Governor Campbell complained to the Secretary of State, that " many people have purchased very large tracts of land which they do not cultivate... intending to sell it hereafter, when prices rise. Merchants purchase to a considerable extent, with the view of having land ready to assign to those who may employ them, and they generally... charge from twelve to twenty shillings an acre, for what the Government has sold at five."²⁵ Capper writing about the same time, gives more information about the private dealer in land, and his description of a firm with which he was acquainted, gives some indication of how well organised the business was rapidly becoming. There was, the writer says, a firm in Colombo which sent a representative on board every ship that put into the harbour, " in the hope of catching a constituent or two in want of a fine block of land, in an accessible, salubrious and picturesque district, of which this firm always had a number on hand, ready surveyed, with the boundaries and bridle-paths cut."²⁶

The Colonial office, when apprised of the situation in Ceylon,²⁷ contemplated a change in land-sales policy, and requested Campbell to report on whether the system then in force in the Australian colonies might not

23. C.O. 54, 199. 22nd December 1842 ; C.O. 54, 210. 24th January 1844 ; C.O. 45, 214. 3rd February ; Pridham. op. cit. 401.

24. C.O. 54, 203. 18th February 1843 ; C.O. 54, 210. 22nd March 1844 ; C.O. 54, 214. 3rd February 1844.

25. C.O. 54, 199. 22nd December 1842 ; C.O. 54, 212. 9th August 1844.

26. Capper. " Old Ceylon." p. 88.

27. C.O. 54, 199. 18th November 1842.

profitably be applied in the Island. In those territories, the Government had laid down the general rule that land should be surveyed, blocked into lots of about one square mile in area, classified as town lots, suburban lots and country lots, and then sold quarterly by public action, at a price of not less than £ 1 per acre (larger blocks of twenty thousand acres being available to purchasers "under special circumstances.")²⁸

The Governor however reported unfavourably on the proposal. He pointed out that in Australia the local population was of negligible size, and the quantity of cultivable land immense. Ceylon on the other hand was a small country with a considerable indigenous population, and though there was a great deal of waste land belonging to the Crown, it differed from the Australian colonies, in that throughout the Island there were scattered villages of native inhabitants, who possessed genuine claims to their land. There were thus very few districts where any extensive tracts belonged solely to the Crown. In fact in almost every case where the sale of waste land was intended, an investigation into local claims became necessary.²⁹ The adoption of the Australian System in circumstances such as these would have brought more work and confusion into a Department which already possessed a surfeit of both.

With one aspect of the scheme however, Campbell fully agreed, i.e. the raising of the minimum upset price of land to 20 sh. per acre. He was convinced that such a step would not lead sales to fall off, since newcomers were already paying as much. The charging of this higher price would lead to an increased revenue, which could be used to extend the road system into districts where land sales were taking place. Moreover, people would be discouraged from buying more land than they could open up and would cease to follow the example of those early settlers, who because of the low price of land had purchased more than they could cultivate, and so contributed to the setting up of a private market in surveyed land.³⁰

As an alternative to the Colonial office proposal, Campbell submitted one of his own devising. In his opinion, the solution to Ceylon's problem lay in the adoption of a correct surveying policy. Both accuracy of surveys and a higher sale price for land could be obtained he believed, if the Surveyor-General's department was put in a state of "forwardness," and quarterly sales held, at which land could be obtained without delay, trouble or expense.

28. C.O. 54. 199. 22nd December 1842.

29. C.O. 54, 199. 22nd December 1842.

30. C.O. 54. 203. 18th February 1843 ; C.O. 54, 212. 9th August 1844.

Surveyors would under such a system, have time to check their calculations; while competition at the sales would make it possible for the Government to enforce an upset price of 20 sh. per acre instead of five.³¹

As a prelude to introducing such a system, Campbell had in fact already secured the services of four additional Surveyors from England.³² He then tried to persuade the Surveyor-General, Mr Norris, to carry out regular surveys of waste-land and divide it up into lots before any sales were made. But Norris was unco-operative. He maintained that despite the additional surveyors recently brought out from England, his department was still woefully understaffed,³³ and he and his officers, far from being able to go out into the field, were unable even to check whether the private surveyors had actually conducted surveys or not.³⁴ For this state of affairs the Surveyor-General was himself to be blame, since he had steadfastly refused to follow the Government's instructions that land sales be suspended until sufficient surveys had been made. Yet it was also true that his staff was inadequate and overworked, and Campbell, while criticising the Surveyor-General for his failure to follow the Government's instructions, admitted that the combined duties of Surveyor-General and Civil Engineer were now too much for one man. He therefore advocated their separation, and the formation of two different Department to exercise these functions.³⁵

The Governor's representations won over the Colonial Office, and the Secretary of State issued instructions that the system then in force in Ceylon be replaced by Campbell's scheme. In June 1844, it was therefore announced, that in future no land would be sold, until it had been surveyed ; that no purchasers would be allowed to run their own boundaries ; that all surveys would be made with reference to a general scheme, and that all land would in future be sold at an upset price of twenty shillings the acre.³⁶

31. C.O. 54, 214. 3rd February 1843.

32. C.O. 54, 203. 18th February 1843 ; C.O. 54, 214. 3rd February 1844.

33. The Surveyor-General was also the Civil Engineer, and his Department functioned in this dual capacity.

34. C.O. 54, 203. 18th February 1843.

35. Ibid ; C.O. 54, 214. 3rd February 1844.

36. C.O. 55, 85. 27th April 1844 ; C.O. 54, 282. 8th November 1851 ; The rise in the upset price appears to have put a stop to the activities of those who bought land, in order to resell it uncultivated, at a higher price. No more is heard of this class of persons after 1844. The quantity of land sold consequently showed a marked fall after 1843, since only those genuinely interested in opening up plantations made purchases. While Campbell was declaiming against the private speculator in land, and endeavouring to raise the price per acre, his Colonial Secretary, Mr P. Anstruther made a very questionable use of his access to the private correspondence of the Government. In the interval between the transmission of the Governor's suggestion that the upset price of land be raised, and the arrival of

On the Governor's request that the offices of Surveyor-General and Civil Engineer should be separated, however, the Secretary of State reserved his opinion for the time being. He demanded only that Mr Norris be cautioned for his neglect of duty and his disobedience of orders, and warned him that a continuation of his line of conduct would lead to dismissal, since it made him an obstruction rather than an assistance to Campbell's endeavours to introduce a better system in the management of Crown lands.³⁷

Campbell's hopes for the success of the new methods he had introduced, and his conviction that they would soon bring order, where it had previously been sadly lacking, were not completely realized. True, the new system was infinitely better than that which it had replaced, but the confusion produced by the latter had been so great, that the Governor was forced, a little over eighteen months later, to modify his earlier enactment. Campbell's new scheme had not proved altogether successful, since "numerous small pieces of Crown land had been omitted from the original sales of large tracts in the Central Province, and it was desirable for many reasons, that facilities for their purchase should be given to the proprietors of adjoining estates." The preceding Minute of June 1844 was therefore suspended, and, in order that proprietors might be encouraged to call attention to cases in which such omissions had been made, a further Minute was published on the 22nd November 1845, by which parties desirous of purchasing any particular tracts of land were permitted to make applications to the Government Agent, who was to exercise his discretion in respect to complying with them.³⁸

Afraid that prospective coffee growers would, in disgust, turn to fields of investment other than Ceylon, Campbell continued his efforts to set up a satisfactory arrangement for the disposal of land. He was still inclined to the view that much of the disorder could be traced to the heavy burden of work imposed on the Surveyor-General's department, and continued to press for its division into two separate sections,—under a Surveyor-General and a Civil Engineer respectively, with the assumption by the latter, of part of the duties of the Royal Engineers (an army detachment which attended to the needs of the military forces in Ceylon).

36.—(Contd.)

the Secretary of State's reply allowing the proposal, Anstruther bought nearly 2,000 acres, principally at 5 sh. the acre. After the minimum price was raised, he made no more purchases, but sold as much as people could be induced to take at an advance upon the original cost.—C.O. 54, 244. 1847: Memorandum No. 10 submitted by Governor Lord Torrington.

37. C.O. 55, 85. 27th April 1844.

38. C.O. 54, 282. 8th November 1851.

The Secretary of State, however, still refused to accede to this request; yet no definite reasons for the rejection of Campbell's suggestion were given. The Governor was merely asked to give his "careful deliberation" to the problem.³⁹ It is not improbable that the Colonial Office believed that Campbell was exaggerating somewhat, the situation in the Surveyor-General's department, and was hence, not prepared to rush into making an administrative change which it might later regret.

But the Governor was convinced that he was right, and on receipt of the Colonial Office reply, put forward the converse proposition, i.e. that the military department with a small increase, might perform the services of the Civil Engineer.⁴⁰ When this request too was opposed by the authorities at White Hall, Campbell, certain that his proposal was the key to the problem, reverted to his earlier demand for the separation of the offices of Surveyor-General and the Civil Engineer. A year later, in 1846, the Governor's persistence was rewarded. The Colonial Office, won over at last to the Governor's way of thinking, gave official sanction to the change for which he had fought so hard.⁴¹

His proposal accepted, Campbell hoped that effective organization would soon offset the difficulties which then surrounded the disposal of land. But subsequent events proved him to have been too optimistic. Despite the increased activity in the survey department, the applications for the purchase of lands, which continued to pour in, could not be complied with, owing to the lack of surveys. The supply of land was thus, still unable to keep pace with the demand for it.

Representations from the several Government Agents upon this subject became at length so urgent that during the first year of the administration of Campbell's successor, Lord Torrington (1847-49), the Secretary was obliged to call the attention of the Surveyor-General to "the great loss occasioned by lands not being sold." Moreover, there was every chance that even the existing level of demand would fall, "for while the acquisition of land for coffee cultivation, appeared on paper to be a simple process, prospective planters found the converse to be true in practice." The Surveyor-General was therefore called upon to do his best, to ensure that all applicants for surveys were given quick attention.⁴²

39. C.O. 54, 214. 3rd February 1844.

40. C.O. 54, 282. 8th November 1851.

41. C.O. 54, 224. 9th April 1846.

42. C.O. 54, 282. 8th November 1851.

The Surveyor-General, Mr W. H. Simms, however, pointed out that the Government was asking for too much. The pieces of land demanded by prospective coffee-growers lay scattered about the Central areas of the Island, and surveyors would have to range about the hill-sides making innumerable detached surveys,—a proceeding which called for a much larger staff than the department then possessed. In his opinion, the best course was to undertake a general survey of the entire planting district. Then, once the rights of the indigenous population and the Government had been defined, crown land, in correctly surveyed lots could be made available in sufficient quantities to meet immediately the demands of those who wished to buy. But this course the Government was unwilling to pursue,⁴³ since the cost of a general survey was such as to render it prohibitive in a country like Ceylon,—with her slender resources and frequent budgetary deficits. In addition, the coffee industry had entered upon a period of depression, and the pressure of work upon the Surveyor-General's department was consequently not as heavy as before. The old method of land disposal was therefore allowed to continue, until its shortcomings were once again exposed with the return of better economic conditions.

		Total Acreage Sold	Amount Realised ⁴⁴
1847	—	4,508 acres	£ 6,496
1848	—	2,761 acres	£ 4,672
1849	—	786 acres	£ 2,265

The first signs of recovery were discernible at the end of 1849, and the demand for land improved markedly in the following year.⁴⁵ As a result, the Surveyor-General's department was in difficulties soon afterwards, and its inability to cope with the work it was called upon to do led to a very limited quantity of land being sold in 1851.⁴⁶

43. *Ibid.*

44. A comparison of the amounts realised in 1848 and 1849, with the total number of acres sold in those years, shows that the average price of land increased after 1847, i.e. during the period of depression 1848-1849. This average price, however, is greatly distorted, owing to the sale of 178 acres for £1,470, in 1848, and 45 acres for £1,246 in 1849. When these influences have been discounted, it is clear that land prices were lower during the depression. It is interesting to note that all but 5 acres of the high-priced land mentioned above, were sold to the indigenous population, in 88 lots. There is no information on how this land was utilised. Figures are from the Ceylon Blue Book, C.O. 59 Series.

45. For a fuller treatment of the depression and subsequent recovery, see VandenDriesen. *op. cit.* Part I. pp. 49-61, and Part II. pp. 156-161.

46. B.P.P. of 1852-3. Vol. LXII, p. 317; C.O. 54, 283. 5th December 1851; C.O. 54, 299, 25th April 1852; Figures are from the Ceylon Blue Book. C.O. 59, Series.

		Total Acreage Sold	Amount Realised
1850	—	1,862 acres	£ 2,603
1851	—	939 acres	£ 1,695

The serious effect, which this state of affairs could have upon the recovery of the Island's fortunes, was early appreciated by Sir George Anderson, Governor from 1851-55. He accordingly set out in 1852, to devise ways and means, whereby the Surveyor-General's department could be put in a more efficient condition,—this once again brought up for review the official policy relating to land disposal.

Anderson began by consulting Simms. The latter still held the view that there was no alternative to a general survey and the Governor, who like his predecessor, considered the cost of such a survey beyond the Island's means, then sought the aid of the Secretary of State, Earl Grey. Grey, having nothing to offer of his own, decided to seek advice himself, and accordingly secured the services of an "expert" on the subject,—The expert in this instance being a Major Dawson; an officer with long experience in directing surveys of vast extent in the United Kingdom.⁴⁷

Dawson, having studied the situation in the Colony, suggested a middle course, by which he proposed to obviate the uncertainty and labour which would attend detached and irregular surveys, and yet would avoid some of the weighty objections entertained to a very costly general survey. He proposed a Trigonometrical Survey of the particular districts, comprising an extent of about 6,000 square miles, in which most of the lands to which titles were sought were situated. The cost he estimated at an amount, which, if spread over the time necessary for the completion of the work, would demand an annual expenditure of £ 17,000 for the first three years, and of £ 5,000 for the succeeding five years.

With this plan the Secretary of State was in complete accord. It would give the greatest possible accuracy, and this alone merited its adoption since any other proceeding, short of a general survey, had sooner or later to lead to disappointment and costly litigation. The first question, however, was to ascertain whether the finances of the colony were sound enough to admit of the requisite outlay. It was therefore left to the Governor to go into the question of cost and decide whether the immediate adoption of Dawson's scheme was feasible.⁴⁸

47. C.O. 54, 282. 8th November 1851.

48. C.O. 54, 282. 8th November 1851.

In the meantime it was becoming increasingly evident in Ceylon, that a positive course of action had to be settled upon without delay. The difficulties of getting land surveyed and deeds of sale made out, were seriously affecting the coffee industry at a time when the depression of the late forties was giving way to a period of boom. Moreover, many peasant farmers, who would have bought land if it was available, were taking the easiest way out and encroaching on crown property instead.⁴⁹ The sale of crown land was particularly arrested in the Central Province, the chief coffee-growing district, at a time when the demand for coffee land was daily growing in strength,—only 828 acres being sold in this province in 1851. The sum of all this, was that the Government was deprived of a legitimate income, the number of potential litigants increased, and the development of the Island's economy seriously hindered.⁵⁰

Yet the Executive Council, when Dawson's recommendations were brought up for discussion, were obliged to reject them. The Colonial finances were in too poor a condition, to bear even a fraction of the estimated cost of £ 86,000 for the survey of 6,000 square miles,—so badly had the depression of the late "forties affected the Island."⁵¹ It appeared that the development of Ceylon's resources, in general, and the extension of the coffee industry in particular, was to receive a serious check, so long as adverse economic conditions prevented a trigonometrical survey, and an expansion of the Surveyor-General's department. Admittedly, the rising fortunes of coffee prompted the sale of increasing quantities of land after 1851, but at no time was the demand fully met.⁵²

		<i>Land Sold—Acres</i>	<i>Amount Realised</i>
1852	—	1,848	£ 2,499
1853	—	2,200	£ 3,324
1854	—	5,392	£ 9,927

Happily, better times were on the way. Only a year later, in 1855 Ceylon was able to show a balance in its favour; a balance which, month by month, and year by year, increased so rapidly, that the new Governor, Sir Henry Ward, was able during his term of office, (1855—1860), to over-

49. C.O. 54, 283. 5th December 1851.

50. About this time many of those who were desirous of entering the coffee industry, but were unable to purchase land from the Government, began to buy land from the Sinhalese. No records of these purchases appear to exist, but their volume was probably limited, since only passing references are made to the practice in the writings of this period.

51. C.O. 54, 301. 10th September 1853.

52. C.O. 54, 301. 10th September 1853. Figures are from the Ceylon Blue Book. C.O. 59 Series.

come many of the difficulties which previous Governors had found it difficult to surmount.⁵³

		<i>Surplus Revenue</i>
1855	—	£ 70,263
1856	—	£ 47,037
1857	—	£ 42,224
1858	—	£ 60,628
1859	—	£ 48,769
1860	—	£ 61,660

As a first step, the number of surveyors in Governmental employ were increased, and a trigonometrical survey, begun in those districts where outstanding claims were heaviest.⁵⁴

The results of this increased efficiency were of a very satisfactory order. The response was immediate, and in the very next year (1856) though the demand for land was not completely satisfied, Ward was able to report, that more land had been advertised for sale than in the years immediately preceding.⁵⁵

		<i>Land Sales</i>	<i>Amount Realised</i>
1855	—	7,286 acres	£ 16,410
1856	—	11,656 acres	£ 22,805

Throughout the prosperous years that characterised Ward's administration, the Surveyor-General's department continued to increase in strength and extend its activities. Each new addition to its staff, brought it nearer to the ideal of being able to meet all the demands made upon it.⁵⁶ In 1859, this goal was finally reached, and the Governor, when refusing to employ any more surveyors in the Colony, was able to say, that the department was "provided with a complete and efficient staff, for all the requirements of the Island...adequate to the work of the Colony."⁵⁷

53. For full statistics and a fuller description of these events, see Vanden Driescn op. cit. Part II, pp. 157-160.

54. C.O. 54, 316. 11th July 1855; C.O. 54, 322. 9th June 1856.

55. C.O. 54, 329. 25th July 1857. Figures from Ceylon Blue Book, C.O. 59. Series. After 1854, land unfit for sugar or coffee cultivation was sold at a price assessed by the Governor and Council,—the minimum being 5 sh. the acre. This relaxation of the law of 1844, (which had put the minimum upset price at £1 per acre) stimulated the peasantry to increase the size of their holdings—C.O. 54, 321. 18th July 1854.

56. C.O. 54, 329. 25th July 1857; C.O. 54, 331. 30th March 1857; C.O. 54, 333. 30th January 1858; C.O. 54, 335. 5th July 1858; C.O. 55, 95. 10th November 1858; C.O. 54, 344. 4th July 1859; C.O. 55, 100. 13th April 1859; C.O. 54, 351. 17th January 1860.

57. C.O. 54, 351. 13th February 1860; C.O. 54, 353. 15th June 1860.

He was able too, a year later, to state that land sales were yearly increasing that the trigonometrical survey of Ceylon was progressing rapidly, and that the costs of survey were falling steadily.⁵⁸

		<i>Land Sold</i>	<i>Amount Realised</i>
1857	—	19,795 acres	£ 37,027
1858	—	15,752 acres	£ 33,425
1859	—	23,447 acres	£ 38,589
1860	—	33,660 acres	£ 51,628

It was thus, not until about twenty years after the coffee boom had created a strong demand for land in Ceylon, that investors were able to purchase coffee-land at a fair price and without a long period of delay. Charges of inefficiency and obstruction, could perhaps be brought with some justification against particular Surveyor-Generals, but this alone does not offer a complete explanation. The crux of the problem lay in the paucity of Surveyors in the Island. Had the department been expanded when the need for such expansion arose, the spread of coffee-culture in the Colony might have been quicker. But unfavourable finances prevented the adoption of such a policy until the middle 1850's—Governor Ward was not in this matter more enlightened than his predecessors, he was merely more fortunate. Had Campbell possessed the same budgetary surpluses, the credit of reorganizing the Surveyor-General's department would have been his. His efforts were limited by forces over which he had no control. The finances of the Government had grown dependent on the state of the coffee industry, and the fortunes of the latter, depended in turn, on the movement of world prices. In other words, the administrative and domestic economic policies of Ceylon could not be decided without reference to world economic forces. It was within the limits set by these, that the Governors were obliged to act.

After 1860, the Surveyor-General's department remained in an efficient state, able to meet all the demands made upon it. Land disposal policy too, underwent no further changes; but mention must be made of a proposal put forward by a section of the coffee-growing fraternity in 1863. In that year, certain coffee-planters in the Central Province, most of whom wished to extend their plantations, called for a modification in the procedure governing land sales. As the law then stood, a buyer of uncultivated Crown land had to pay a deposit of ten per cent. upon the

58. C.O. 54, 353. 25th June 1860. Figures from the Ceylon Blue Book. C.O. 59. Series.

whole value of the purchase, at the time of sale, and send in the remainder within one month. The planters now asked that purchasers be henceforth allowed to pay the purchase-money of lands, intended for coffee cultivation, in four equal annual instalments.

This demand, the Governor refused, on the ground that such an alteration would prove inexpedient, since a concession could not be granted to coffee-cultivators, without extending it to other types of land, and to a general concession to all landholders he was definitely opposed. It would, he wrote, "be difficult to recover the purchase money from natives, and even in the case of Europeans, there would be no security for payment." Again, the existing terms of sale were not such as would deter persons possessed of capital from entering into the cultivation of coffee, and it "did not seem wise to hold out further facilities to persons who had no capital to embark in such speculations."⁵⁹ These views when submitted to the Secretary of State, led him to decide against the proposal, and the applicants' prayer was accordingly dismissed.⁶⁰

From that time until the end of our period, i.e. 1886, no further changes were either made or mooted in the rules relating to the sale of land. Moreover, since the Surveyor-General's department was able to meet the demands made upon it, the quantity of land sold for coffee cultivation depended on the availability of land suitable for the purpose, and on whether the prospects of coffee-growing in Ceylon, were regarded as favourable or otherwise by prospective planters.

<i>Land Sales</i> ⁶¹			
		<i>Acres</i>	<i>Amount Realised</i>
1861	—	28,329	£ 44,166
1862	—	25,302	£ 45,300
1863	—	32,567	£ 72,811
1864	—	34,122	£ 76,567
1865	—	41,150	£ 68,276
1866	—	45,546	£ 72,021
1867	—	44,019	£ 45,257
1868	—	24,492	£ 38,514

59. C.O. 54, 375. 16th February 1863.

60. C.O. 54, 383. 3rd March 1863.

61. Ceylon Blue Book. C.O. 59. Series.

The boom conditions of the 1860's, and the efficient state of the Survey Department during those years, led to large quantities of land being sold annually for good prices.⁶² The fall in prices in 1867, and in both sales and prices in 1868, were the result of financial pressure experienced on the London money market. Starting in 1866, these adverse conditions made their influence felt in the Ceylon land market in 1867. With less money at their disposal, prospective coffee-growers were not inclined to bid very high, nor were they willing to take up very large estates. Lower prices and smaller sales were thus characteristic of the second half of 1867 and the first half of 1868.⁶³

After 1868, the coffee industry entered upon a period of prosperity, which lasted until 1879. The quantity of land sold annually did not reach the levels of the middle 1860's, since the supply of land suitable for coffee-growing was beginning to diminish, but this served only to push prices higher than ever before.

		<i>Land Sold</i> ⁶⁴	
		Acres	Amount Realised
1869	—	35,823	£ 57,964
1870	—	29,556	£ 57,206
1871	—	25,227	£ 61,331
1872	—	19,829	£ 69,563
1873	—	21,656	£ 103,089
1874	—	32,089	£ 100,40
1875	—	17,609	£ 59,974
1876	—	25,632	£ 104,959
1877	—	28,543	£ 132,245
1878	—	30,975	£ 125,167

After 1879, the ravages of the coffee leaf disease, (*Hemileia Vastatrix*) made themselves felt on a serious scale. At the same time there came the Great Depression, and then soon after, the final collapse of the coffee industry in Ceylon. In circumstances such as these, the price of land naturally fell considerably below the levels which had obtained in the boom period.

62. C.O. 54, 378. 26th August 1863 ; C.O. 54, 392. 30th August 1864 ; C.O. 54, 404. 16th September 1864.

63. The size of the average purchase made by Europeans during 1867, was only 25 acres. Most sales must therefore have been made to planters already resident in the Island, who took up small pieces of land in the neighbourhood of their estate. C.O. 54, 415. 15th October 1866 ; C.O. 54, 437. 14th November 1868. Ferguson "Ceylon Directory" 1868.

64. Ceylon Blue Book. C.O. 59. Series.

The volume of land sales it is true, remained high between 1879-1886, but this was due in the main, to large purchases being made, (in the neighbourhood of the newly-repaired irrigation works) by the indigenous population, for the cultivation of grain. Investment in cash crops did not come to an end, and about a third of the land taken up during these years was set aside for that purpose. None of it, however, was devoted to the growing of coffee. This was the era of the "new crops,"—tea, cinchona and cocoa, and it was with the cultivation of these, that those interested in commercial agriculture were now pre-occupied.⁶⁵

		<i>Land Sold</i>	
		Acres	Amount Realised
1879	—	26,738	£ 67,969
1880	—	31,619	£ 61,111
1881	—	26,818	£ 40,749
1882	—	22,446	£ 32,997
1883	—	25,099	£ 31,013
1884	—	21,943	£ 39,079
1885	—	22,085	£ 35,795
1886	—	20,460	£ 33,140

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65. Ceylon Blue Book. C.O. 59. Series