COMMUNICATING EMPIRE:

GAUGING TELEGRAPHY'S IMPACT ON CEYLON'S NINETEENTH-CENTURY COLONIAL GOVERNMENT ADMINISTRATION

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ABSTRACT

For long, historians have considered the telegraph as a tool of power, one that replaced the colonial government's *a posteriori* structures of control with a preventive system of authority. They have suggested that this revolution empowered colonial governments, making them more effective in their strategies of communication and rule. In this dissertation, I test these assumptions and analyze the use of telegraphic communication by Ceylon's colonial government during the second half of the nineteenth-century; to determine not only the impact of the telegraph on political decision-making but also how the telegraph and politics became embedded together, impacting on colonial government and its decision-making and on everyday administrative processes. I examine telegraphic messages alongside other forms of correspondence, such as letters and memos, to gauge the extent to which the telegraph was used to communicate information between London and Ceylon, and the role that the telegraph played locally, within Ceylon, between the Governor General and the island's regional officials. I argue that, contrary to conventional ideas, the telegraph did not transform colonial government practices. Rather, the medium became entrenched in a multi-layered system of communication, forming one part of a web of colonial correspondence tactics. While its role was purposeful, its importance and capacities were nevertheless circumscribed and limited.

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DEDICATION

Many of Sri Lanka's major communication systems originated before the country's independence from British rule in 1948. The railway track that lines the west coast of Colombo, just east of the rusted barbed-wire fence, blocking access to the seawater, is one example. It was laid about one hundred and fifty years ago. Continue the trace of colonial communications and board the train going from Colombo Fort to Kandy, and feel yourself bounce along the winding, bumpy mountain rail. This line was installed in the 1880s to support coffee and tea agriculture. Today it offers passengers an opportunity to experience the countryside in almost intrepid style: you are not restricted from hanging your body outside the boxcar while the train moves at a snail's pace over steep cliffs overlooking breath-taking tea-covered mountain vistas. When you alight, call home. The telephone was also an invention first introduced to the island by the British in the 1880s. Also, many of Sri Lanka's roads were originally laid by the British. Colombo to Kandy Road was constructed in the first quarter of the nineteenth century, and many roads were constructed in the wake of plantation agriculture from the 1830s.

Roads and railroads are quite obvious British communication technologies; they are visibly inscribed in the island's landscape, and no traveler in Sri Lanka can possibly bypass them. There is, however, another communication technology, installed by the British, which less conspicuously co-exists with modern Sri Lankan society: the island's telegraph network, installed in 1858.

Even in 2012, many companies in Sri Lanka require its employees to request a leave of absence by telegram. "Sir, I beg three days' leave," is what a very spry ninety-year old woman told me she used to telegraph to her boss in the 1950s when she wanted a long weekend. And, according to a witty twenty-something year old man with whom I met and discussed Sri Lankan telegraphy, the same practice still applies today. "Why?" I asked him. "Telegrams, unlike telephone calls, leave an official paper trace," he replied. Anyone familiar with Sri Lankan bureaucracy can attest to this importance. Sri Lankans have a paper-centric administrative tradition, which is also a communication remnant of British occupation.

But what is considered telegraphy today is far removed from what it was in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. There are no longer telegraph clerks clicking away Morse code round the clock. Instead, telegrams are noted telephone conversations, verbal messages which are jotted down by post office workers and delivered by telegram couriers. Most telegraph poles, which once lined the island's meandering roads, have been felled since the 1980s. Those that do remain are nothing more than wooden posts, stripped bare of their once buzzing wires.

Perhaps, though, we are living in the end days of telegrams in Sri Lanka. On 8 June 2011 the AFP ran a piece titled "Sri Lanka scraps colonial-era telegram service,"[1] which stated the potential demise of Sri Lanka's telegram service that sends on average 50 messages per day. The reason given: "Transmitting telegrams using a network of postal messengers across the country was too expensive, postal ministry secretary Hemasiri Fernando said, adding that they could not compete with phones and text messages for speed." In addition to the announcement, the article highlighted various ways in which the technology has been, and continues to be, used in Sri Lankan society. Parliamentarians and businesses still send telegrams to contact people in remote locations. Until the 1990s, applicants were informed telegraphically of their employment, and hospitals and the police used telegrams to inform next-of-kin of deaths and accidents of loved ones. The article also stated that "provincial correspondents of newspapers used telegrams to send their news reports to offices in the capital." The telegram service has not yet been "scrapped," however, as the decision to end it is still pending presidential approval. But, soon, telegraphy, which has endured in Sri Lanka since its introduction in the second half of the nineteenth century, may vanish completely.

This dissertation is dedicated to the preservation of Sri Lanka's memory of its soon-to-vanish telegraph system.

[1] I dearly thank Neena Mahadev for pointing my attention to this article.

Synchronicity brought me here.

INTRODUCTION

According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the word "telegram" was first recorded on 6 April 1852 in the *Albany Evening Journal:* "A friend desires us to give notice that he will ask leave…to introduce a new word... It is *telegram*, instead of *telegraphic dispatch*, or *telegraphic communication*."[2] The word, it states, denotes a message sent by (electric) telegraph. It is a message that had first passed electrically through telegraph wires, cables and magnets; electrically coded information that was translated and transferred onto a piece of paper, becoming a telegram. But while this definition serves to explain what a telegram is, it does not express what a telegram means. That depends on the context. From a twenty-first century perspective a telegram is a relic of the past, part of the magical imagination of authors like Gabriel Garcia Márquez and Rudyard Kipling—a technology that represents an age of electric communication that humans have since surpassed in terms of ingenuity. But, from a nineteenth-century perspective a radically different interpretation emerges; in this time, the newly invented telegram was a milestone in technology, absolutely breaking with the past in its capacities of communication. The steamship, which developed alongside the telegraph, was fast, but messages sent by telegraph were approximately 99% faster. The semaphore, which predated the telegraph by well over a hundred years, was ingenious, but telegraphs could do what the semaphore did *and* its messages were capable of transcending the hitherto known boundaries of space and time. The telegraph's transmission of messages, almost immediately across distances that reached beyond oceans and continents, far exceeded the capability of any previous communication device, and telegrams provided an entirely new way of expressing and sharing information.

The nineteenth-century British Empire was the unequivocal site of the most expansive telegraph network in the world, a network that reached from Adelaide, Australia to Europe, and multiple islands and territories in between. The technology was primarily used in the empire in two ways: first, it was a commercial tool, being used by merchants

[2] "telegram, n.." OED Online. June 2012. Oxford University Press. http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/198685?isAdvanced=false&result=1&rskey=xXiGia& (accessed August 14, 2012)

and bankers to convey national and international market transactions and currency exchanges; second, it was used in the political correspondence activities of the government(s) of the empire. In these two ways, the technology was involved in coordinating the economies and political enterprises of the empire with impressive and unprecedented speed and form. In this dissertation, I focus on the second of these primary uses of the technology, its governmental use as a tool of the British Empire, detailing one British colony's government's use of telegrams in its correspondence activities by examining their impact on government practices and on decision-making processes.

The purpose of this study is to gain an understanding of what telegraphy meant and how it functioned culturally and practically in the British Empire. I hypothesize that the telegraph's lightning-fast communication speed created a number of transformations within the structures of imperial power, ranging from the most basic development of new communication choices, practices, and changes in language to the more profound renderings of shared time and space; and that these changes had the capacity to instill new forms of bureaucratic realities, including tighter centralization and weakened colonial Governors' autonomy, and thus revolutionize imperial structures of control from within. The aim of this dissertation is to assess the full extent of telegraphy's new communication powers, and to examine its impact on imperial government administration. I show that despite its revolutionary capacities the technology played only a minor role in colonial government administration; it operated in a conjoined effort with limited effect alongside other forms of communication, such as the letter. While its function was purposeful, it was nevertheless circumscribed by a system that was tailored to favor the imperial mail service, not the enterprise of telegraphy.

I examine Ceylon, the tear-shaped island colony located south of India in the Indian Ocean, which received telegraphic technology in 1858. While Ceylon may seem like an obscure place to examine telegraphy, it is, in fact, particularly useful for exploring these issues. Not only was it one of the earliest British colonies to receive telegraphic technology, but also it was ruled by one colonial government, which allows for an in-depth analysis on a definable, locatable colonial government's use of telegraphy. This

would be a more complicated undertaking in other colonial government administration contexts, such as India's vast administrative complex. Furthermore, studying Ceylon redresses a great deficit in the literature on south Asian communications, given that studies until now have focused almost exclusively on India.

CEYLON, COMMUNICATION, AND TELEGRAPHY

To highlight the significance of this dissertation's aims, I begin with a brief history of the island and its political organization. Only with this knowledge will we be able to assess the implications which telegraphy had on the critical domain of imperial communication.

Ceylon was formally ceded to the authority of the British Crown under the fifth article of the Peace of Amiens in March 1802.[3] As a Crown Colony, the British Crown held absolute control over Ceylon's legislation, while the administration was carried on by public officers under the control of the Home Government. The Secretary of State for the Colonies—responsible to the British Government, and thence to Parliament—was the *de facto* highest representative ruling Ceylon. All decisions regarding the ways in which Ceylon was run ultimately began and ended with him. All legislative, executive, and judicial decisions were conducted under his authority, and all individual acts depended on his consent. Given the distance between his position in London at the Colonial Office and the colony, the Secretary of State was required by necessity to appoint a representative to rule in his place in the colony. In Ceylon, the Secretary of State's representative was known as the Governor General, under whose command was a retinue of civil servants and regional administrators.[4] In many ways, the Governor embodied the Secretary of State's authority, as the full extent of his powers makes clear. He had both executive and legislative powers, and he exercised nearly all the

[3] K.M. de Silva, "Chapter I - The Coming of the British to Ceylon," *University of Ceylon, History of Ceylon (from the Beginning of the 19th Century to 1948)* 3 (1973): 10; G.C. Mendis, *The Colebrooke-Cameron Papers: Documents on British Colonial Policy in Ceylon 1796-1833*, vol. 1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1956), 30; Colvin R. de Silva, *Ceylon Under the British Occupation 1795-1833*, vol. 1 (Blacksburg: Navrang, 1995), 249; Lennox A. Mills, *Ceylon Under British Rule 1795-1932: With an Account of the East India Company's Embassies to Kandy 1762-1795* (London: Oxford University Press, 1933), 41; A.E. Buultjens, ed., "The Dutch East India Company and the Peace of Aimens, 1802," in *Ceylon Antiquary and Literary Register*, vol. I, pt IV, 1916, 237–242.

[4] Be aware that the title of the Governor differed in other colonial contexts.

constitutional functions of the Crown within his territory. The breadth and scope of his duties were officially declared in the *Rules and Regulations for Her majesty's Colonial Service*, [5] of 1843, and in the *Colonial Office List* under the "rules and regulations" chapter concerning the behavior of the Governor.[6] According to the texts, the Governor was in charge of everything that occurred in his colony, from the smallest of bureaucratic details such as granting leaves-of-absence to the institution of large-scale public infrastructural projects, civil servant appointments, dealing with riots, and managing the colony's finance; and, he was even the final verdict on criminal trials.[7] However, while his powers were supreme in Ceylon, he was still subordinate to the Secretary of State and his actions were answerable to his superior's discretion.[8] Although he was required to use his discretionary powers autonomously to handle what were considered normal affairs, such as the remittance of fines and granting licenses for marriage, he was not allowed to act without the Secretary of State's prior consent on more important matters, such as the declaration of war or the assent of rights of Her Majesty's Subjects.

In reference to all matters, the Governor was required by law to submit a report of all his actions, deeds, needs, or wants to the Secretary of State in the form of written correspondence, depending on the nature of the situation, either before, during, or upon completion of each and every course of action or decision. And, the Secretary of State was required to respond, retrospectively approving or disapproving of what the Governor had done or was in the course of doing. The Secretary of State could and did command the Governor directly as well; and in respect to situations of great importance, such as those examples posited above, the Governor was forced to await Home government directions or else give himself to the possibility of punishment. It was this

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[5] Great Britain. Colonial Office, *Rules and Regulations for Her Majesty's Colonial Service* (Printed by W. Clowes and sons for H.M. Stationery off., 1843), 1–9. Even matters such as granting leave had to be confirmed by the powers in London. In cases of emergency like riots or famines, however, the Governor had discretionary authority to take immediate action and could disobey unnecessary directions. Still, following a Governor's independent course of action, he had to inform the Secretary of State about what he did and all measures remained provisional, not official, until consented. So, while the Governor had the right and duty to rule Ceylon directly, the Secretary of State was wholly implicated in the process.

[6] *The Colonial Office List (1878)*, 1878; Arthur N. Birch and William Robinson, *The Colonial Office List for 1867, Comprising Historical and Statistical Information Respecting the Colonial Dependencies of Great Britain: With an Account of the Services of the Principal Officers of the Several Colonial Governments* (Pall Mall: Harrison, 1867).

[7] Birch and Robinson, *Colonial Office List for 1867*, 136.

[8] Mills, *Ceylon Under British Rule 1795-1932: With an Account of the East India Company's Embassies to Kandy 1762-1795*, 101.

legally necessary relay and transference of information between the Governor and the Secretary of State that concretized the Crown in Ceylon, both virtually and practically infusing the Governor and the Secretary of State into a hierarchical enterprise of power.

The essential feature of Crown Colony rule, then, was the hierarchically distinct relationship of power, between the two officials, where the colony was virtually ruled by the Crown through various practical layers of hierarchy and representation. At the heart of the mechanism by which this control and power relationship was exercised was communication. This is to say, communication, in the form of a technology capable of circulating the reports, correspondence, and directives necessary for the relationship between the two men and the Crown itself, across a distance as vast as 5,000 miles, was the ultimate tool of Crown Colony power; without such a tool, the processes of Crown colony government could not or would not function. There is no need to insist further then that one of the most important practical matters to the colonial government was its communication system: a system whereby the Governor and the Secretary of State would be able to correspond on matters related to government, particularly concerning the authorization and oversight of the Governor's authority, and whereby the Governor could relate or seek approval for his decisions from the Secretary of State, and the latter could affirm his approval and relate his directives. Given these circumstances, and the geographic distance between Ceylon and London (approximately 5,000 miles apart), an effective long-distance communication system was vital for the operation of Crown Colony government.

Until telegraphy was installed on the island, the letter, transported by sailing and steam vessels and overland post carriers, was the primary means of relating and directing communication relevant to the function of Ceylon's Crown government. Given the nature of transport at the time, letters took on average one month to travel from the colony to London and another month to return. Consequently, policies of Crown Colony government took months to realize, a duration which forced into effect the outstanding measures of power conferred to the Governor, mentioned above.

Because of distance, the Secretary of State could not realistically command every act of government in the colony from the top down; and because letters travelled slowly, the Governor would wait more than two months for a Home response. Therefore, rather than wait for the Secretary of State's commands, the Governor was granted powers of autonomous action. Instead of waiting for the Secretary of State to tell him what to do, he would formulate a plan of action and execute it and then declare his case to London for official confirmation. As detailed in his list of General Powers, this active execution of his powers prior to the official command from the Secretary of State was precisely what the empire required of the Governor. The reason for this was because letters, taking approximately two months to circulate, did not foster a centrally driven system of control. On the contrary, letters fostered a different system of control, opposite to a rational process, one where control was repressive and reactive.

The letter itself, with its inherent time lag, influenced the scale of hierarchy and the decision-making process, inflating the Governor's abilities of power and deflating those of the Secretary of State. Letters had thus a real impact on the power relationship between the colony and the Crown. This all goes on to say that letters enforced a system based on *a posteriori* control. Control was not preventive; that is, it was not a top down imposition of decisions or a determent and avoidance of decisions considered inappropriate or inefficient. On the contrary, letters forced government to take a repressive or reactive position, if such a control was possible, particularly over decisions already taken and executed by the Governor. The immanent nature of the letter's speed of transmission forced an environment of *a posteriori* mechanisms, whereby hierarchical power was inversely articulated. Therefore, the *medium* of communication mattered significantly; because of the practical limitations of the transmission of letters the system of control was forced to operate in a manner opposite to that of the established hierarchy, where the Governor had the right to act and then report and the Secretary of State had to trust, let be, only to later judge, the decisions made by his subordinate.

Given the power of communication media to influence the Crown Colony's system of control, one might speculate that the agency of the telegraph, with its impressive speed and unprecedented forms, reversed this situation, as it provided the Secretary of State

with an ability to communicate within a matter of hours. It is possible that the telegraph fostered an *a priori* system of control, where control was preventative and directive, therefore ideally representing the scale of hierarchy. This is evidenced by *(a)* the energy involved in the network's installation and growth in the colony, *(b)* the colonial government's subsequent application of it in political correspondence, and *(c)* the unprecedented characteristics of telegrams. One might speculate that given these three elements the telegraph's use in colonial government correspondence shifted the dynamic of communication as a tool of power, so that the consequential mechanisms of *a posteriori* control were replaced by an *a priori* method of control. In fact, this has been the mainstream presumption sustained by scholarship. I turn now to detail these elements and explore their verity.

Telegrams and the colonial government

Ceylon was the second British colony, after India (1854), to receive telegraphic communication. Like in India, under the control of the British government, the network expanded rapidly and consistently throughout the century. The original outlay of the network connected Galle and Manaar, with conveying stations in Colombo and Kandy. In 1859, it was extended to Madras, India, via submarine cable technology. From which point in time it was expanded to include nearly all locations considered to have significant commercial and political importance, including but not limited to Dambulla, Anuradhapura, and Batticaloa; in 1900, there were nearly 1,500 miles of telegraph posts in Ceylon. In addition to its local expansion, the network functioned significantly as a node in the empire's system of global communication, operating as a conveying station and communication mid-way point between the empire's eastern colonies and the Middle East; as the rest of the empire's network expanded, so too did the dimension and capacity of Ceylon's.

The island's government, which had installed and controlled the system, began to incorporate the technology in its communication activities almost as soon as it was introduced. From 1865, the year when it was first used by the Governor of Ceylon to correspond with the Secretary of State for the Colonies in London, it became part of the

everyday communication activities of official correspondence.[9] The technology was also used locally, beginning in 1876, becoming integrated into the correspondence of the Governor and his subordinates. While the colonial state was hesitant to adopt the technology at first, by the 1870s telegrams had become an integral component of the colonial administration, operating on every level of government from the highest to the most subordinate. The colonial government's energetic expansion of the telegraph and its subsequent application of telegrams in official correspondence suggest that the colonial government's relationship with the technology was more than a novelty, but one with a long-term and committed view to shift the system of imperial communication from letters to telegraphic technology. Given the unprecedented characteristics of telegrams, this commitment might have also included an aim to switch from using *a posteriori* techniques of control to those of *a priori* control.

Contrary to letters, the characteristics of a telegram were favorable to achieve preventative and prescriptive power. Firstly, telegrams were a vastly faster form of communication; they could travel the distance between the colony and London in about four hours. This was a near 99% increase. By the fact of speed alone, telegrams had the capacity to transform the current relationship of control, granting the Secretary of State the ability to dictate commands and the Governor the capacity to request permission. It was not until the telegram that Ceylon's Governor could ask for advice on a pending decision. And, likewise, it was not until the telegram that the Secretary of State could intervene on a practical level, checking the Governor *before* his actions were made. This meant significantly less waiting, more interaction, nearly immediate implementation of London's directives, and the reception of essential information from the Home authority. Furthermore, faster communication between the Governor and the Secretary of State could improve the quality and efficiency of policy- and decision-making; greater speed indicated a more interactive and responsive approach to political formulations which could entail greater contact and accountability.

[9] Progress in telegraphic technology, such as the opening of the Red Sea submarine cable in 1870, improved telegraphic correspondence across this distance.

These characteristics of the telegram, including the ability to communicate information at once, and circumvent the letter's necessary waiting period of several months, implied an absolutely new way in which the Crown colony government could communicate and a revolution within its system of control. To clarify how the telegraph's speed may have operated, consider the following brief message that the Governor telegraphed to the Secretary of State on 31 May 1873: "*I propose in supplementary ordinance to the passed week to give 2000 in gratituties [sic] to the impensioned [sic] men of the rifles who would otherwise be sent adrift without any means of subsistence.*" This message was sent one week before the passing of a bill in support of providing gratuities to riflemen. Although the outcome has not been ascertained, it shows that the telegraph could be used to influence legislative decisions up to and at the eleventh hour. By extension of its speed, the telegram, therefore, offered an unprecedented capacity to communicate last minute objections or changes of opinion, challenging and removing many of the obstacles, established by letters, that had for so long shaped and limited the regime's relationship of power. But the telegraph's potential to change communication practices was not only a matter of its ability to annihilate time and space.

Telegrams were also an entirely new *form* of communication that, in addition to its speed, implied many changes in Crown Colony government. For years, Ceylon's colonial administration circulated political information in the form letters. Letters were well written, perhaps not as artful as the Persian letters first incorporated by the British in India,[10] but in their own way they were eloquent and articulate, and most distinctly, they were analytical. They contained a combination of quantitative and qualitative input. This was both a matter of convention and rule, as there were strict procedures dictating the writing and submission of official letters. Conversely, however, there were no such rules concerning telegrams and their operability was free form. Unlike letters, they were short and concise, not eloquent, and they hardly contained grammatical precision. But they offered a quality that letters did not. Free of rules and excess details, they acted as a short-cut to communication, where the fact of poor writing was overlooked. The purpose of a

[10] Bayly discusses the royal letters of the Mughal Court in: C. A. Bayly, *Empire and Information: Intelligence Gathering and Social Communication in India, 1780-1870*, 0 ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 76–77.

telegram was to convey a message, an idea, not to become involved in grammatical warfare and the formalities of letters.

All of this goes on to suggest that the telegram had not only the full support of the colonial government but also contained the technical characteristics capable of reversing the effects imposed on the regime by the speed of letters and reinstating an entirely new discursive system of power. A system based on the telegraph would not prohibit the Governor from reporting his actions before entertaining them; on the contrary, with telegraphy he would be able to communicate Home before making their attempt. Instead of passively awaiting the arrival of the mail, the Secretary of State could command the Governor from the armchair of his office and have more direct influence over the everyday conditions of the colony. The telegraph, in other words, had the capacity to revolutionize the Crown government from within.

But this is a superficial reading of the subject and is just one of the many possible realities affected by telegraphic technology. I suggest that, alongside the general idea that telegraphy replaced or reversed the pre-existing system of communication, other possibilities about telegraphy and its consequences on power relations must also be taken into account. In addition to the conventional idea, there were other possible consequences and roles of telegraphy in Ceylon's colonial government; these include the possibility that the telegraph *(1)* had no effects on, *(2)* complemented, or *(3)* paralleled the pre-existing system of lettered communication. In order to broaden our understanding of imperial communications and sharpen our knowledge of the role of telegrams in British colonial government, we must evaluate these alternative possibilities.

(1) The telegraph had no effects on the pre-existing communication system:

As well as having evidence to show that the telegraph had the capacity to revolutionize the system of control of Crown Colony rule in Ceylon, there is also evidence to support the claim that the telegraph had no effects at all. Throughout the nineteenth century, even after the telegraph was introduced and used by the colonial government, the system of letters continued in use. In fact, it not only persisted, it remained the dominant form

of communication used, both quantitatively and qualitatively. More letters than telegrams were sent, and the colonial government circulated all matters of government in letters, even re-circulating information that had already appeared as a telegram. Therefore, we might assume that the telegraph had no effects on the system of control, on the relationship between the Governor and the Secretary of State, or on Crown Colony policies.

(2) The telegraph complemented the pre-existing communication system

There is also reason to believe that the telegram did have an important role to play as a complementary tool, as the telegram and letter were also seen to have combined to form a mutual enterprise of communication—where the telegram provided an extra system of communication and the two mediums worked together, not apart. Although the unique qualities of telegraphic speed and form would prove extremely useful in the context of Crown Colony government where time was of the essence and factual discourse was required, they would not overturn the need for letters, nor would they replace the unique roles that letters played. The telegraph's form and speed enabled new ways of communicating. For example, telegrams were excellent for expressing short facts without the rigmarole of letter drafting; on 8 February 1890, the Governor telegraphed "*M Clark recommends his son.*" This short and informative telegram only would have made sense to the Secretary of State if it followed a more detailed letter; but, at this point in their discussion, this idea, conveyed by a solitary subject/verb/object statement, was all that was needed. The telegram was thus used to complement the letter, to provide something that had been lacking in the previous system, that is, the capacity to exercise same-day correspondence.

The telegram also complemented the imperial system of communication in other ways, as a "meta-media": a media used to coordinate and complement the functions of other media. This was clearly the case in Britain, where the telegraph was first used to organize the arrival and departure of trains. While the telegraph predates Ceylon's railroad, there are numerous instances of the telegraph organizing the sending and receiving of the post, which is another possible function of the telegraph for which there is ample evidence.

The following is an example of a telegram being used to coordinate a letter, from 26 February 1876: "*Please do not appoint auditor till you can hear by mail.*" This telegram did not provide new information about a subject; rather it postponed the results of an appointment that had been sent by mail, yet still not arrived, and permitted the Governor's opinion to become heard. This was beneficial because the letter, detailing his ideas, may have been made and sent in vain. There is thus room to suppose that the telegram and letter coexisted, working to complement each other's lacking qualities and to make imperial communication a dynamic and multi-layered system.

(3) The telegraph paralleled the pre-existing communication system

There is also evidence showing that telegraphy developed purposes independent of those of letters, working outside and in separate domains. A prominent example of this was the matter of leaves of absence. In fact, the practice of telegraphing a request for time off work still exists in Sri Lanka today. In order to request leave, an employee in Sri Lanka must telegraph, not call or e-mail. This is likely a practice dating from the nineteenth century, given the plethora of examples when telegrams, not letters, were used to request leaves of absence. To take just one of a handful of instances, on 1 January 1889 the Secretary of State received the following telegram from the Governor: "*may I take leave 28 days to take wife, serious illness* …?" The Governor would not have to wait long for a response from the Secretary of State, who could also telegraph his response without hesitation. As a fast, fact-oriented, and to-the-point medium, telegrams provided a new language for Crown Colony government that was capable of translating itself in a number of terms, ideas, and actions that were not sustainable by letters—situations which required immediate and forthright attention were purely the domain of the telegraph; hence, the mediums might have operated in parallel to each other, one for everyday communication and the other for situations that required immediate attention and the occasional emergency.

As is clear from these alternative hypotheses, and the evidence supporting them, we must see telegraphy's colonial history as more complex than the mainstream belief that the telegram revolutionized Crown Colony government. In fact, these purposes mutually

coexisted, operating in tandem, making the history of telegraphy a fluid one, a story stricken with both agreements and contradictions, and with revolutions and silent pauses. Telegraphy at times transformed power, while in other moments it complemented or paralleled existing forms of communication. Its impact on the system of Crown Colony control, in its mediating agency as a tool of power, was therefore highly complex and yet subtly charged. How it functioned culturally also remains widely uncertain. And, there is much to learn about this dynamic technology in the possession of the colonial state and its impact on imperial power relations. This dissertation takes on this challenge in its assessment of the topic to draw as broad a perspective as possible on the meaning and nuances of telegrams in the nineteenth century.

To summarize its main aims, this dissertation, firstly, assesses the extent of telegrams' impact on the practices of control in the power relations of the Crown in ruling Ceylon by directly examining the telegrams used by the colonial government in its administration of Ceylon, a methodological approach which has yet to be taken in studies on telegraphy; secondly, it attempts to measure telegrams' roles, level of importance, benefits, and their force as agents of change, discerning the extent to which they manifested transformations in the colony's structures of power and the extent to which they did nothing, complemented, or paralleled it; thirdly, it compares the functional differences and similarities between colonial government telegrams and letters and determines not only their impact on political decision-making but how they became embedded together, impacting on colonial government and its decision-making and on everyday administrative processes. As a final broad but critical aim, this dissertation seeks to understand the relationship between telegraphy and power in a colonial context to realize, on some level, what telegrams meant in the nineteenth century and how they operated in a culture of power's everyday and extraordinary practices of government and administration. To reiterate, Ceylon is particularly useful for exploring these issues, and I do hope that a focused study on this colony draws attention to the benefit of examining south Asian regions other than India as a point of departure for exploring topics relevant to the British Empire as a whole. Doing so enriches our perspective on colonialism and on modern history in general.

LITERATURE REVIEW

To date, there have been many studies on the subject of telegraphy with topics ranging from the technology's application in commerce and trade[11] to its function in news correspondence,[12] its impact on language and culture,[13] and its role in imperial governments. Given the British Empire's role in facilitating and controlling a major portion of the global telegraph network in the nineteenth century, Britain's national and imperial telegraph networks during this time and later have constituted a part of this latter topic. Surprisingly, however, there has been very little attention paid to British south Asia and the library of British imperial telegraphy is relatively thin.

Within this rather limited field, there are nevertheless a number of key scholarly texts, which can summarily be classified into two categories: first, Daniel Headrick's books from the 1980s and his thesis that associates telegraphy inseparably from imperial power, claiming that the former was a direct cause of the latter and, second, studies made on telegraphy since the mid-1990s, which challenges Headrick's thesis of power and the telegraph's ostensible role in strengthening empire. This dissertation fits nominally in the second category, although it is unprecedented in two ways. It is the first study on Ceylon,

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[11] Some of the earliest examples include: John Langdale, "Impact of the Telegraph on the Buffalo Agricultural Commodity Market: 1846-1848," *Professional Geographer* 31, no. 2 (1979): 165–169; Ranald C. Michie, "The London Stock Exchange and the British Securities Market, 1850-1914," *The Economic History Review, New Series* 38, no. 1 (1985): 61–82. Recent publications on the topic include: Peter N. Davies, "The Impact of Improving Communications on Commercial Transactions: Nineteenth-Century Case Studies from British West Africa and Japan," *International Journal of Maritime History* 14, no. 1 (2002): 225–38; and David Hochfelder, "'Where the Common People Could Speculate': The Ticker, Bucket Shops, and the Origins of Popular Participation in Financial Markets, 1880–1920," *The Journal of American History* 93, no. 2 (2006): 335–58.

[12] For example: Toni Weller and David Bawden, "Individual Perceptions: A New Chapter on Victorian Information History," *Library History* 22, no. 2 (2006): 137–156; Alex Nalbach, "'Poisoned at the Source?' Telegraphic News Services and Big Business in the Nineteenth Century," *History Review* 77, no. 4 (2003): 577–610; Donald L. Shaw, "News Bias and the Telegraph: A Study of Historical Change," *Journalism Quarterly* 44 (1967): 3–31; Amelia Bonea, "The Medium and Its Message: Reporting the Austro-Prussian War in the Times of India," *Historical Social Research. Global Communication: Telecommunication and Global Flows of Information in the Late 19th and Early 20th Century* 35, no. 1 (2010): 167–197.

[13] For example: Carey, *Communication as Culture, Revised Edition*; Deep Kanta Lahiri Choudhury, "Of Codes and Coda: Meaning in Telegraph Messages, Circa 1850-1920," in *Global Communication: Telecommunication and Global Flows of Information in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century*, ed. Roland Wenzlhuemer (Cologne: Center for Historical Social Research, 2010), 127–139; Iwan Rhys Morus, "'The Nervous System of Britain': Space, Time and the Electric Telegraph in the Victorian Age," *The British Journal for the History of Science* 33, no. 4 (2000): 455–475; Annteresa Lubrano, *The Telegraph: How Technology Innovation Caused Social Change* (New York: Garland, 1997).

and it is the first study to tackle the question of telegraphy by studying the everyday role of telegraphic communication in one imperial culture. In what follows, I will briefly outline the key texts in these categories and proceed to outline my methodology and my dissertation's contribution to the field of British imperial telegraphy.

Literature on imperial telegraphy began to emerge in the late 1960s and early 1970s[14] as an offshoot of British imperial history and the scholarship of imperial science and technology.[15] Comparable to the contemporary trend in the discourse of British imperialism in general, these early works focused on the actions and policies of individual politicians responsible for constructing Britain's telegraphs, acting as biographical accounts of the scientific men involved in the engineering and laying of the lines. As such, telegraphic history during these years included histories of the politicians, national leaders, and engineers who constructed the technology, but little was said about telegraphy itself and how it mattered from a sociological perspective. The discussion was reversed, however, in the late 1970s following the popularization of a republished edition of the until-then little-known work by Harold Innis, titled *Empire and Communications* (first published in 1952), that has since become the cornerstone of communication studies and the driving force behind the literature on imperial telegraphy.[16]

Harold Innis' work was a watershed. As stated above, previous scholarship on the British Empire had dealt with the actions of individual politicians, implying it was the subjective decisions of individuals that set the course of empire towards progress or decline. Innis

[14] The first studies to discuss imperial telegraphy include: Christiana Phelps Harris, "The Persian Gulf Submarine Telegraph of 1864," *The Geographical Journal* 135, no. 2 (1969): 169–190; Paul M. Kennedy, "Imperial Cable Communications and Strategy, 1870-1914," *The English Historical Review* 86, no. 341 (1971): 728–752; Mel Gorman, "Sir William O'Shaughnessy, Lord Dalhousie, and the Establishment of the Telegraph System in India," *Technology and Culture* 12, no. 4 (1971): 581–601. *Technology and Culture* 12, no.4 (1971): 581-601.

[15] The most famous examples of works on imperial technology include: Gerald S. Graham, *The China Station: War and Diplomacy, 1830-1860* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978); Henry T. Bernstein, *Steamboats on the Ganges: An Exploration in the History of India's Modernization Through Science and Technology* (Bombay: Orient Longmans, 1960); Carlo Cipolla, *Guns, Sails and Empires: Technological Innovation and the Early Phases of European Expansion, 1400-1700* (New York: Minerva Press, 1965); Lucile Brockway, "Science and Colonialism: The Role of the British Royal Botanic Gardens in Empire-Building" (Thesis (Ph. D), University of New York, 1977); Ms. Lucile H. Brockway and Lucile H. Brockway, *Science and Colonial Expansion: The Role of the British Royal Botanic Garden* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002). The former title was based on her Ph.D. thesis.

[16] Harold Innis, *Empire and Communications* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1972).

not only offered a completely different topic to the mix, communication media, but a completely new lens, a sociological and objective one, through which the history of empire could be gauged. According to Innis, communication media were a crucial determinant of the social fabric and central to the fact of empires. They were not just important because political men required or used them. Communication media were a primary factor of empires in their own right; through their own agency they were able to influence the rise, fall, and endurance of empires. For Innis, communication media, not individuals, accounted for the driving factor behind imperial history. His concept thus challenged the views that had hitherto encompassed the bulk of the literature by opening the floor to a discussion on empire that sought more than to scrutinize political and diplomatic capacities, but to objectively and morally discern the history of empire through the organizational basis of its institutions. For Innis, culture and institutions were interrelated and both were "epiphenomena of communications technology."[17]

To characterize the main ideas in *Empire and Communications*, I relate here a summary written by the eminent cultural and communication professor James Carey, a self-declared admirer of Innis:

> Innis argues that any given medium of communication is biased in terms of the control of time or space. Media which are durable and difficult to transport—parchment, clay, and stone—are time-binding or time-biased. Media which are light and less durable are space-binding or spatially biased. For example, paper and papyrus are space-binding, for they are light, easily transportable, can be moved across space with reasonable speed and great accuracy, and they thus favor administration over vast distance. Any given medium will bias social organization, for it will favor the growth of certain kinds of interests and institutions at the expense of others and will also impose on these institutions a form of organization. Media which are space-binding facilitate and encourage the growth of empire, encourage a concern with expansion and with the present, and thus favor the hegemony of secular political authority. Space-binding media encourage

[17] James W. Carey, "Harold Adams Innis and Marshall McLuhan," *The Antioch Review* 27, no. 1 (1967): 9.

> the growth of the state, the military, and decentralized and expansionist institutions. Time-binding media foster concern with history and tradition, have little capacity for expansion of secular authority, and thus favor the growth of religion, of hierarchical organization, and of contractionist institutions. [18]

According to Innis' model not only do communication media determine the type of social organization of an empire, they also determine the level of its success; an overemphasis of a media with either bias, which was ultimately a technical and moral bifurcation, was "the principal dynamic of the rise and fall of empire."[19] This meant that relying too much on media that fostered technical state and military expansion and not enough on media which favored tradition, religion, and history, or vice versa, would ultimately lead an empire to decline. The same he held true for Egypt and America and every empire in between. For Innis, a successful empire would have to strike a balance between the two media biases, honoring the institutions of both space and time.

For the history of imperial telegraphy, Innis' work signaled a new way to approach the topic, one which would be emancipated from the gravitational pull of politicians and centered instead on technology as an autonomous subject of history that could be studied objectively.

The first historian to extend Innis' ideas to the topic of telegraphy, by considerably looking at how communication technology related with imperial power, was Daniel R. Headrick, whose works from the 1980s are cornerstones for any historian interested in studying imperial telegraphy today. [20] Headrick began his exploration of imperial telegraphy in *The Tools of Empire: Technology and European Imperialism in the Nineteenth Century* in 1981, which he divided into three main parts. Part one concerned what he called "tools of penetration."[21] Steamboats, for example, enabled Europeans to penetrate lands deep in Asia and Africa by allowing river travel; likewise, it was malaria prophylaxes that

[18] Ibid.
[19] Ibid., 13.
[19] Daniel R. Headrick, *The Tools of Empire: Technology and European Imperialism in the Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981); Daniel R. Headrick, *The Tentacles of Progress: Technology Transfer in the Age of Imperialism, 1850-1940* (Oxford University Press, USA, 1988).
[20] Headrick, *The Tools of Empire*, 17–42.

allowed European occupation of sub-Saharan Africa. Part two concerned military technologies, such as rapid-fire guns, which enabled the conquest of indigenous people and the imposition over them of European rule. Part three emphasized the major role of steam ship and telegraphic communication in imperial consolidation. Although he dedicated only an eight-page survey-style chapter to telegraphy, it was an important component of his thesis of empire and technology as a whole. The telegraph, Headrick argued, was one of several technologies that allowed Europeans to penetrate, suppress, and control continents and indigenous non-European populations. In particular, it gave Europeans a strategic military advantage and intensified imperial central power in the colonies.

In *Tools of Empire* and in successive writings, Headrick affirmed that hitherto studies had confronted the question of imperialism—why Europeans were able to colonize most of the world with relative success during the last half of the nineteenth century—from numerous angles but always came up short. Building on Innis, he argued that they focused on the various wills of individuals, politicians, and other interest groups in the imperial project but missed the critical importance of the "tools" under their command.[22] For example, he claimed that the British were able to conquer sub-Saharan Africa in the late nineteenth century, not because politicians suddenly became interested in colonizing Africa, but because the discovery of quinine and other prophylactics allowed them to penetrate the sub-Saharan African interior without dying from Malaria.[23] He stressed that previous scholarship on European technologies had focused on developments in the technologies themselves at the expense of analyzing their relationship to imperial wills. There were thus scores of histories, according to Headrick, that thought critically of European imperialism, and many that explored European technology, but no single study, before his, confronted both concerns at once; and no study before his emphasized to the same extent the role that technologies, including the telegraph, played in imperial power.[24]

[21] Ibid., 3–12.
[23] Ibid., 58–80.
[24] Headrick, *The Tools of Empire*; See Headrick's introductions in both: Headrick, *The Tentacles of Progress*.

For Headrick, telegraphy was one key to imperial success in the nineteenth century, providing greater social changes and increased governmental power than any prior technology. It improved the lines of communication which had feebly served empires before the second half of the nineteenth century:

> Before the 1840s it took 5 to 8 months for a letter to travel between Britain and India, and the writer could not expect to receive an answer in less than 2 years. Even after steamships took over the mail service, in still took 6 weeks in each direction. Within India, the mails were just as slow.[25]

Telegraphy, according to Headrick, tied the empire into a web of power in which political and military decisions flowed swiftly between the colonies and the center, faster than they ever had before. According to the author, telegraphic messages took no more than four hours to send from India to London, resulting in a number of beneficial consequences. During peaceful times the telegraph served as a critical political decision-making tool; during times of crises and war, such as the 1857 Mutiny, the telegraph became valuable to diplomatic communications and military strategy.[26] According to Headrick, in other words, the telegraph reinforced the power structures of the imperial government, absolutely making its communications faster, more efficient, and by extension revolutionizing the operations of its system of control as well.

But for such bold claims, Headrick based them on little more than conjecture. Rather than looking at the telegraph in context, Headrick hyper-focused on the technology itself. He based his thesis on one fact alone: the telegraph was fast. For Headrick, it was as if it were placed in a vacuum or superimposed on a cultural blank slate. Yet, as I have described above in the introduction, this was definitely not the case in the British Empire. The imperial telegraph was introduced into a system dominated by a system of lettered communication that had unique traditional and cultural practices, logic, function, rules, and agency. Without taking this into perspective, Headrick's view of the telegraph's absolute agency is baseless, deriving from a technological determinist theory, not from

[25] Headrick, *The Tentacles of Progress*, 97.
[26] For Headrick's chapter on imperial telegraph networks, see: Ibid., 97–144.

evidence. Yet, it was precisely this foundationless argument that has prevailed in the majority of studies on the subject of imperial telegraphy. Since Headrick, historians have assumed that because the telegraph was a technology that permitted rapid communication, once installed, all communication sped up, absolutely transforming all previous communication practices. The technology itself was perceived as inherently transformative.

Headrick's emphasis on the power of the telegraph's technological agency became a foundational, uncontroversial part of the historiography, culminating over the years in a variety of texts on a diversity of related topics. Some of the most notable contributions following Headrick have included works by Peter J. Hugill,[27] Jill Hills,[28] and Peter McMahon[29] in their studies on telecommunications and geopolitical power in various national and international contexts. The line connecting the ideas in their works was the precept established by Headrick's views on the unbridled power of technology: telecommunication technologies, including the telegraph, were essential in geopolitical power shifts and fundamental to the decline of British and the rise of American world domination following the Second World War. Like Headrick's works, they too examined telegraphy in a cultural and technological vacuum. Some of the most current works have also clearly been influenced by Headrick. As indicated in its introduction, Headrick has been identified as a direct source of inspiration for Daqing Yang's recent publication *Technology of Empire: Telecommunications and Japanese Expansion in Asia, 1883-1945,*[30] which analyzed imperial Japan's telegraphic network and its role in the East Asian empire's expansion throughout the region. Based on Headrick's discourse of technology and power, Yang emphasized the role of telegraphy in the spread of Japanese influence and imperial hegemony. John Tully's 2009 article on the ecological impact of Gutta-Percha

[27] Peter J. Hugill, *Global Communications Since 1844: Geopolitics and Technology* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999).
[28] Jill Hills, *The Struggle for Control of Global Communication:The Formative Century* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2002).
[29] Peter McMahon, *Global Control: Information Technology and Globalization Since 1845* (Northampton: Edward Elgar Pub, 2002).
[30] Daqing Yang, *Technology of Empire: Telecommunications and Japanese Expansion in Asia, 1883-1945* (Harvard: Harvard University Asia Center, 2011).

manufacturing is another case in point.[31] He began with Karl Marx's 1853 observation as a starting point for his work, which, interestingly, was reflected in the theoretical foundation of Headrick's work over a century later. Marx wrote:

> The political unity of India, more consolidated, and extending farther than it ever did under the Great Moguls, was the first condition of its regeneration. That unity, imposed by the British sword, will now be strengthened and perpetuated by the electric telegraph. [32]

While his article highlighted many current concerns regarding industrialization, history, and the environment,[33] tying concepts of progress to ecological disasters, Tully's article on Gutta Percha was nevertheless another addition to the growing library on the materiality of telegraphy and its agency as a tool of imperial power. To make sense of the environment and the effects that cultivating Gutta Percha had on it, he embedded his analysis in the discourse of technological power established by Headrick and perpetuated by the literature. In their pursuit of extending their domain of power, he showed, the British necessarily cultivated Gutta Percha, a key ingredient in insulating submarine cables; the over cultivation of the material rendered an unforeseeable ecological disaster. The ecological disaster, therefore, was not merely the product of human neglect, but an environmental mishap subsumed in the discourse of telegraphy and power. According to Tully, the more the empire strived to strengthen its base of power, and cultivate more materials for it, the greater were the wounds inflicted on nature.

Over the last few decades there has arisen critical disagreement over Headrick's work, particularly in regard to his association of telegraphic expansion with imperial power. The first historian to critically address such ideas was C.A. Bayly in his seminal study on the information order of the British Empire, *Empire and Information: Intelligence Gathering and Social Communication in India, 1780-1870.*[34] Drawn together by an impressive array of

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[31] John Tully, "A Victorian Ecological Disaster: Imperialism, the Telegraph, and Gutta-Percha," *Journal of World History* 20, no. 4 (2009): 559–579.
[32] Ibid., 559.
[33] For a discussion on the relation between history and the environment, see: Dipesh Chakrabarty, "The Climate of History: Four Theses," *Critical Inquiry* 35, no. 2 (2009): 197–222.
[34] Bayly, *Empire and Information*.

primary source materials, the book critically traces the ways in which the British came to understand Indian society, through indigenous social networks and surveillance agencies of the colonial state. In it, Bayly argued that before the 1830s, colonial intelligence was primarily based on pre-existing systems of knowledge gathering embedded in what he called the Indian ecumene, an Indian public sphere composed of various individuals and communities divided along the lines of religion and caste. He described the ways in which the British infiltrated and manipulated the sophisticated communication systems of the subcontinent's Hindu and Mughal predecessors and adapted themselves strategically to their sources of local knowledge. According to Bayly, from around the turn of the 1830s, the British began to diverge from these traditional information channels and rely more on rational statistical surveys of state-run institutions, such as those used in the fields of the army, political services, revenue collection, education, and law. They also began to incorporate various new techniques and technologies of information gathering. Print media developed during this period. A postal department, a telegraph network, and a railway were adopted to support the interests of the state.

Bayly states that this "information revolution" came at the expense of affective and patrimonial knowledge which ultimately isolated the British state from Indian society.[35] As the British came to understand Indians in abstract universal terms, through census reports and statistical analyses, much of the complexities of Indian society became hidden to the state, as exemplified by the inability of the British to anticipate the 1857 Mutiny. By the time the revolt was quelled, critics of the Indian state had already begun to utilize the new systems of communication to challenge the political and intellectual dominance of the British rulers. The author implied that this eventually escalated into Indian Independence and partition nearly a century later.[36] Among the devices utilized in Indian nationalism was telegraphy.

Bayly's work turns Headrick's conclusions on their head. In *Empire and Information,* Bayly argues that the "information revolution" in India, of which the telegraph was a crucial part, was detrimental to British imperial power in the region; the British were more

[35] Ibid., 143, 343.
[36] Ibid., 338–364.

successful ruling and controlling their territories before the information revolution; and the new advanced technologies at their command, rather than becoming "tools of empire," worked to undermine British authority in both the short- and long-runs. According to Bayly's thesis, telegraphy was not the recipe for power that Headrick had taken it for.

Yet, as insightful as his theory was, the fruit of his ideas did not fall too far from the tree of imperial power planted by Innis. Curiously, there is a major similarity between their theses. For one, Bayly's insistence on the agency of new communication media and its capacity to bring an end to empire, particularly that of telegraphy and news media, can be seen in Innis' terms: that too much space-biased media imbalanced the communication media of the empire and thus brought about its end. Without getting too close to details, Bayly's argument is somewhat Headrick's in reverse. While Headrick said that communication media empowered the empire, Bayly said it disempowered it. But, unlike Headrick, Bayly did not make this observation in a vacuum, but in the context of imperial as well as Indian communication practices and broader social networks. For that reason alone, not to mention his plethora of well-integrated examples and sources, his study on imperial communications, although limited in its attention to telegraphy, was undoubtedly a watershed, influencing at least a few studies of British Imperial telegraph since.

The most exemplary of such cases, specifically dealing with the telegraph's part in the information revolution in India, which Bayly described, was Deep Kanta Lahiri Choudhury's *Telegraphic Imperialism: Crisis and Panic in the Indian Empire, c.1830*. In the book, he examined the construction, expansion, and fruition of telegraphy in the Indian Empire from 1830 to 1920, making the most current and thorough historical account of India's telegraph network;[37] and, drawing on Bayly's wide perspective of a technology's social and cultural uses, it gives further evidence of Headrick's limitations and the need to examine the telegraph as something more than just a tool affecting absolute power.

[37] Deep Kanta Lahiri Choudhury, *Telegraphic Imperialism: Crisis and Panic in the Indian Empire, C.1830* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

Throughout the book Choudhury highlighted British ineffectiveness at managing telegraphy and the anxiety and panic which ensued. In the second chapter specifically he explains the difficulties which the British faced in using telegraphy as a way of "knowing" India and stopping the Mutiny.[38] He showed that, at the time of the Mutiny, the network was incomplete, marginally connecting only the most significant northern cities. The telegraph, he states, was not a technology of surveillance and control as described by Headrick and others in the literature. He argues that following the Mutiny the Indian government began to improve upon and expand its telegraph network to redress the mistake of having a defunct telegraph system during a time when it could have been put better to use.[39] Motivated by an "information panic"— a term he borrows from Bayly[40] to explain that the British wanted more information while at the same time knowing that important and exclusive information could leak into the wrong hands—the British government began to expand the telegraph across the Indian subcontinent and into transnational and global dimensions, and improve its security and operability both within and outside India.[41] More telegraph lines were laid and fixed in an effort to gain greater control over information. New disciplinary measures and training efforts were enacted to enforce greater accountability among telegraph clerks and office personal. Tariff charges fluctuated and balanced to meet the needs of its users. Rather than the telegraph saving India, as previously thought, Choudhury suggests that India saved the telegraph through a sense of panic and an urgency to improve itself.[42]

Like Bayly's study, Choudhury's history diverged from the narrative of imperial telegraphy espoused by Headrick. Instead of painting the telegraph as a tool of imperial conquest and a source of imperial strength, Choudhury describes it being fraught with weaknesses and a cause for skepticism, insecurity, and panic. On this point the author wrote: "In its quest for stability and control [the British Empire] did not realize the extent to which uncertainty, instability, and information panics were inherent in the system."[43]

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[38] Ibid., 31–49.
[39] Ibid., 49.
[40] Bayly, *Empire and Information*, 174.
[41] Choudhury discusses this process in chapters 3 and 4 of the text: Choudhury, *Telegraphic Imperialism*, 50–102.
[42] Ibid., 49.
[43] Ibid., 6.

The telegraph caused a vicious cycle of insecurity in which more information begot the need for more information, and the panic of losing the information to outsiders drove imperial needs to secure and expand it. Choudhury's examination of the telegraph thus reveals, in extension of Bayly's claims, that the telegraph undermined British authority in the region and that the over abundance of information led by new media technologies brought uncertainty and instability to the information order, not greater power.

Yet, Choudhury's argumentation and analysis are not perfect. Michael Mann pointed out in a review of Choudhury's book that the author's argument failed to redress effectively Headrick's theories.[44] For Mann, Choudhury's emphasis on the telegraph in India as the point of departure for telegraphy throughout the region falsely accounted for the technology's historical development, and that Choudhury's view of the technology and the Indian Empire as mutually reinforcing agents[45] continued the "old positivistic narrative of a progressive imperial power subduing countries and people by means of science and technology," espoused by Headrick and works under his persuasion. I agree to some extent with Mann's argument that Choudhury's book was too methodologically restricted to the confines of British Indian territory even though it was "transnationally operating cartels [which] influenced the laying and working of cables and tariffs" in India, not national and imperial politics as Choudhury shows. Choudhury's failure may have been avoided, as Mann suggests, if he had incorporated the research of Dwane Winseck and Robert Pike, which I will introduce shortly, in their seminal work *Communication and Empire: Media, Markets, and Globalization, 1860–1930*, which had made the discovery about the link between the telegraph and its transnational roots, in 2007.[46] However, I disagree with parts of Mann's criticisms as well; as outlined in the above assessment of his work, *Telegraphic Imperialism* is, in fact, a far cry from the "old positivistic narrative," which Mann has critically called it. Choudhury skillfully and effectively presented and examined the shadow side of imperial telegraphy, and he successfully demystified many of the "old positivistic" ideas created by Headrick and maintained by his followers.

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[44] Michael Mann, "Deep Kanta Lahiri Choudhury. Telegraphic Imperialism. Crisis and Panic in the Indian Empire, C.1830. Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke [etc.] 2010. Xii, 277 Pp. Ill. Maps. £55.00," *International Review of Social History* 56, no. 02 (2011): 341–343.
[45] Choudhury, *Telegraphic Imperialism*, 101–102.
[46] Dwayne R. Winseck and Robert M. Pike, *Communication and Empire: Media, Markets, and Globalization, 1860–1930* (Durham: Duke University Press Books, 2007).

Probably the most serious departure from Headrick's scholarship to date is the book referred to above, *Communication and Empire*. Even the authors were aware of their divergence; in the preface they wrote strongly against Headrick and the scholars he inspired:

> As found in much current literature, the key and distinguishing feature between the past and the present is that the advent of the global media system…was driven mainly by the logic of imperialism and rivalry among the imperial super powers. In this view, the conquest of people and territory provided the dominant logic of international relations while the means of communication were, above all else, adjuncts of great power strategy. The leitmotiv of this era, then, is what Jill Hills refers to as "the struggle for control of global communication."[47]

They continued by saying that their book departed from conventional approaches in several significant ways. Firstly, it showed that there was no great imperial power rivalry in the expansion of a global media network in the years prior to the First World War; instead, the development and organization of telegraph and cable systems were maintained along the lines of international cooperation, between private agencies and business cartels. Secondly, it stressed the hesitance of imperial officials to become involved in the expensive and tedious business of formal imperial rule and refrained from meddling in the affairs of global media. Thirdly, it demonstrated that it was neither national nor imperial politics which determined global cable strategies, but rather the mutual cooperation between transnational private individuals and groups. Their findings thus dispelled much of what has been written and known about imperial telegraphy, specifically in the literature of Headrick and the global telecommunication historians. According to the authors, the technology was not embedded in imperial and national politics, territorial expansion, and control but was instead a product of complex exchanges between capitalism and business. Empires did not construct the telegraphs to

[47] Ibid., xv.

control its subjects, and it was not a tool of empire as much as it was a device of commercial capitalism.

The works of Bayly, Choudhury, and Winseck/Pike, described above, represent the general disagreements that historians have had with the central ideas of Headrick's works. They have moved the literature away from the simplistic reading of imperial telegraphy as an agent of absolute change and they have filled Headrick's vacuum with culture, society, and practices. Nevertheless, they have all tackled the analysis of imperial telegraphy with his methodology. They have all studied imperial telegraphy from an institutional and network-centered point-of-view. This means that their records and source materials consist primarily of infrastructural accounts and correspondence on the technology's formation, installation, and institution. Like Headrick, their histories have been primarily about the materiality of the technology, its construction, its formation, its institutions, etc., not about the technology-in-use. They have not written histories about how people used the technology and how the technology in turn affected individual lives. Rather, the subject of their histories has been the network itself, answering how it was built, by whom, and for what aim. But they have paid very little or no attention to the human-side of the network and what it meant for those involved.

Quite recently this sustained methodological focus on the institution of telegraphy has come under redress. Drawing on James Carey's seminal essay "Technology and Ideology: the Case of the Telegraph,"[48] which postulated the telegraph's revolutionary implications in time and space, language, and cultural practices, and its "dematerialization of information,"[49] Roland Wenzlhuemer's most recent account, *Transforming Global Spaces: The Telegraph, Communication and Globalization in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century*, is the first study to argue comprehensively for a need to study both technology as a fact and as a fact in use. His work draws on not just statistical reports but qualitative evidence of the telegraph's use in cultural practices. According to the author, the telegraph brought about many discernible changes in cultures throughout the world, an insight which has

[48] Carey, *Communication as Culture, Revised Edition*, 155–177.
[49] Roland Wenzlhuemer, "The Dematerialization of Telecommunication: Communication Centres and Peripheries in Europe and the World, 1850-1920," *Journal of Global History* 2, no. 3 (2007): 345–372.

been neglected by historians concentrated primarily on infrastructural data. To observe these cultural changes, he suggested, one must observe the telegraphic exchanges manifested by the technology and attempt to locate how the technology affected individual users.

His example about Lord and Lady Mayo makes a good case in point, showing his attempt to describe the telegraph's capacity to impact cultural practices. Telegraphing to her husband in Simla from John Pender's (Chairman of the British Indian Submarine Company) soiree at 10.34 p.m. on 23 June 1870, Lady Mayo wrote:

> *In availing myself of the Submarine Cable I feel the obligation which science imposes upon the world. Not only does it serve political interests, but assists domestic relations in thus enabling me to send you almost instantaneously an affectionate greeting from your wife and family.*[50]

Given the time difference, the message found her husband still in bed and unable to reply until nearly two hours later. Presumably awoken with the message at around 5 a.m., he responded curtly: "*Thankful for your message. I send you affectionate greetings from your two boys, and all here.*"[51]

Wenzlhuemer highlighted several ways in which this exchange was illustrative of the technology's impact on culture in the nineteenth century and why studying such exchanges provides valuable insight into the history of the technology. Firstly, divided by vast geographic distances, the husband and wife were nevertheless capable of sharing time. Secondly, Lord Mayo's curtness indicated how telegraphy began to affect language, making it shorter and direct. And, thirdly, it also showed that telegraphy's impact on society was asymmetrical. The obvious asymmetry was in the language of Lady Mayo's message, indicative of a gender division, reflecting how "distinguished women were expected to express themselves in Victorian society."[52] That her message was well written and polite, despite the technology's linguistic shift, apparent in her husband's telegram,

[50] Roland Wenzlhuemer, "Transforming Global Spaces: The Telegraph, Communication and Globalization in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century" (University of Heidelberg, 2010), 19.
[51] Ibid.
[52] Ibid., 20.

shows that the technology's capacity to force users to write shorter messages was not universally received. Relying on infrastructural data alone, argued Wenzlhuemer, we would miss out on such cultural changes and relations between the telegraph and society, changes which have hitherto been lacking in the literature on empire. This dissertation picks up from Wenzlhuemer's mark to create the first ever in-depth study of one imperial culture's everyday use of telegraphy.

To recap, the history of imperial telegraphy dates back to the 1950s but became popular in the 1980s with Daniel R. Headrick's groundbreaking studies on technology and empire. His work has since triggered a lively discussion on the relationship between imperial telegraphy and power, one which has summoned a number of complex and well-researched opinions. In Headrick's view, the telegraph was a tool of power; the empire installed it, an unprecedented and by any contemporary standards revolutionary technology, which strengthened and transformed its power and capacity to control and conquer. A number of studies have challenged this simplistic and technologically determined view of the telegraph, claiming that the telegraph was actually incumbent in the process of decolonization in India, was a tool that brought forth panic to the empire, and that transnational commercial interests, not imperial ones, were the driving force behind telegraphic expansion.

These arguments, including Headrick's, are sustained by a common denominator. They unanimously focus on the technological and institutional aspects of the technology and have paid very little attention to the telegraph's cultural practices. For this reason, the discussion on telegraphy's relation to imperial power has remained limited, a limitation which has recently been redressed by Roland Wenzlhuemer's redirection of the field into the domains of culture and society. In order to understand how "powerful" the telegraph was, he claimed we must take into account how the technology was used in practice and how this use was tied to the domains of power. Analyzing telegraph wires and lines can only get us so far. We must also look to see how people used the technology. Paralleling Wenzlhuemer's recommended methodological approach to the topic, my study explores the British Empire's use of telegraphy, rather than its telegraph network alone. Unlike his study, however, this dissertation examines the culture of the British Empire's telegraphic

communication by examining in detail the telegrams that were used at the time in order to understand their practical and daily application. Only through such a focused study can we begin to fully understand the complex relationship between the telegraph and power in the British Empire.

SOURCES

Given the centrality of telegrams to this dissertation, locating and obtaining observable and legible source materials were of utmost importance. Since this dissertation studies the function, purpose, and information of telegrams used by Ceylon's nineteenth-century government, it is therefore concerned with colonial government source materials themselves. Satisfying this concern required an analysis of materials which are contained in the public archive holdings of Ceylon's colonial government from the period, which are currently located in London and Sri Lanka. The primary source materials necessary for this study include select documents from the British colonial records of Ceylon, found at the National Archives in Kew, London, and the Department of National Archives Sri Lanka in Colombo. They include records from the colonial government's correspondence during Britain's control of the colony, containing letters, memos, minutes, telegrams, and other published and non-published materials. The records for Ceylon's colonial government held at the National Archives in London consist of, among other sources, letters between the Governor and British government departments, particularly the Colonial Office, which was home to the Secretary of State for the Colonies. The Department of National Archives Sri Lanka in Colombo carries the records of the colonial government of Ceylon, including the Governor's correspondence and correspondence between him and the various colonial government departments and local government agents.[53]

[53] Sources:
In researching and writing the dissertation, I have surveyed a variety of British colonial records pertaining to Ceylon's colonial government administration and telegraph network. At the National Archives in London I examined record groups:

1. CO/54 "Colonial Office and Predecessors: Ceylon, Original Correspondence,"
2. CO/337 "Register of Correspondence,"
3. CO/56 "Ceylon: Acts," and
4. CO/59 "Blue Books of Statistics."

There was a significant difference between the state of materials in London and Colombo which naturally limited the scope of my analysis. At the former's institution of records, official correspondence was organized and bounded, and telegrams were found organized in betwixt the pages of letters and other correspondence materials. There, telegrams were treated precisely as letters. This juxtaposition of the mediums left in their original state allowed me to compare the flow, content, and timing of telegrams alongside letters, which as I will shortly explain, was essential to my methodology. This was not the case for the records found in Colombo. Telegrams in this location had been separated from their original correspondence, and were not recorded in the correspondence lists. Furthermore, many telegrams were missing and no telegrams after 1886 could be found. This meant that while I was able to construct a very focused and analytical interpretation of telegrams and their use in the channel of communication between the Governor and the Secretary of State, I was not able to make the same treatment of the sources related to Ceylon's local administration. In light of these limitations, my methodology took a two part case-study approach; I was able to analyze in depth the system of official correspondence, that is, the international communication, and unravel the function of telegrams in the island, despite having limited conditions, by contextualizing local communication in several locatable case studies.

At the Department of National Archives Sri Lanka, in Colombo, Sri Lanka, I examined, from record group 6, record numbers:

1. 2463 "1858 Inspector of Telegraph Reports,"
2. 2591 "1860 Inspector of Telegraph Reports,"
3. 2601 "Shipping Intelligence received from Electric Telegraph Office,"
4. 8127 "1886 Telegrams,"
5. 6545 "1876-1881 Telegrams (Local) Part 1,"
6. 6545 "1876-1881 Telegrams (Local) Part 2,"
7. 6869 "1882-83 Telegrams (Local)."

From record group 10, I analyzed record numbers:

1. 70 "Letters and Statements to the Telegraph Superintendent, 1858-1872,"
2. 166 "Correspondence regarding introduction of telegraph 1852-54," and
3. 208 "Telegrams from Galle to Colombo, 1858"

At the Sri Lanka National Archives, I also examined "Ceylon's Administration Reports," pertaining to the sections on the Telegraph and Postal Department for the period under consideration, beginning in 1867.

METHODS

As my first case study, I focused on the most available, official correspondence, including any and all official communication between Ceylon's Governor and the Secretary of State for the Colonies. Telegrams had become a regular component of official correspondence in Ceylon's government since 1860, especially during the decades following the completion of the Indo-European submarine cable in 1870. The first case study, set in chapter three, examines official correspondence telegrams, in relation to more traditional forms of official correspondence communication, such as letters and minute sheets, to assess their specific functions and the extent to which they benefited Ceylon's colonial government administration and its communication practices. The flow of telegrams between the colony and the center were regular and appeared consistently in tandem with letters. This case study thus enabled me to ascertain how telegrams operated at the highest levels of colonial government and to determine how they functioned in an everyday capacity in an everyday administrative context.

To make use of the telegrams located in Sri Lanka's archives, the second case study focused on local events where locatable telegrams were used. Purposefully, these local events were chosen to include the antithesis of the everydayness of official correspondence telegrams. Rather than being about everyday operations of the administration, these events were moments of crises, specifically in relation to three cases: the cholera epidemic of 1877-8, the Kotahena Riot of 1883, and the collapse of the Oriental Bank Corporation in 1884. These events, each in unique ways, posed significant challenges to British authority in the region and pressed the colonial government administration to respond with urgency and speed. This environment of emergency was implicitly the breeding ground for speedy reactions by the state and therefore presents the opportune moments to make use of telegraphic communication. By setting up the structure of the dissertation along the lines of these case studies, I was able to overcome the difficulty of having limited access to materials; I was able to include local materials; and I was able to establish a comparative structure through which I could judge the role of telegrams during everyday correspondence and crisis related activities. Doing so thus

provided me with a well-rounded approach to the topic that has enabled rich interpretative conclusions and scientific assessments.

The dissertation's treatment of its source materials in these case studies is an essential part of its methodology, as source materials themselves and their operation are its main focus and concern. Therefore, I have taken careful steps to ensure that the sources received the most in-depth attention as possible. The approach I have taken is my own design, and I call it "Inter-media analysis." I have developed it for this study specifically to meet the aims of the dissertation, which is to analyze the role of telegrams in Ceylon's colonial administration. Inter-media analysis, as its name implies, is the analysis of one media in relation to another media. Its purpose is to draw meaning about one media by comparing its content/language and materiality to that of another.[54] This methodology worked well for this dissertation which is specifically concerned with how telegrams functioned in the context of a colonial administration that had predominately communicated via other forms of media for decades. Studying telegrams naturally calls into question the efficacy of other media and other forms of communication technology. Moreover, Inter-media analysis enabled me to gauge the degree of impact that the telegrams had on individual processes and practices and on the system as a whole, and to determine how they fared in relation to other media. To practically make use of inter-media content analysis, I have drawn from sample sets of telegrams, letters, and their official copies from the colonial office records and related holdings pertaining to the period under consideration. I then analyzed their content, language, and materiality to ascertain how they differed and compared. I looked for similarities and differences in the

[54] Content is the subject, purpose, and tone of a message and language are the words, grammar, syntax, punctuation, and style in which the message appeared. In plain terms, content was what was said and language was how it was said; in essence, they combined to form the message itself, not taking into account the materials they appeared on or the conditions in which they were transmitted. The content and language of a message served two main purposes. Firstly, they served practical purposes: they were the format through which colonial government communicated; they were how information was shared and processed. Secondly, they served representational purposes: they constituted the formal aspects of colonial government; the signature, respectful words, and cordial headings and closings were all fundamental components of correspondence which were the discursive methods of representing the formality of Crown Government. Materiality is the physical substance on and by which the messages were transferred. For example, telegrams were electric-coding before the message was transferred onto thin square sheets of paper, written in ink. Letters were standardized, made of special parchment, and shipped via postal carrier. Materiality also included the mode by which the messages were transferred: horseback, telegraph wires, steamer, runners, etc. Materiality was thus the object of the message, or what McLuhan might have called the medium, the mode or means of the message.

subjects the two messages communicated, in the language through which they communicated, and in the function of the materiality on and by which they were communicated. My analysis was contextualized in the case studies above described.

In line with Wenzlhuemer's study, this dissertation also departs from the literature by taking a methodological shift. I study telegrams, rather than telegraphs, to ascertain how the technology was used and impacted on the culture of Ceylon's nineteenth century colonial administration. It is thus the first focused account of the telegraph to assess a purely qualitative analysis of telegrams. And, unlike other works, this dissertation focuses on the role of telegraphy in the context of colonial government administration. This allows for an in-depth analysis on the relationship between technology and power. Drawing from John W. Cell's study on the Colonial Office,[55] in which he argued that the great dividing point in nineteenth-century colonial administration was the telegraph—but did not go into great detail on the subject or show how the technology was incorporated into the machinery of government—a primary focus of this dissertation is the adaption and utility of telegrams in official correspondence at the Colonial Office.[56] The everyday administrative processes at the Colonial Office, much more significantly than military control and police forces, ruled the empire. It was the administrative decisions there that determined the operation of most British colonies, covering issues ranging from revenue collection to building permission, policy making, and the livelihoods of colonial agents, which were the keystone problems the British Empire faced on a day-to-day basis. Thus, by examining telegrams in colonial government administration at the Colonial Office the study probes the heart of British imperialism, and the technology's utility in it, in ways which have thus far not been possible by a sustained emphasis on the technology's function in military movements and other extraordinary, one-off, circumstances. Secondly, rather than concentrating on telegraph networks and their cables to discern results and assess imperial relationships, as nearly all previous scholarship including Choudhury and Winseck and Pike has done, this dissertation analyzes the content of telegraphic communication, known aptly as telegrams. By studying telegrams, rather than

[55] John W. Cell, *British Colonial Administration in the Mid-Nineteenth Century* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1970).
[56] Ibid., 43.

cables, it becomes possible to see how telegraphy really functioned in the empire, to understand what topics they were used to communicate, and, by relating them to other forms of communication such as letters, to draw out and compare its meaning to the empire. Thus, the study evaluates telegraphy from a *content* rather than *material* approach, that is to say it analyzes telegraphy as a means of communication by paying attention to the information that it uniquely contained and that which it shared.[57] It thus differs from McLuhan's preoccupation with the agency of the medium by concentrating, instead, on the words, language, ideas, and expressions which the medium contained. Rather than counting telegraph poles and wires to determine what the technology ought and ought not to have been used for, and by which faction of society; rather than seeing its expansion as an indication of its power or of any underlying insecurities; and rather than ascribing any normative principles to it, this study reads the messages which colonial officials themselves wrote and sets out to determine what these messages meant in their particular context.

This dissertation is, finally, the first in-depth scholarly account of Ceylon's telegraphic history. Previous attention to the island's telegraph system has included brief descriptions of its construction and costs.[58] And, cursory descriptions of the network have been included in a coffee-table style book by Sri Lanka Telecom.[59] By examining the telegraph in Ceylon, this study extends the discussion of imperial telegraphy to a part of South Asia which has until now been ignored. To date, the history of South Asian telegraphy has focused on only India and its network. An examination of Ceylon, which was the second British colony after India to receive the technology, provides an understanding of the technology outside the discourse which has been dominated by reference to only the subcontinent. In contrast to Choudhury's book, this study does not consider Ceylon in the context of the Indian Empire[60] but instead as a distinct colonial enterprise with a unique telegraphic history. This does not dismiss that much of the island's telegraphic

[57] Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, (New York: McGraw Hill, 1964).
[58] S.V. Balasingham, "The Administration of Sir Henry Ward: Governor of Ceylon 1855-60," *The Ceylon Historical Journal* 11 (1968): 43–44.
[59] Sri Lanka Telecom, *Making the Connection: SLT and 150 Years of Telecommunications in Sri Lanka* (Colombo: Sri Lanka Telecom Limited, 2007).
[60] Choudhury, *Telegraphic Imperialism*, 1.

history was shared between and born within India but that India and Ceylon were individual agents that related on mutually autonomous terms.

CHAPTER STRUCTURE

The body of the dissertation is divided into three chapters. Chapter one provides a broad historical overview of the invention of the telegraph in the west and in India, and its installation in Ceylon from 1857 to 1858. The chapter is unique in that it provides the first focused scholarly account of Ceylon's nineteenth-century telegraph network, detailing its construction, the rationale of its outlay, and its expansion. The chapter also seeks to understand the reason telegraphy was introduced into the colony. It suggests that the technology was installed for commercial purposes, and it delineates the colony's economic transition from mercantilism to capitalism from the 1830s to illustrate this point. Like the roads, railroads, and steamship routes incorporated into Ceylon's landscape in the wake of plantation agriculture, the telegraph too was designed to serve the needs of the merchants, shippers, and planters who contributed to the island's nineteenth-century economic development. Although the colonial government was involved in every aspect of the technology's introduction and operation, telegraphy was installed for the merchant and commercial communities, not for direct government application.

Half a decade after the technology's introduction, Ceylon's colonial government administration began to utilize telegraphic communication. Chapter two studies the role of telegrams in official correspondence, which I have divided into two sections. The first section analyzes and details the system of official correspondence between the Governor and the Secretary of State, as it functioned before the introduction of the telegraph. It examines the Colonial Office's system of communication and shows how letters functioned in its bureaucratic processes. Section two, then, determines how telegraphic communication was fitted and negotiated into this pre-existing system. It examines the benefits and limitations of official correspondence telegrams in the Colonial Office.

Chapter three examines three unique cases of crisis which the colonial government faced during the second half of the nineteenth century. The first case is the Cholera epidemic of 1877-78. The second case is the Kotahena Riot of 1883. The third case is the Oriental Bank Corporation's collapse in 1884. The chapter divides each case into two sections. The first section delineates and analyzes the history of the crisis, and the second section provides a quantitative and qualitative assessment of the role which telegrams played in the colonial government's handling of it. In the chapter's conclusion, I compare all three cases to determine how the particular nature of each crisis influenced how the colonial government administration used telegrams to mitigate it. The purpose of the chapter is to understand the extent to which telegraphy was useful, or even used, as a medium of crisis management in Ceylon during the second half of the nineteenth century.

CHAPTER TWO: TECHNO-SOCIAL ORIGINS AND STRUCTURAL OUTLAY OF CEYLON'S NINETEENTH-CENTURY TELEGRAPH NETWORK

INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides a broad historical overview of the introduction, expansion, and institutionalization of Ceylon's telegraph network during the course of the nineteenth century. It is divided into three parts. The first part examines the techno-scientific context within which Ceylon's telegraph network was born; it describes the history of electricity and telegraphy in Europe and the United States and the history of William O'Shaughnessy's introduction of electric telegraphy in India. The second part looks at the political, social, and economic transformations during the 1830s in Ceylon which fostered telegraphy's introduction in the island later in the century. It suggests that rather than being introduced to directly serve the colonial government as a tool of power, the telegraph was a product of commercial capitalism, a political and economic rationality that had replaced mercantilist policies following the Colebrooke-Cameron Reforms of 1833 and the rise of plantation agriculture in the same decade. The telegraph, in other words, was introduced to serve the merchant and commercial communities which had grown and expanded since this time, not to serve the long-arm of the state. The third part provides never-before published information regarding the structural foundations of Ceylon's nineteenth-century network. It details the network's material presence on the island, examining the network's construction in 1857 and completion in 1858, and assesses the labor and materials used therein. It then explores the rationale of the network and its institutionalization and organization. This chapter thus provides the historical context in which Ceylon's network was established, delineates the purpose of its erection, and illustrates its structural dimensions. All of this is important for the dissertation's subsequent chapters which explore how the colonial government went on to make use of the technology in its administration.

PART 1: TECHNO-SCIENTIFIC CONTEXT OF CEYLON'S TELEGRAPH NETWORK

The word telegraph derives from the Greek words τήλε (far) and γράφω (write).[61] In English, telegraph means "far-writer," and can encompass any type of device that conveys long-distance information. Technically, even smoke signals or drumming could be considered forms of telegraphy. However, when thinking about the telegraph today most people would consider isolated modern offices connected by lines and wires, with clerks bent over at their desks, diligently tapping away at strange contraptions emitting clicking noises and messenger boys speedily delivering the telegram. They would imagine the characteristics of the electric telegraph, a nineteenth-century technology, invented in the west—and as we shall see, in India as well.[62]

Overland and submarine wires, batteries and transmitters: these were the simple ingredients that when combined formed an electric telegraph system. What an electric telegraph is and how it functions are today questions which any elementary-age child could answer.[63] All that is required are batteries, an electric wire, and a light bulb. The bulb attached to the wire can be connected and disconnected from the battery to emit a blinking light, which can be translated into a coded language of the child's choosing. The technology of a nineteenth-century electric telegraph operated along similar basic principles, albeit more complexly and socially conditioned. For example, the standard Morse-code telegraph system, named after its progenitor, Samuel Morse, transmitted messages by sending electrical impulses over telegraph wires. Messages were formed by making and breaking electrical contact with a telegraph key, which resulted in an audible signal produced by a telegraph sounder, which was then interpreted and transcribed by a clerk. The message was then conveyed by human agency to the message's recipient. The

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[61] Peter J. Hugill, *Global Communications Since 1844: Geopolitics and Technology* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 25.

[62] There is evidence that a man was trying to invent his own sort of telegraph system in Ceylon but failed. It may have been a Dr. Jones Lamprey, born in 1825 in Dublin; he was a Principal Medical Officer of the Army Medical Department. SLNA 10/166 "Correspondence Regarding the Introduction of the Telegraph, 1852-1854." For a short biography, see: http://www.pelteret.co.za/pdf/numismatics/lamprey_j.pdf. More information is needed to confirm his association with the telegraph.

[63] For more information about how a telegraph works please visit and explore the Online Porthcurno Telegraph Museum: "Porthcurno Telegraph Museum," *Porthcurno Telegraph Museum*, June 23, 2011, http://www.porthcurno.org.uk/index.php.

order of the operation was reversed for outbound messages. Other models existed but they nevertheless operated along similar principles. There were two general types of telegraph lines used: overland and submarine. The former were typically uninsulated iron or copper wires strung along ceramic insulators usually on the cross arms of wooden posts, and the latter were insulated with Gutta Percha and other materials to prevent water damages.[64] The rather simplistic technology of electric telegraphy, however, became one of the most advanced methods of global communication of the nineteenth century,[65] unprecedented in its speed and dynamism. It has been named the Victorian Internet because of its impact on everyday global communications,[66] and its wires and connections have been likened to the nervous system of the human body, providing the electric pulse that characterizes modern society.[67] Indeed, from its germination in Europe and the United States with the discovery of electricity to its manifestation as an institutionalized system controlled by both private companies and governments across the North American, European, Asian, and African continents, the history of the electric telegraph provides a fascinating history. The following is a synopsis of the history of electric telegraphy and its scientific origins, underpinning its extension into Ceylon.

Origins of Electric Telegraphy

By the time Ceylon's telegraph was installed in 1858, the technology already had a long and complex history, the origins of which can be traced back to the optical semaphore telegraph system which had existed in various parts of the world for almost 150 years, since its invention by Claude Chappe at the end of the eighteenth century. The semaphore telegraph system conveyed information visually by using towers with pivoting shutters that could send complex messages using combinations of simple signs. If there was no darkness or fog, it could convey information quite quickly. A message between Paris and Strasbourg, for example, took about six minutes with good visibility. While the

[64] Hugill, *Global Communications Since 1844*, 28.
[65] Roland Wenzlhuemer, "The Dematerialization of Telecommunication: Communication Centres and Peripheries in Europe and the World, 1850-1920," *Journal of Global History* 2, no. 03 (2007): 350–1.
[66] Tom Standage, *The Victorian Internet: The Remarkable Story of the Telegraph and the Nineteenth Century's On-line Pioneers* (New York: Walker & Company, 1998).
[67] Iwan Rhys Morus, "'The Nervous System of Britain': Space, Time and the Electric Telegraph in the Victorian Age," *The British Journal for the History of Science* 33, no. 4 (2000): 455–475.

system was used primarily in French territories, and developed extensively under Napoleon, types of semaphore telegraphs were used in the United Kingdom with Murray's shutter system, in Sweden, Prussia, Russia, Canada, the United States, Ireland, Denmark, and India. The semaphore telegraph proved useful for military and commercial matters, such as Napoleon's Milano campaign. But unlike the electric telegraph which it inspired, the general public had little or no access to it.

Also, the history of the electric telegraph extends to the discoveries and inventions of electricity of the sixteenth century—when, for example, William Gilbert, an English physician, physicist, and natural philosopher, coined the term "electricity"[68] from the Greek "Ηλεκτρον," meaning "amber," to describe the force that two substances exert when rubbed together.[69] The history of electricity proceeded into the seventeenth century when many electricity-related discoveries and inventions were made, such as Otto Von Guericke's development of the early electrostatic generator,[70] the differentiation between negative and positive currents,[71] and the classification of electrical materials like insulators and conductors.[72] However, the majority of discoveries and innovations that led to the establishment of the electric telegraph began in the eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries.

One of the earliest recorded moments when electricity passed through a wire was in April 1746, when a chain of Carthusian monks joined in a large circle, each grabbing part of a 5,400-foot cable, received simultaneously an electric shock when Abbé Nollet sent an electric charge through a Leyden jar[73] attached to the cable.[74] It was not long before others took up the experiment in other contexts. In 1747, Sir William Watson, a member of the Royal Society, sent electricity through "9,000 feet of earth and water on the Thames and

[68] He wrote "electricus" from Latin, meaning "like amber."
[69] William Gilbert, *De Magnete* (Mineola: Dover Publications, 1991), 86, 97.
[70] Michael Brian Schiffer, *Draw the Lightning Down: Benjamin Franklin and Electrical Technology in the Age of Enlightenment*, 1st ed. (University of California Press, 2006), 18–19.
[71] Ibid., 30–31.
[72] Ibid., 28.
[73] A device that keeps static electricity between two electrodes.
[74] Jeffrey L. Kieve, *The Electric Telegraph: A Social and Economic History* (Newton Abbott: David & Charles, 1973), 13.

through 10,000 ft of wire suspended at Shooter's Hill."[75] Benjamin Franklin famously invented the lightning rod by attaching a key to a kite during a lightning storm in 1752; and, Du Lac experimented with transmitting electricity across Lake Geneva in 1749. All such experiments provided evidence that electricity could travel through specific materials and seemingly transcend time, a fundamental characteristic of the electric telegraph.

These inventions and experiments also fed continued research into the possibility of using the properties of electricity to transmit information. For example, an anonymous author, with the initials "C.M.," published a letter in *Scots Magazine* in February of 1753, indicating that he had invented a machine that could transmit alphabetic code along electric wires by using a separate wire for each letter of the alphabet.[76] In 1795, Francisco Salva read a paper before the Academy of Sciences at Barcelona regarding a multi-wire contraption that could potentially send messages by various combinations of signals from a limited number of wires.[77] Neither experiment was demonstrated publically. But their research indicated the possibility of using electricity to transmit information in such ways.

During the early part of the nineteenth century, scientists and technicians turned their attention toward the practical applications of electricity, away from electrochemical and toward electromechanical signaling, thus making an important step from science to technology. For instance, in 1800 Alessandro Volta created the Volta pile, also known as the electric battery, which was the first device able to render a steady electric current.[78] Michael Faraday invented the dynamo in 1831, which was a crude precursor to the modern generator.[79] These inventions made electricity viable for technology since they could provide instruments with a constant source of electric energy.

Between the publication of C.M.'s article and 1837, at least sixty experimental devices were invented by independent researchers attempting to communicate electrically over

[75] Ibid.
[76] Ibid., 14.
[77] R.M. Black, *The History of Electric Wires and Cables* (London: Institution Of Engineering And Technology, 1983), 1–2.
[78] Giuliano Pancaldi, *Volta: Science and Culture in the Age of Enlightenment* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 247.
[79] Peter Day, *The Philosopher's Tree: A Selection of Michael Faraday's Writings*, 1st ed. (London: Taylor & Francis, 1999), 118.

long distances.[80] However successful some of them were, such as Francis Ronald's telegraph in 1816,[81] they did not make it past experimental stages. Governments of both the United States and Britain were skeptical of technological innovations and did not financially support large-scale telegraphic inventions. Rather, they continued to rely on the conventionally established semaphores as telecommunication. For this reason, many inventors did not have the means of testing the practical application of their devices. The birth of the modern electric telegraph, although scientifically and technologically possible since the beginning of the century, did not materialize until the late 1830s.

On 9 April 1839, Charles Wheatstone and William Cooke— after much unsuccessful appeal to the Admiralty and English government—opened the first functioning, practically applied electric telegraph line on the Great Western Railway, over thirteen miles from Paddington Station to West Drayton. Then, on 24 May 1844, Samuel Morse, after experiencing much resistance to his experiments, opened the first telegraph line in the United States, between Washington and Baltimore and transmitted the famous first words: "What Hath God Wrought!" Both occasions marked the first successful application of the electric telegraph in the western world.[82] The five year separation between them is explained by the fact that Morse and Wheatstone and Cooke's technologies were developed independently and were distinct from each other in a number of ways; Samuel Morse's Morse code is one distinguishing feature that the other system did not have. Interestingly, Ceylon's telegraph network, created almost twenty years after them was not directly based on their models. Rather, it was made of the technology that William O'Shaughnessy had invented, experimented with, and applied in British India from 1834. Before turning to this part of the electric telegraph's history, it should also be known that by the time Ceylon's network was laid, the electric telegraphs in the United States and Britain became a success, the network of electric telegraphs expanded exponentially, and spread to other western countries. In the United States, the 40 miles of experimental line that Morse had established in 1844 between Baltimore and Washington, according to *Scientific American*, gave way to 1,234 miles of operable line in

[80] Standage, *The Victorian Internet*, 18–19.

[81] Tal P. Shaffner, *The Telegraph Manual: a Complete History and Description of the Semaphoric, Electric and Magnetic Telegraphs of Europe, Asia, Africa, and America, ... Six Hundred and Twenty-five Illustrations* (Berlin: Nabu Press, 2010).

[82] Standage, *The Victorian Internet*, 18–19.

October of 1846.[83] By 1852, there were over 23,000 miles of telegraph line and 10,000 more miles under construction across the continental United States.[84] Although Britain's telegraphic expansion had been more sober than in the United States, it was nevertheless substantial. By 1851, England was connected to continental Europe and by 1857 most of its large towns and railroads were linked telegraphically. European countries quickly followed suit: France, Prussia, Austria, Canada, Tuscany, Saxony, Bavaria, Spain, Russia, and Holland all established, to some extent, an electric telegraph network. In 1857, the first attempt had even been made to lay a submarine cable across the Atlantic Ocean, which would not be successfully in place until 1865.

But, as stated above, the electric telegraph is not an entirely western success story. Yes, the man who created it in India was Irish by birth but the technology he invented was specifically tailored to the Indian context and would later be tailored again in some ways to fit the particular context of Ceylon when it was introduced there. It was O'Shaughnessy's telegraph system, not Wheatstone and Cooke's or Morse's models that was adopted and diffused in Ceylon in 1858. When Ceylon's telegraph network was implemented, India's government, Indian businessmen and merchants, news agencies, and military personnel were making substantial use of the already expanding and flourishing electric telegraph system that William O'Shaughnessy had erected and maintained since 1851.

The History of the British Empire's Telegraph Network in India

While Morse's and Wheatstone/Cooke's telegraph systems spread throughout the United States and Europe, William O'Shaughnessy of the East India Company conceptualized, experimented with, and implemented his own adaptation of electric telegraphy, based on scientific ideas from Europe, in British India between 1834 and 1851. Because he was working outside Britain, O'Shaughnessy did not have the right to patent his device and its adoption was limited to the frontiers of British India.

[83] *Scientific American*, October 10, 1846, 17–24.
[84] Standage, *The Victorian Internet*, 58–59.

William O'Shaughnessy was born in Ireland in 1809. Although not as far a leap as Samuel Morse had made from mediocre painter to acclaimed electrician and inventor of modern telegraphy, O'Shaughnessy had become interested in telegraphy after graduating in surgery and chemistry at the University of Edinburgh's Medical School in 1829 and sailing to India in 1833 to begin a career as a surgeon of the East India Company.[85] His list of achievements is notable. In 1833 he became Professor of Chemistry at the Medical College in Calcutta and from 1837 he was a member, and later chairman, of the Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal. In 1834, O'Shaughnessy obtained a high-ranking position at the Calcutta Mint.[86] Prior to his involvement in the development of telegraphy, he had invented an advanced type of electric motor, the silver chloride battery, and "had acquitted himself of a controversy with Faraday, Daniell, and Wheatstone concerning lightning rods of his own design."[87] Because of his diverse range of talents and competence, coupled with the demonstrations of his experiments in Calcutta Salons and at select government gatherings, O'Shaughnessy gained administrative support and financial backing for his experiments from donors.[88] O'Shaughnessy began to experiment with telegraphy between 1834 and 1837 and in 1839 he made the first public demonstration of his research. He constructed and successfully deployed a 20-kilometer telegraph line, part of which went through the River Hugli near Calcutta, to transmit a message.

Although the experiment was a success, it did not signal the immediate espousal of the technology by the Indian government. Like in Britain and the United States, British Indian Officials were not initially interested in using telegraphic communication. Unlike in Britain and the United States, however, the technology was not presented to the government and refused on the grounds of unnecessary public expenditure; rather, in

[85] Both Morse and O'Shaughnessy followed a divergent path if compared to William Cooke, who had been introduced to telegraphy at Heidelberg University by Professor Münke's lectures that included the demonstration of a telegraphic device on the principles introduced by Baron Schilling in 1835; and Charles Wheatstone, who had already worked closely on topics of optics and electricity well before Cooke proposed the idea to him of commercial telegraphy.
[86] Deep Kanta Lahiri Choudhury, *Telegraphic Imperialism: Crisis and Panic in the Indian Empire, C.1830* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 16.
[87] Mel Gorman, "Sir William O'Shaughnessy, Lord Dalhousie, and the Establishment of the Telegraph System in India," *Technology and Culture* 12, no. 4 (1971): 582.
[88] Choudhury, *Telegraphic Imperialism*, 16.

India, O'Shaughnessy's telegraph was confined to audiences among the academic circles of the Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal and until Governor-General Lord Dalhousie (1847-1856) took office in Calcutta, neither military nor civil administrators regarded the electric telegraph as a viable means of long-distance communication, especially since [89] a semaphore system had already been in operation in Bengal and Bihar since the 1820s.[90]

Figure 1. Notice the semaphore tower on top of the central hill. A sketch, pen and ink on paper, titled, "View of the village of Silwar (Bihar) at the foot of the hill with signaling tower.13 February 1823." Source: British Library. http://www.bl.uk/onlinegallery/onlineex/apac/other/019wdz000002060u00028000.html

In 1850, the East India Company's Court of Directors agreed to establish an 82 mile experimental telegraph line from Calcutta to Kedgeree. The decision was approved

[89] Governor General Dalhousie's career was marked by territorial expansion and acquisitions. As well as being considered a lucid, strategic, detailed, and indefatigable administrator, Dalhousie was also a "modern" visionary who implemented a number of measures and technologies to secure and consolidate newly annexed territories in India. Among these included the railway, military educational reforms, and after some advocating and proposal from the inventor, the adoption of O'Shaughnessy's telegraph technology. It was during Dalhousie's modernization of India that the telegraph, along with many other nineteenth century technologies, was implemented.

[90] An India-wide semaphore system, seriously considered from 1820 to 1830 by the East India Company, never materialized.

enthusiastically by Dalhousie—who regarded it as a matter of British national interest and an imperial investment in the promotion of uniform management and authority—and duly executed by O'Shaughnessy. The experiment proved successful and Dalhousie approved O'Shaughnessy's plans to extend the network throughout India.

The first telegraph line in India went from Alipore to Diamond Harbour, three miles south of Calcutta, and was operable by 8 March 1851. The line was opened to the public on 5 December 1851 and the semaphore telegraphs were removed. Large-scale construction of India's telegraph network began on 1 November 1853[91] and was completed on the 31st of December 1854 and opened to the public on 1 February 1855.[92] Like the main railway lines constructed later, the telegraph replicated established patterns of Mughal information routes, which had since become sites of British administration and military cantonments. The trunk line of the network followed the arterial road from Dhaka to Peshawar. There was a branch line that connected the previous Mughal residence of Agra with Bombay which, being close to Surat, was once one of the most important port cities of the Mughal Empire. From Bombay, a line crossed the peninsula towards Madras and Chennai. From a bird's-eye-view, the network was "Z" shaped and connected all major British settlements and places of colonial authority. The original network consisted of 3,000 miles of telegraph line. Both English and Indian mercantile communities made extensive use of the network and within the first year of the technology's operation, Indians accounted for one-third of all messages sent.[93]

O'Shaughnessy's telegraph system differed from those in the United States, Britain, and Europe in a number of substantial ways. Firstly, the signaling instrument that was used, which by 1853 had matured into the Single Needle Horizontal telegraph, replaced the English Vertical needle and the American Dotter.[94] Because of the rapid polarization of the magnetic needle, especially during monsoons, western-style instruments were not

[91] Choudhury, "Beyond the Reach of Monkeys and Men'? O'Shaughnessy and the Telegraph in India C. 1836-56," *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 37, no. 3 (2000): 348.
[92] Gorman, "Sir William O'Shaughnessy, Lord Dalhousie, and the Establishment of the Telegraph System in India," 594.
[93] Ibid., 597.
[94] In 1857, Morse's signaling instrument replaced O'Shaughnessy's.

sufficient for the Indian environment.[95] Secondly, O'Shaughnessy used materials from India. Bamboo, a flexible and cheaper alternative to timber posts, was used to construct the telegraph poles. Iron rods transported by Indian elephants and produced by local forgers were used instead of wires since they were not as susceptible to damage from "gusts of wind or ordinary mechanical violence," which was thought to prevail in the subcontinent. Thirdly, O'Shaughnessy employed his own brand of platinum and zinc plated batteries in his system. Finally, local Indians, not Europeans, produced the electric devices used in telegraphy—for example, Messrs. Grindle and Crible in Calcutta—and constituted the bulk of labor used in erecting the network.[96] O'Shaughnessy's telegraph system was, therefore, not a product of west-to-east technological expansion. Instead, it was a device that was created within and applied to the particular context of India by Indian materials and peoples.[97]

By the end of Dalhousie's administration in 1856, O'Shaughnessy had become the superintendent of the Indian Telegraph Department, which was a unique government department for operating, maintaining, and managing India's telegraphs. Also, the basic structure of the Indian telegraph system had been laid, over 4,000 miles of telegraph were in operation, and the entire line from Sagar Island, off the coast of Calcutta, to the military cantonments—located in northern and central India—and Peshawar was complete.[98] And the network expanded throughout the subcontinent and the century. In 1856, the Indian government set its sights on connecting its Madras lines to Galle in Ceylon, one of the most significant port cities in the Indian Ocean region and a crucial port of entry for imperial information flows. As a result, discussions ensued between India's and Ceylon's governments to establish telegraphy in Ceylon and connect it to India. However, the Indian government was met with the fact that Ceylon's government had its own interests in telegraphy that stemmed from the substantial transformations of

[95] Choudhury quotes: Home Department, Public Proceedings, no. 4, 11 April 1850, no. 429. From Sir Henry Elliot, Secretary, Government of India, with enclosures including O'Shaughnessy's "Abstract account of the construction of the experimental line from Calcutta to Kedgeree," and a Minute by the Governor General. NAI Choudhury, *Telegraphic Imperialism*, 19.
[96] Ibid., 18–20.
[97] Choudhury, "Beyond the Reach of Monkeys and Men'? O'Shaughnessy and the Telegraph in India C. 1836-56," 339–340.
[98] Choudhury, *Telegraphic Imperialism*, 22.

the island's economy and political culture during the course of the first half of the century. The following subchapter explores this issue in detail.

PART 2: SOCIAL AND POLITICAL FOUNDATIONS OF CEYLON'S NINETEENTH-CENTURY TELEGRAPH NETWORK

Ceylon's telegraph network was a product of the island's political and economic transformations that occurred during the second quarter of the nineteenth century. Before the 1830s, Ceylon's economy and political agenda were fundamentally state-focused and the colonial government did not invest in trade and industry to benefit the island's population. Then, a series of significant events in Europe and within the colony influenced the colony's transition to capitalism. It was with the rise of capitalism from the mid to late 1830s that Ceylon's government began to invest in infrastructure to facilitate and support long-term capital growth. From Governor Edward Barnes' road construction projects in the 1830s to Governor Henry Ward's £1 million expenditure during his five-year tenure (1855-1860) on roads and bridges, his spending on railroads, steamships, and telegraphs, and successive governors' comparable investments—Ceylon's government from the 1830s became actively involved in transforming the colony's population into a vanguard community of merchants and planters. Technologies like the telegraph, roads, the railway, bridges, etc. were among the main ingredients in the process of commercialization and capital transformation. This subsection explores these transformations and their influence on the birth of Ceylon's telegraph network in 1858.

Economic History of Nineteenth-Century Ceylon

Until the 1830s, Ceylon's economy was ruled under the mercantilist policies continued from Dutch practices.[99] After acquiring the Maritime Provinces from the Dutch in 1796,

[99] According to Laura Lahaye, Adam Smith coined the term "mercantile system" to describe the system of political economy that sought to enrich the country by restraining imports and encouraging exports. In: Laura LaHaye, "Mercantilism," *The Concise Encyclopedia of Economics* (Library of Economics and Liberty, 2008), <http://www.econlib.org/library/Enc/Mercantilism.html>.

the British continued the mercantilist economic policies which the Dutch had taken from the Portuguese during the first decades of their rule. Monopolies in cinnamon and salt were retained, for example. The principal object of the British during this early period was the extraction of tribute for the security and enhancement of the state and crown by taking service, revenue, and products for trade through existing tenurial relations.[100] Labor was commonly derived from the *rajakariya* system which was, in essence, state enforced labor that had been regularly exercised by the Portuguese and the Dutch. The regulatory mechanisms of the state were strongly state-centered as well. The bureaucracy of the state provided the daily, overall "efficient" administration; and, troops, police, prisons, and law courts gave the necessary backing of force to ensure "law and order."[101]

Under mercantilism, the colonial government encouraged trade but "discouraged investment and the development of agricultural enterprise."[102] Very few investments were made that were not concerned with revenue extraction. There was no incentive to transform the "native social order and to invest in infrastructure which would not benefit the state's extractive policies."[103] One of the only notable investments made during the 1820s was the construction of Kandy Road, built after the fall of the Kandyan Kingdom in 1815. However, the road was constructed for military purposes, government commercial projects, the transport of enforced labor, and to symbolize the Kingdom's defeat. It was not intended to stimulate local commerce.[104]

The political and economic changes in Britain during the first few decades of the nineteenth century led to the gradual abandonment of mercantilism in Ceylon. With the rise of the British middle classes during the beginning of the nineteenth century—and

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[100] Nira Wickramasinghe, *Sri Lanka in the Modern Age: A History of Contested Identities* (Sri Lanka: Vijitha Yapa Publications, 2006), 33.
[101] Kumari Jayawardena, *Nobodies to Somebodies: The Rise of the Colonial Bourgeoisie in Sri Lanka* (Colombo: Social Scientists' Association, 2000), 72–73.
[102] Asoka Bandarage, *Colonialism in Sri Lanka: The Political Economy of the Kandyan Highlands, 1833-1886* (Pannipitiya: Stamford Lake, 2005), 54.
[103] James S. Duncan, *In the Shadows of the Tropics: Climate, Race, and Biopower in Nineteenth-Century Ceylon* (London: Ashgate, 2007), 27.
[104] According to Indrani Munasinghe, "During the first three decades of the nineteenth century, political and military considerations were uppermost factors that led to construction of roads in Sri Lanka," in: Indrani Munasinghe, *The Colonial Economy on Track: Roads and Railways in Sri Lanka, 1800-1905* (Colombo: Social Scientist Associaton, 2002), 1.

their affinity for free trade, utilitarianism, and evangelicalism—mercantilism became increasingly challenged both in Britain and in the colonies. By the 1830s, the industrial revolution was well underway in Britain and with the growth of capitalism there was a rise in new economic and political ideologies and campaigns against feudalism and slavery.[105] A new form of political thought had emerged, influenced by the reformist political ideology articulated by Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill, which "promised to change fundamentally Britain's relationship to its colonies."[106] They sought to abolish mercantilist and feudal restraints, including hereditary privileges, and demanded equality before the law and equal opportunity for the Bourgeoisie, with freedom of trade and enterprise, and rights of political representation.[107] In the colonial context, these had very specific meanings. According to Kumari Jayawardena, "these concepts theoretically favoured measures conducive to capitalist expansion: the abolition of pre-capitalist land tenures, monopolies, privileges based on caste and birth, vexatious laws and taxes which were counterproductive and in restraint of trade, and an end to various forms of discrimination and the creation of new political and administrative institutions."[108] In Ceylon, the most important aspect of these reforms was the opening up of the island to investment capital for plantation agriculture.[109]

Ideologically, the shift from mercantilism could not have happened without the Colebrooke-Cameron Reforms of 1833.[110] The Reforms affected multiple interfaces of colonial government, reducing the Governor's arbitrary powers and creating an Executive Council composed of key officials.[111] Another innovation was a Legislative Council of the "principal officers of government" and "respectable inhabitants, European or native."[112] The island was divided into separate administrative regions, each placed under the authority of its own regional office. The cinnamon monopoly and the *rajakariya* system

[105] Jayawardena, *Nobodies to Somebodies*, 70.
[106] Nira Wickramasinghe, *Sri Lanka in the Modern Age*, 29.
[107] Jayawardena, *Nobodies to Somebodies*, 70.
[108] Ibid.
[109] Duncan, *In the Shadows of the Tropics: Climate, Race, and Biopower in Nineteenth-Century Ceylon*, 29.
[110] Vijaya. Samaraweera, "The Colebrooke-Cameron Reforms," *University of Ceylon, History of Ceylon* 3 (1973): 77–88; Bandarage, *Colonialism in Sri Lanka*, 59.
[111] Jayawardena, *Nobodies to Somebodies*, 71.
[112] Ibid.

were, at least in theory, abandoned.[113] They were believed to slow the growth of private enterprise, impede the creation of a land market, and interfere with the free movement of labor.[114] The *accommedessan*, which was the granting of land for cultivation rather than for its outright sale, was also removed.[115] Agency Houses were opened throughout the island to promote and provide loans to investors. Finally, Ceylon was opened to foreign investment capital for plantation agriculture. A major effect of the reforms was to transfer the colonial state's direct engagement in the economy to the creation of capitalist enterprise;[116] but the colonial state continued to receive revenue indirectly by introducing a variety of taxes on imports and exports.[117] Mercantilism, in other words, was ended by the Reforms and in its place the colonial government opened its markets to speculators, traders, and agricultural capitalists. Consequently, the state began to invest in infrastructure and communication technologies to stimulate capital growth.

As James Duncan has noted,[118] the Reforms have historically been understood as being part of a "teleological narrative of modernization." According to Asoka Bandarage, for example, it was the "Colebrooke-Cameron Reforms of 1833 that provided the politico-juridical framework for the 'modernization', specifically the capitalist development of Ceylon, and provided a definite watershed in the history of the island."[119] G.C. Mendis, too, the first professional modern Sri Lankan historian, described the Reforms as a crucial moment in "an approved journey of progress," linking modernity and the nation state.[120] In contrast, historian David Scott has reconsidered the Colebrooke-Cameron Reforms, not in terms of "modernization," but rather as a kind of paradigmatic shift that resulted in the transformation of one type of political rationality—mercantilism—for another—governmentality—by which not just the "rules of the political game but *the political game itself* changed."

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[113] The Road Ordinance of 1848, described below, was a form of forced labor.
[114] Wickramasinghe, *Sri Lanka in the Modern Age*, 33.
[115] Ibid.
[116] Duncan, *In the Shadows of the Tropics: Climate, Race, and Biopower in Nineteenth-Century Ceylon*, 30.
[117] K.M. de Silva, *A History of Sri Lanka* (New York: Penguin Books, 2005), 353.
[118] Duncan, *In the Shadows of the Tropics: Climate, Race, and Biopower in Nineteenth-Century Ceylon*, 29.
[119] Bandarage, *Colonialism in Sri Lanka*, 59.
[120] Taken from Scott's remarks on Mendis. See, G.C. Mendis, *The Colebrooke-Cameron Papers: Documents on British Colonial Policy in Ceylon 1796-1833*, vol. 1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1956); David Scott, "Colonial Governmentality," *Social Text*, no. 43 (October 1, 1995): 206.

Drawing heavily from Michel Foucault's concept of governmentality, which seeks to build an understanding of the multiple "techniques and strategies by which a society is rendered governable,"[121] David Scott suggests that under mercantilism, the British were largely concerned with the extraction of wealth and as long as the local peoples cooperated there was no reason for British administrators to concern themselves with the lives of the colonized.[122] The Reforms, Scott argued, were designed to alter the colonial project so that society itself became the point and focus of state power. It was to be a system that encouraged free will, free trade, and active societal-wide participation; "a governmental redefinition and reordering of the colonial world was…the design of institutions so that, following their own self-interest, natives would do what they ought."[123] From this perspective, during the 1830s and under the influence of the Colebrooke-Cameron Reforms there was a fundamental reconfiguring of the colonial state, a transition from one to another entirely distinct political rationality. It would be a leap of faith, however, to believe that the Reforms initiated the changes exactly as Scott proposed. Vestiges of the old mercantile system like *rajakariya* remained, in the guise of the Road Ordinance of 1848 and in policies which favored cheaper south Indian labor, rather than Ceylonese labor, at almost slave-like conditions. And, the Governor retained a significant amount of autonomy. David Scott is correct to assume though that change, however substantial, was underway in the 1830s. But, while the Reforms laid the discursive political foundation for the shift from mercantilism to capitalism, the emergence and acceleration of commercial capitalism in the form of plantation agriculture, primarily that of coffee production from the late 1830s, was the real impetus behind the expansion of commercial capitalism, thus establishing the groundwork for telegraphy in British Ceylon.

The Rise of the Plantation System and its Social Effects

Central to the state's shift to capitalism was the rise of the plantation system during the 1830s. While a variety of cash crops such as indigo, cotton, coffee, and sugar

[121] Scott, "Colonial Governmentality"; Simon Gunn, "From Hegemony to Governmentality: Changing Conceptions of Power in Social History," *Journal of Social History* 39, no. 3 (Spring 2006): 705–720.
[122] Scott, "Colonial Governmentality," 207.
[123] Ibid., 214.

characterized European plantation agriculture from the early 1820s to the 1840s, it was coffee, gaining real ascendancy in the 1840s,[124] that became the most lucrative of all crops grown in Ceylon and drove the island's economy for a half century.[125] The choice to grow and produce coffee in Ceylon was influenced by a number of factors. The interior of the island had a long history of peasant coffee production dating back to Portuguese and continuing with Dutch control. Following the fall of the Kandyan Kingdom, the British began to revive the practice, and the roads which had been constructed in the interior under Barnes stimulated capital investment. The significant rise in coffee consumption in Britain during the nineteenth century, the decline in coffee production in the West Indies after the abolition of slavery, and the removal of import tax on Ceylonese coffee in Britain spurned the coffee industry in Ceylon.[126] Also, the colonial government encouraged speculators by organizing land at low prices. Between 1833 and 1843, 258,000 acres of land were sold by the government at 5 schillings per acre. Within just a decade of the removal of mercantilism and the rise of commercial capitalism, the cultivation and exportation of coffee had become the island's most lucrative industry and the *raison d'être* of the British Crown Colony.[127] From 1850 onwards, the sale of coffee more than trebled. The price on the London market for coffee from Ceylon was 278,000 cwt[128] in 1850 and 1,054,000 cwt in 1870.[129] This continued until the industry's collapse in the 1880s when the cultivation of tea replaced the production coffee. The coffee leaf rust disease *Hemileia vastatrix* devastated coffee crops and made growing it nearly impossible. Before tea replaced coffee, however, a number of substantial societal-wide transformations occurred.

One of the most substantial changes wrought by the coffee plantations was the rising significance of foreign investment and immigrant labor. The plantations were owned mostly by foreigners from Europe and required a seasonal labor force that was comprised primarily of south Indian Tamils. There was also an annual need for other closely associated jobs such as "weeding, pruning, fertilizing, staking, digging drains, planting

[124] Bandarage, *Colonialism in Sri Lanka*, 68.
[125] Ibid.
[126] Jayawardena, *Nobodies to Somebodies*, 74.
[127] Duncan, *In the Shadows of the Tropics: Climate, Race, and Biopower in Nineteenth-Century Ceylon*, 34.
[128] Cwt means Centrum Weight, in Imperial Standard it is defined as 112 lbs, which is equal to 50.802345 kg.
[129] Jayawardena, *Nobodies to Somebodies*, 75.

grass, transporting rice, and other foodstuffs, along with duties necessary for the maintenance of the residential population."[130] Each year thousands of Indian laborers traveled back and forth to Ceylon to work on the plantations or in related jobs; many of them settled permanently. Thus, the plantations also affected significant transformations among the Ceylonese population.

The plantation system offered Ceylonese merchant capitalists a range of new possibilities toward capital accumulation by creating livelihoods servicing the plantation communities. According to Kumari Jayawardena in a recent study on the topic, "Forests had to be cleared for plantations and supplies were brought in by carts. Timber and building materials were acquired to build houses for planters and 'line rooms' for workers."[131] The plantations themselves stimulated the operation of satellite businesses and industries. Demands for barrels of coffee and furniture for houses and offices arose, and there was an increasing demand for food and drink.[132] Other satellite businesses operated by the Ceylonese included boat building and coastal transportation, internal trade by carts, construction work, repair shops, land accumulation, and the farming of paddy, fish, and toll rents.[133] The most lucrative of local capital ventures was the arrack trade, the details of which Jayawardena delves into greatly and credits as the source of capital accumulation principally responsible for the emergence of the modern bourgeoisie in Ceylon. The business of arrack alcohol was closely associated with life on the plantations, as the arrack was taken by workers to help them cope with and relieve the hardships they experienced.[134] There was a direct correlation between arrack and coffee sales. The busiest plantations were also the places which enjoyed the most alcohol consumption. Combined, these businesses and commercial activities reshaped Ceylon's economy and reflected the diversified areas of commerce and business created and affected by the emergence of the plantation system.

[130] Ibid., 34.
[131] Ibid., 75.
[132] Ibid.
[133] Ibid., 13–36.
[134] I can speculate that loneliness and physical pain were but a few of these experiences.

A salient feature of Ceylon's plantation-based economy was the continual movement of capital, goods, and labor between the island's interior and the coast. Prior to the plantation system, capital was concentrated in government monopolies primarily along the coastal regions of the island. The plantation system, located in the central highlands, shifted the geographic focus of the colonial government toward the interior but a close relationship between the interior and the coastal areas was maintained. The production of coffee required the continual circulation of labor from the island's ports to the central highlands. Since coffee was harvested in the interior, auctioned in and distributed worldwide from ports such as Colombo and Galle, there was a regular flow of raw and refined coffee moving between the highlands and the coastal areas. More detailed connections existed too. If a plantation machine broke in the interior, for instance, it was very likely that an engineer would have to commute from Colombo or a neighboring coastal town to fix it. The attendant Ceylonese industries operated within the interior and along the coast servicing all sectors of commercial life. The plantation system thus transformed the island's geography into a nexus of interconnected commercial activities and businesses. Labor had to travel, goods had to circulate, and market information had to be shared. A communication network to support these movements and connections was a necessary component of Ceylon's transition to commercial capitalism. Roads were the primary agents of the island's communication channels and it was in the wake of their expansion that other communication systems, like the telegraph, were installed.

Communication Infrastructure and the Colonial State

Under the aegis of mercantilism, L.A. Wickremeratne writes, "military exigencies rather than economic considerations were the determining factors in the construction of roads by the colonial government." [135] Although much attention was placed on road development in the annexed territories of the Kandyan Kingdom, roads built for nonmilitary means were few: "The roads from Colombo to Galle, Matara and thence to Batticaloa, as well as the roads from Mannar to Colombo, 'the carriage roads' to which writers like Percival make reference—were in truth nothing more than 'mere clearings

[135] L.A. Wickremeratne, "The Development of Transportation In Ceylon, C. 1800-1947," *UCHC* III (1973): 303.

through forests…practicable for rough cart traffic during the dry season but impassible during the rains.'"[136] The success of the coffee plantations, however, signaled the development of road networks into the plantation areas and commercial sectors.

Road construction commenced from the 1830s, under Governor Barnes. But the island experienced its most extensive road construction after the depression of 1847-48, during Governor General Henry Ward's tenure from 1855 to 1860. One significant reason for this was the introduction of the Road Ordinance of 1848, which introduced a form of *rajakariya* requiring six days free labor on roads or payment of a cash equivalent.[137] Also, road construction had begun in response to the agitations made by the Planter's Association of Ceylon since their formation in 1854,[138] based on plans as early as 1845 by the Chamber of Commerce[139] for a railway between Colombo and Kandy, bridges, and an arterial road system facilitating commercial transportation.[140] Finally, Governor Ward had taken advantage of increasing revenue accumulated by his predecessor in order to construct his projects. According to K.M. de Silva, Governor Ward "adopted energetic measures for the extension of the existing roads and the construction of new roads for the specific purpose of serving the plantations. Between 1855 and 1860 he spent over £1 million on the construction of roads and bridges. On his departure from the island he left 4,800 km of roads in good repair and all the major roads were adequately bridged."[141] The road systems he installed brought noticeable benefits to the planters. In his annual address to the Legislative Council on 28 July 1858, Ward stated that "for every new Road gives fresh opportunities of turning Land to profitable account, and the increase of £9,152 in the toll rents of the year, shows how fully this advantage is appreciated."[142] But it was not only roads that concerned Governor Ward.

In addition to roads and bridges, Governor Ward also introduced plans for the railway, a new technology at the time; he instigated an Irrigation Act to revive the once flourishing

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[136] Ibid., 303–05.
[137] Nira Wickramasinghe, *Sri Lanka in the Modern Age*, 35.
[138] The Planter's Association of Ceylon was established at a public meeting held at Kandy on 17 February 1854 "for the furtherance of the agricultural interests of the colony."
[139] de Silva, *A History of Sri Lanka*, 362.
[140] *Jubilee of the Planters' Association of Ceylon: 1854-1904; Ill. Souvenir of the "Times of Capper".* (Capper, 1904), 2.
[141] de Silva, *A History of Sri Lanka*, 362.
[142] Ceylon Legislative Council, "Address of His Excellency Sir Henry George Ward, K.G.C.M.G. on Opening the Session of the Legislative Council," *Sessional Papers* (1858): 243.

northern dry-lands of the island; he implemented a steam communications route round the island's coast—steam ships were also a new modern technology; he rendered a Penny Postage Ordinance in the model of England's; and he installed the Electric Telegraph which had only four years before made headway in India—all of which, according to him in a speech in 1857, "are all inchoate benefits that require time to bring them to maturity." Like the roads, they were long-term investments that would gradually foster the "benefits" of capital growth and commercial expansion.

Like Lord Dalhousie in India, Governor Ward introduced communication infrastructure on the basis that long-term commercial "progress" could be achieved through utilitarian means such as technological development; that exogenous factors such as technology could extend the frontiers of the economy in a positive direction. The roads would improve the fluidity of goods and people in and around the coastal and commercial centers; railroads would speed up the process; and the telegraph would provide the merchant communities with a device by which they could share at "lightning speed" shipping and freight information without the hassle of the post or message runners. Trade would therefore benefit from the technologies and the colony itself would benefit from the additional tax revenue. Commercial capitalism could expand at the same rate as the expansion of plantation agriculture.

In many of Governor Ward's speeches, it is clear that he reveled in the prospect of technological development and the prosperity he believed it would bring to the colony. For example, in a speech before 132 guests attending his 1857 New Year's Eve Ball at the Kandyan Pavilion, Governor Ward announced publically his enthusiasm for his legislation:

> I know no instance in Colonial Legislation—certainly, none in the Legislation of Ceylon—in which so many important measures have been compressed into a single Session. The Railway, the Electric Telegraph, a monthly Steamer running round the coast, Penny Postage, liberal and well considered Votes for Roads, Bridges, Hospitals, Public Buildings, and Irrigation Works, upon which the restoration of native Industry depends…all these are measures, any one of which must have exercised a considerable influence upon the fortune of a rising

> community, but which, taken together, and vigorously carried out, in a young and healthy colony like this; full of energy and life, where all the great difficulties have been surmounted, and where the capital invested is already yielding a rich return, cannot fail to produce changes, the effects of which it is difficult to overrate.[143]

It was in the spirit of Ward's enthusiasm for technological development that the telegraph network was constructed, that roads were expanded, and that so many of the modern technologies which still remain in Sri Lanka today were first tried and implemented. I turn now to highlight the evidence that directly connects the introduction of telegraphy to commercial capitalism.

The Connection between Telegraphy and Commerce

The relationship between the telegraph's introduction and commercial capitalism is somewhat perplexed. Until recently, with Winseck/Pike's publication *Communication and Empire,*[144] many historians postulated that the British Empire's telegraph network was introduced for the purpose of serving government as a tool of power; that it was installed to centralize the empire and intended as a technology of imperial control over the colonial governors.[145] However fitting these theories may be in other contexts, which this dissertation does not intend to prove or disprove, the case of Ceylon's telegraph network presents itself entirely differently. Evidence found at the National Archives in London and the archives in Sri Lanka strongly suggests that Ceylon's telegraph network was introduced for the purpose of serving commerce. Yes, the colonial government benefited from tariff charges. Yes, the government used telegraphy in governmental correspondence as subsequent chapters will analyze. But, the network was originally installed to serve commercial capitalism; this is important to recognize because it in turn impacted the government's ability to use it in its subsequent adaptation of the technology.

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[143] S.V. Balasingham, "The Administration of Sir Henry Ward: Governor of Ceylon 1855-60," *The Ceylon Historical Journal* 11 (1968): 43–44.
6 January 1857, *Ceylon Times.*
[144] Dwayne R. Winseck and Robert M. Pike, *Communication and Empire: Media, Markets, and Globalization, 1860–1930* (Durham: Duke University Press Books, 2007).
[145] For a discussion on this problem, refer to the section titled "Literature Review" in the dissertation's introductory chapter.

There is sufficient evidence to support this claim. Firstly, according to S.V. Balasingham, the first and only historian to have written at any length—a few pages—on the case of Ceylon's telegraph network, it was the merchant community that, in 1846, first brought the government's attention to the possibility of establishing telegraphy between Galle and Colombo.[146, 147] Despite the merchant community's request, however, the telegraph was not introduced during the 1840s. The ensuing economic crisis of the following years made the prospect of government expenditure on the technology unrealistic.

Nevertheless, agitation for the construction of the telegraph commenced "again after 1853 and increased in volume when the telegraph was installed in India…"[148] Again, agitation came from the merchant community. According to Balasingham, there were four reasons the technology appealed to the merchant community. Firstly, they desired the telegraph for trade with India, since Ceylon was South India's grain market and India was the site of the island's currency exchange.[149] Secondly, they believed the telegraph would become a useful tool for port calls and for the spread of market news and prices: "All ships from India called at Galle and wasted time," Balasingham wrote, "visiting all ports for advices regarding their freights, information regarding which was given to them by ordinary mail. This led to extra port charges, wear and tear and additional interest on the value of the cargoes detained."[150] These expenses would be reduced, the community suggested, if the telegraph were installed. Thirdly, "Ceylon occupied a very strategic position in the Indian Ocean and lay equidistant between the other parts of the Empire in the Far East and the Cape."[151] It would therefore benefit global trade communications. Finally, he stated that "the telegraph had proved to be of great value during the Crimean

[146] S.V. Balasingham, "The Administration of Sir Henry Ward: Governor of Ceylon 1855-60," *The Ceylon Historical Journal* 11 (1968): 43–44.
[147] Kieve, *The Electric Telegraph*, 40. Jeffrey Kieve's research challenges the date and wrote that the papers of William F. Cooke at the Institute of Electrical Engineers suggest that the Governor of Ceylon had written a letter in 1845 requesting a telegraph between Galle and Colombo.
[148] Balasingham, "The Administration of Sir Henry Ward," 43.
[149] Ibid., 44.
[150] Ibid.
[151] Ibid.

War and hence would be extremely useful for the quick and cheap transmission of news and market prices."[152]

Missing from his examination, however, is evidence to substantiate his writings. In fact, the *Ceylon Times* on 6 June 1855 was the only material he used to examine what the merchants thought of the telegraph. Furthermore, his research does not directly tackle the relationship between the technology and government. For, did the colonial government also regard the technology as something which could benefit commerce? Did the colonial government have any other interests in obtaining the device, and if so, what were they? In what follows I shed light on how the colonial government thought about telegraphy and its relationship with commerce.

The "Correspondence Regarding the Introduction of the Telegraph, 1852-1854," [153] located at the Sri Lankan National Archives, is a collection of letters associated with the telegraph's introduction during the times indicated in the title. Evidence therein attests that the merchant community did indeed desire the telegraph for its utility in commerce and that it had asked the government to install it. It also provides evidence that Ceylon's government understood the technology similarly. That the government understood the telegraph as a technology for commerce is evident, first, in the fact that the Governor had appointed two government bodies to determine the efficacy and value of the technology to the colony. According to the records, on 18 October 1852, the Governor requested that Dr. Lamprey, a surgeon in Ceylon and member and Joint Secretary (1852 and 1853-54) of the Royal Asiatic Society of Ceylon; Major Cole, Commissioner of Roads; and Captain James Stuart, Master Attendant, "establish themselves as a committee"[154] to look into the feasibility of establishing an electric telegraph between Colombo and Point de Galle, and assess the probable construction expenses.[155] On 1 December of the same year, the Governor appointed another committee, consisting of W.A. Simms, Surveyor General, F. Saunders, Collector of Customs for the Western Province, and Mr. Armitage and Mr.

[152] Ibid.
[153] SLNA 10/166 "Correspondence Regarding the Introduction of the Telegraph, 1852-1854"
[154] Ibid., 18 October 1852
[155] Ibid., 20 October 1852, "Treasury proceedings."

Smith, unofficial members.[156] It was their opinions that ultimately persuaded the government to construct the network in 1857.

The opinions they submitted in their reports varied, but nonetheless, they each spoke highly of the prospect of the electric telegraph. Some wrote that the telegraph would be more useful if connected to Kandy as well as to Galle; two of them proposed that the government would not benefit directly from the technology "except in returns of revenue."[157] They all agreed, however, that the technology would primarily benefit mercantile traders calling at Galle and that the technology would rectify some of the major problems that the mercantile and shipping communities experienced at port. This opinion was expressed clearly by Mr. Simms in his report:

> The source of returns would arise principally from the transactions of mercantile messages and messages from the Captains seeking ships. Ships are prevented coming in by the detention they at present experience. The probability of our giving employment to chartered ships would be increased. Merchants here have often authority to charter vessels for other ports as well as Colombo, such as Maulmain, Cochin, Trincomalee. One objection of Captains touching at Galle is that it involves a journey to Colombo. A letter involves at least one answer and often more, therefore the Captain comes up, but with an electric telegraph he could get answers and do his business in a few minutes.[158]

Also, they unanimously decided that the island would gain the most out of telegraphic connection if it also connected with the lines in construction in India. In the final report submitted to the Governor[159] they opined that an "electric telegraph between Colombo and Galle would in itself be desirable, but that connected with the great chain of such communication which they understand to be contemplated in India it would become of

[156] Ibid., 18 October 1852

[157] For example, "I do not think government would benefit materially by an electric telegraph except in the Post Office Department, but I think for that only the line is necessary. The steamers do not regard Colombo of importance as compared with Calcutta, Madras and Bombay and will not wait for our mails as it cannot be their interest to do so."

[158] SLNA 10/166, "Correspondence Regarding the Introduction of the Telegraph, 1852-1854." Date unknown.

[159] Ibid. No date is given on the record.

vital importance to this Colony." Their opinion was based on the assumption that, "in a commercial point of view, it must always be of the greatest importance that we should be placed on an equal footing with the Presidencies of India. Merchants in Bombay, Madras, and the Straits could communicate via Calcutta with China to the exclusion of the merchants in Ceylon."[160] The telegraph would thus enable Ceylon's merchants to compete with India. According to Armitage, it would also bring advantages to bankers:

> As far as Calcutta is concerned the line from Bombay might militate with the interests of the Ceylon line. In England messages are often sent along the line by medical men who consult with each other and arrange meetings by their channel. This would probably be the case here. A telegraph would also be of importance by facilitating exchange operations. There is a practice among shippers from England to ship goods to Ceylon or Madras. Suppose that the manager of the Oriental Bank in China or Singapore were to ship specie for these places by steamer to Bombay, the manager of the Bank here might detain the specie at Galle for use here, or for shipment to Calcutta, Madras or Mauritius as he might find most to the advantage of the Bank in case of any sudden alteration in exchange. Remittances in species arriving by the overland mail could also be detained at Galle and their destination charged as the managers of the Bank might find necessary on account of any alteration that might take place in exchange after the date of the advices from which the bank in London had made the remittance.[161]

The question of telegraphy was not resolved until Governor Henry Ward took office in 1855. It was under his governorship that the telegraph was to be realized. And as indicated in his speeches, Ward's decision to construct the network reflected the views submitted by the abovementioned committee members. Like them, he favored telegraphy for its projected returns to commerce. He placed telegraphy on the same level of significance as roads and other communication infrastructure which he installed during his tenure, all of which were intended to benefit the island's "youthful and growing" industries. Finally, that the network connected Galle, Colombo, Kandy, and India is quite

[160] Ibid., no date given.
[161] Ibid.

telling of the direction in which the network was going: towards the most important commercial centers of the island. Although Ward did not say directly, "the telegraph is installed to serve the merchants *in such and such a manner,*" I believe that the available evidence strongly puts forward that it was commerce, not power, centralization, and control that informed the government's decision to install the telegraph in 1857; that commerce had informed the committees' desire to install the technology between 1852 and 1854; that merchants were the perceived benefactors of the technology, and alongside exchange bankers they would constitute the majority of the technology's users; and that even as early as the 1840s, according to Balasingham, the merchant community, not the imperial center, had initiated the installation of the telegraph. The telegraph was used in government correspondence which chapters three and four explain, but the technology was foremost a technology of commercial capitalism that saw its historical development during the first half of the nineteenth century in the rise of commercial capitalism and was buoyed by the plantation system. The following subchapter maps out the structure of the network, detailing its construction and material outlay to fortify our understanding of the network and further support my claim that the telegraph was constructed to support commerce.

PART 3: THE STRUCTURAL FOUNDATIONS OF CEYLON'S NINETEENTH-CENTURY TELEGRAPH NETWORK

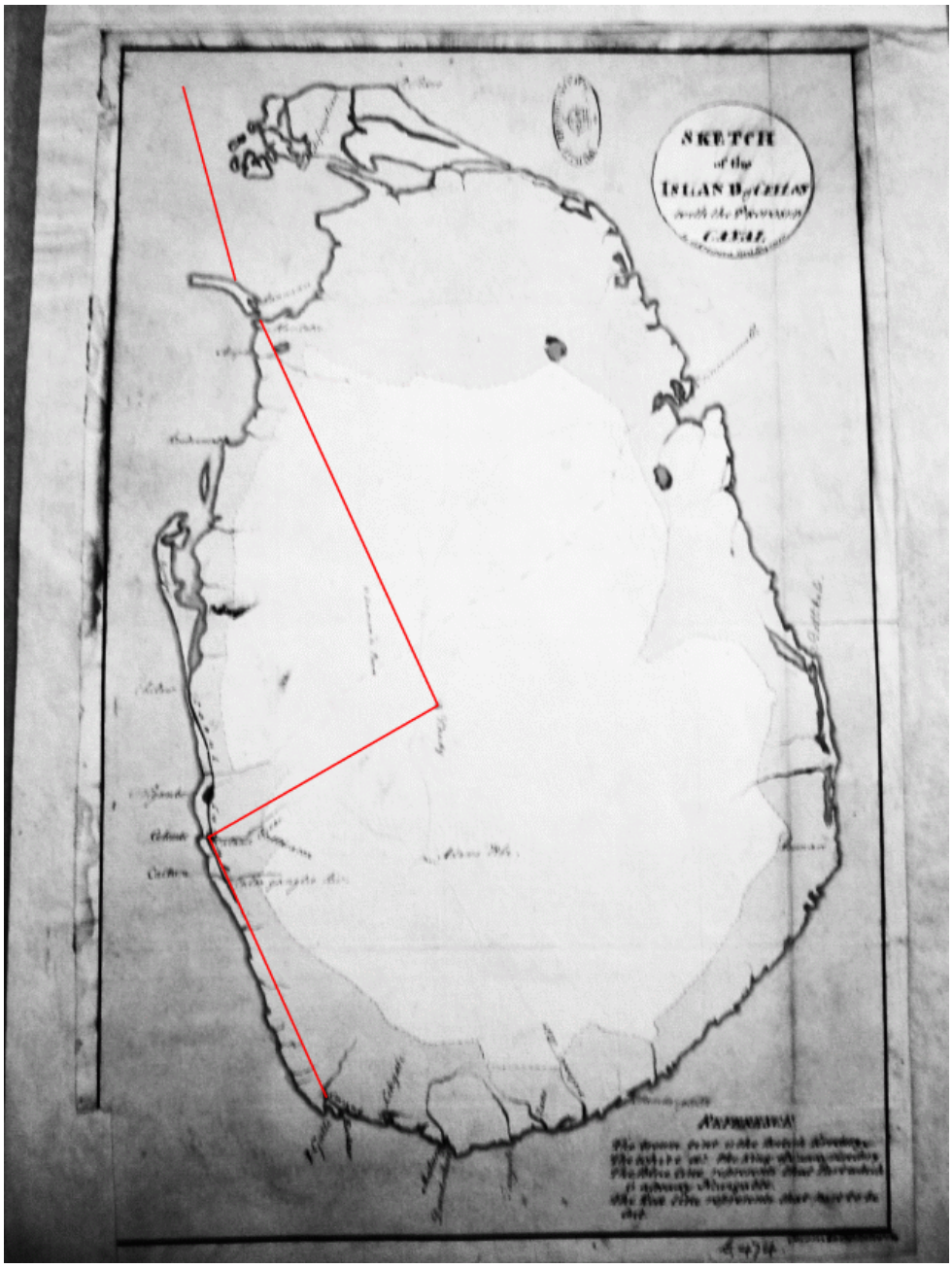

Figure 2. Map of Ceylon. Dutch Sketch. I superimposed the red lines on the map to show the original telegraph network. This is only an abstract representation and should not be taken to scale. No maps of the original network are locatable, unfortunately. Image taken from the National Archives in Kew, London.

The purpose of part three is to illustrate the construction and growth of Ceylon's telegraph network during the course of the nineteenth century. It is divided into three sections. The first one describes the material outlay and structural expansion of the network. Section two focuses on the construction of the network, particularly on its original construction. Section three grapples with the rationale of the network to determine why the lines were laid where they were and not in other places. This third part of chapter two provides the grounds on which later examinations regarding the technology's relationship to colonial government can be made.

Section One: Material Overview of Ceylon's Nineteenth-Century Telegraph Network

Ceylon's colonial government began construction on its telegraph network in 1857.[162] The system was operable the following year. When completed, it connected Galle and Madras via telegraph offices in, and lines between, Colombo, Kandy, and Manaar; a submarine line was submerged under the Paumben Strait connecting Talamanaar and the south coast of India, from where a line was extended north to Madras. This initial network was 300 miles in length. The network was not completed at once but in parts throughout the year. The first section of the network, an overland line between Galle and Colombo, opened on 1 January 1858.[163] On 1 July, the line between Colombo and Kandy was opened.[164] A submarine cable, connecting Ceylon with India, was laid between Thanaikai Point and Talamannar on 17 September. Then the line from Kandy to Manaar via Mihintale was finished in October. On 1 November Ceylon's entire network was completed and opened to the public.[165]

From this initial outlay, the network expanded to different parts of the colony throughout the century. In 1874, Colombo was connected with Polgahawela, Kurunegala, and

[162] CO 54 27 August 1857. Governor Ward to Secretary of State. ""Line from Galle to Manaar is in rapid progress…"
[163] Michael Liyanage, *The History of the Sri Lanka Post Office: 1815-1987* (Colombo: Union of Post & Telecommunication Officers, Sri Lanka, 1987), 46.
[164] SLNA 6/2463, "1858 Electric Telegraph Department," 26 June 1858, Notice from the Electric Telegraph Department
[165] SLNA 6/2463, "1858 Electric Telegraph Department," 28 October 1858, Notice from the Inspector of the Telegraph

Adhuradapura. In 1876, it was connected to Batticaloa. In 1887, a line was constructed from Colombo to Negombo, to Ratnapura in 1888, and from Negombo to Puttalam in 1890. During the governorship of Havelock (1890-1895), telegraph lines were constructed to Maskeliya, Bagawantalawa and Agrapatana. The line to Puttalam was extended to Mannar and then to Anuradhapura via Vavuniya and Jaffna. From there, it extended from Puttalam to Kankesanthurai.[166] By 1900, the island's telegraph network was 1,437 miles.[167] The choice of these locations provide further proof that the network was intended to serve commerce, a point which I will take up later in the subchapter.

Figures 2 and 3 below are taken from Ceylon's *Blue Book of Statistics* for the years 1880 and 1900, respectively, and indicate the length and location of the network's connections in Ceylon during these periods. Even a cursory comparison shows that the network experienced significant growth and expansion into many parts of the island between the two periods.

Figure 3. Telegraph Network in 1880[168]

Location	**Distance in miles**
Colombo to Galle	72.50
Colombo to Kalutara (railway line)	27.50
Colombo to Kandy (railway line)	75.00
Colombo to Kandy (second railway line)	76.70
Extra wire from Rambukka to Kadugamawa (railway line)	12.75
Colombo Breakwater Engineer's Office to Mahara Quarry (railway line)	12.25
Kandy to Gampola	12.45

[166] Liyanage, *The History of the Sri Lanka Post Office: 1815-1987*, 40–41.
[167] "Ceylon Blue Book of Statistics", 1900.
[168] Telegraph lines are measured. Ibid.1880.

Peradeniya Junction to Nawalapitiya (railway line)	17.50
Kandy to Dambulla Junction (main line)	43.64
Dambulla Junction to Anuradhapura (main line)	47.50
Anuradhapura to Mannar (main line)	74.8
Mannar to Talaimannar (main line)	17.00
Kandy to Dambulla Junction (branch line)	43.64
Dambulla to Trincomalee (branch line)	69.50
Mannar to Jaffna (branch line)	70.97
Gampola to Nuwara Eliya (branch line)	20.55
Nuwara Eliya to Badulla (branch line)	27.00
Badulla to Batticaloa (branch line)	94.87
Line across Paumben Strait	53.00
Total	813.12

Figure 4.Telegraph Network in 1900[169]

Location	Distance (measured in miles of posts)
General Post Office, Colombo to Beira	0
Beira Junction to Maradana Junction	1
Miscellaneous signal wires	-
Maradana Junction to Maradana Post Office	1
Maradana Junction to Kandy Post Office	74
Maradana Junction to Avisawella Junction	-
Maradana Junction to Grandpass	-
Maradana Junction to Negombo Junction	-
Maradana Junction to Polgahawela	-
Veyangoda Loop	0
Polgahawela Loop	0
Polgahawela Railway Station to Kurunegala	13
Kurunegala Post Office to Kurunegala	1
Polgahawela Railway Station to Kegalla Post	8

[169] "Ceylon Blue Book of Statistics," 1900.

Rambukkana Railway Station to	-
Peradeniya Junction to Kandy Railway	-
Kandy Post Office Junction to Peradeniya	0
Kandy Post Office Junction to Kandy Post	0
Junction for Courts to Courts Post Office	0
Junction for Grandpass to Mutwal Post	3
Junction for Avisawela to Rawkana Post	75
Avisawella Post Office to Ruanawella	8
Yatiyantota Loop	-
Ratnapura to Haputale	56
Negombo Junction to Negombo	15
Negombo to Puttalam	61
Puttalam to Mannar	64
Mannar Post Office to Talamannar	17
Mannar Post Office to Junction for Jaffna	1
Junction for Jaffna to Jaffna	65
Jaffna to Manipay	5
Jaffna to Kakesanturai	11
Kankesanturai to Velvettitturai	10
Velvettitturai to Point Pedro	5
Kandy Post Office Junction to Matale	18
Matale Railway Station to Anuradhapura	73
Anuradhapura to Trincomalee	63
Anuradhapura to Madawachchiya	17
Madawachchiya to Mannar	51
Madawachchiya to Vavuniya	32
Vavuniya to Mankulam	29
Mankulam to Mullaittivu	30
Mankulam to Jaffna	60
Wattegama to Madulkele	10
Beira Junction to Galle Railway Station	71
General Post Office to Galkissa	7
General Post Office to Kollupitiya	-
Galkissa to Galle Railway Station	-
Moratuwa Post Office to Loop	0
Kalutara Railway Station to Kalutara Post	0
Bentota Railway Station to Bentota Post	0
Galle Railway Station to Galle Post Office	0
Galle Railway Station to Matara Railway	26
Kataluwa Railway Station to Kataluwa Post	0
Matara Railway Station to Matara Post	1
Matara Post Office to Tangalla Junction	22
Tangalla Loop	0
Tangalla Junction to Hambantota	26
Peradeniya Junction to Gampola	7
Gampola to Nuwara Eliya via Ramboda	21
Gampola to Watagoda Railway Station	41
Hatton Post Office to Watawala Post Office	5
Hatton Post Office to Norwood Post	6
Norwood to Maskeliya	7

Norwood to Bogawantalawa	7
Talawakele to Agrapatana	10
Talawakele to Nuwara Eliya	22
Nuwara Eliya to Uda Pussellawa	12
Kandapola to Maturata	8
Nuwara Eliya to Badulla via Welimada	34
Nuwara Eliya to Nanu-oya	4
Nanu-oya to Bandarawela	34
Bandarawela to Badulla	16
Haputale to Koslanda	7
Junction for Boer Camp to Diyatalawa	2
Diyatalawa Station to Boer Camp	1
Loops to Railway Station	10
Badulla to Batticaloa	8
Kalmunai to Batticaloa	16
Batticaloa to Kalkuda	11
Batticaloa to Bar	2
Total[170]	1,437

Section Two: Construction of the Network

The construction of Ceylon's telegraph network is best understood as a mutual project between Ceylon's and India's governments. Indian managers were in charge of installing it and the Indian Telegraph Department supplied the necessary materials at low costs; and Ceylon's government paid for the materials and labor. This not only highlights the fact that India's system became the *de facto* model of the British Empire in south Asia but also describes the dependency of Ceylon on the technology and knowledge of India in rendering its own network.[171] The transfer of Ceylon's telegraphic technology, therefore, did not function on a west-to-east model, but rather, was derived from the system O'Shaughnessy had developed in India in the 1830s. However, O'Shaughnessy was not directly involved in the network's initial construction. He was on leave during this time and was temporarily replaced by Lieutenant Stewart—who was simultaneously occupied with fixing the damages incurred to India's telegraph network in light of the 1857

[170] This total is taken from the Blue Book of Statistics, 1900. It does not equal the sum of the distance of post measured in miles. I believe that the numbers given were just averages and only included whole numbers. However, the total presented here is approximate.

[171] There were earlier attempts at creating telegraphy in Ceylon, however.

Mutiny.[172] Nevertheless, it was O'Shaughnessy's ingenuity which constituted the original structural and material rendering of Ceylon's telegraph system.

In exchange for connecting Ceylon's network to India, India's government, through the agency of the Indian Telegraph Department, provided the materials and experts needed to construct it. It provided "the services of persons skilled in constructing and working the telegraph on the Indian System";[173] and, it supplied "at cost price, including freight from England, the necessary quantity of wire" required to construct Ceylon's network—[174] the price of which, at the time, was estimated at £50 per mile.[175] Additionally, it paid for the entire cost, including the labor and materials, of the Paumben Strait submarine cable. Ceylon's government covered the unmet costs. According to Ceylon's Blue Book of Statistics, Ceylon's government spent £4,840 in 1857[176] which stemmed from the £17,000 provided by the Surplus Fund Ordinance for the purpose of constructing the network.[177] The total cost of the operation upon completion was approximately £15,000.[178] Ceylon also provided the unskilled labor used in installing the telegraph lines.

Labor

The person in charge of the telegraph network's construction was B.C. Bailey from the Indian Telegraph Department.[179] He had arrived in Ceylon in April 1857 and commenced his operatives on 1 June. There were three assistants under Bailey's authority: Mr. Biallobtzky, Mr. La Fey, and Mr. Mackey. Each of them headed various teams of workers on different sections of the network, clearing and preparing the routes to put up the telegraph lines. Bailey's role in the network's construction was substantial and notable. Not only did he oversee the construction of all portions of the lines between Galle and

[172] Choudhury, *Telegraphic Imperialism*.
[173] CO/54 1 April 1857 658-664.
[174] CO/54 1 April 1857 658-664.
[175] William O'Shaughnessy's estimation: CO 54, 3 July 1857.
[176] Blue Book, 1857.
[177] CO/54 24 October 1857.
[178] Balasingham, "The Administration of Sir Henry Ward," 43–44.
[179] SLNA 6/2463 "Inspector of the Electric Telegraph Reports," 6 November 1858.

Manaar,[180] he also organized the labor used to build the network;[181] he managed the training of the telegraph office clerks; and from the network's completion in 1858 until 1860 he acted as the first Superintendent of the Electric Telegraph Department of Ceylon. In such a role, he also became the intermediary between the technology and the public, making notices about the telegraphs' operation and moderating its prices.[182]

The telegraph network was created by the collective efforts of many individual laborers. Laborers worked on different sections of the network in small teams or camps, under the authority of an overseer, either Bailey or one his assistants. Workers within a camp focused on different tasks: clearing the jungle and woods and carting supplies through them; digging holes; sawing, carrying and laying posts; installing brackets and insulators; and connecting the wires. They worked, ate, and slept on site in work camps.

The laborers employed in the work camps were primarily south Indians who had traditionally found employment in the services of the island's plantations. Why south Indians, rather than the Ceylonese, were involved in the network's construction was perhaps a consequence of the labor itself. Constructing a telegraph network from Galle to Manaar required laborers to travel great distances. Some portions of the network were 100 miles in length like the Dambool to Mantotte line. According to Bailey, Ceylonese workers engaged in the stations of the local authorities refused to travel more than two or three miles beyond their houses, and many villagers declined to leave their fields.[183] I would suggest, also, that the colonial government focused primarily on the procurement of south Indians rather than Ceylonese since the Deputy Collector was involved in recruitment. South Indians had for decades been recruited for plantation work by the Deputy Collector and it was easy to procure telegraph labor by similar methods. Local participation was not precluded, however. For example, in July of 1858 Bailey requested the use of 30 or 40 prisoners to be employed "in the Galle Fort for two or three days in running an over ground line from the Ramparts to the House just vacated by the Oriental

[180] Ibid., 25 July 1858.
[181] Ibid.
[182] Ibid., 28 October 1858.
[183]Ibid., 13 May 1858.

Bank."[184] Bailey wrote that each camp contained at least ten laborers and normally 30 to 40 people were employed at any one time on each portion of the network.[185] But never more than 50 workers were engaged at once. And Bailey was assisted intermittently by officials of the districts through which the lines were taken and by "the authority not only of the district officers but the Head of the Public Works Department," Major Skinner.[186]

The amount the laborers earned is not known,[187] nor which incentives were given so that they chose to work on telegraphs rather than in agriculture. But obtaining and keeping labor was a constant problem for Bailey and contributed to major delays in the technology's construction.[188] There were a number of reasons which darkened the prospect of working on telegraph construction. There were firstly rumors among the laborers that there were cholera outbreaks along the routes of telegraphic construction which made the prospect of working in telegraphy quite unsettling. (This is true, there were cholera-related casualties among telegraph workers and numerous occurrences of fevers and other maladies). Also, the work was tremendously laborious and this also limited the entrance of new recruits. In the island of Manaar and in the district between Mehintelle and Dambool, for example, no carts or oxen could be obtained at any price, and the whole of the work, moving heavy posts and carrying supplies, had to be done by hand.[189] But these were just a few of difficulties which telegraphic construction had entailed.

Installing the poles and hanging the lines were arduous tasks especially in and around the highlands and interior jungles. Workers had to cut down trees, whack away bushes, and make room for the poles to be laid and secured. Telegraph construction generally followed the existing networks of roads but this was not always possible. Roads

[184] Ibid., 10 April 1858.
[185] Ibid., 31 October 1857.
[186] Ibid., 25 July 1858.
[187] CO/57 24 August 1857: Governor Ward wrote: "Rates for labor are very different in India and Ceylon," but he did not specify what these wages were. I cannot locate this data in any of the source material, unfortunately.
[188] SLNA 6/2463 "Inspector of the Electric Telegraph Reports," 31 December 1857, 13 January 1858, 25 July 1858.
[189] CO/57 24 August 1857.

sometimes meandered wildly or were too narrow to set up telegraph poles alongside them, so the network had to deviate.

The work succumbed to numerous delays. In the construction of the line between Kandy and Tallmannar, for instance, interdepartmental struggles caused massive delays and difficult detours. In Kandy, the Royal Engineers prevented the laborers from crossing their "reserves" which meant that the line had to be moved and run over "a jungle covered hill 400 or 500 feet above the level of the town."[190] The camp had to trek uphill and clear bushes and trees and erect the very heavy ironwood telegraph posts that were being used at the time.[191] This caused a fortnight delay in production.[192] One of Bailey's three assistant overseers, Mr. Biallobtzky, resigned in the middle of this portion of the line's construction. The labor was too demanding and he was afraid he would catch cholera from his workers, some of whom had caught the disease and died under his command.[193] This in turn caused more delay and discouraged those under his employ. Some laborers also resigned. The "wire parties," i.e. the laborers who installed telegraph wires, which commenced at Matalle on 21 July, were brought to a standstill by sickness which "prostrated the European in charge of one party and frightened away the coolies from another."[194] Even the offer of double wages would not always sway laborers to stay on.[195]

The work was even too hard at times on the animals (elephants and oxen) that they had rented. According to a letter to Bailey from assistant overseer Mr. Brown, "the sawyers and transporters kept absconding almost as fast as procured when they went to the estate and saw the nature of the work they were required to do…The posts being cut out of large old seasoned wood are very heavy. To meet this difficulty I engaged Elephants, but they only went one trip…I tried Bullocks. They also failed, their owners refusing to bring them a second time to such work. I have consequently had to employ a large force of my

[190] 6/2463 "1858 Inspector of the Electric Telegraph Reports," 25 July 1858.
[191] Ibid.
[192] Ibid.
[193] Ibid.
[194] Ibid.
[195] Ibid., 31 October 1857.

estate coolies…I have had to raft them down a river about 20 miles and then cart them up the road another 20 miles at great expense."[196]

Materials

The materials used in Ceylon's telegraph network derived from India and therefore shared similar characteristics with those employed there. O'Shaughnessy's single needle transmitter was used until 1859 when the Morse system was introduced.[197] In 1878, there was discussion about using a Mance Heliograph—a device that communicates with Morse-code flashes of sunlight—not to replace the existing network but to compliment it.[198] This device would have made Ceylon's network different from India's. Discussion was quickly muted, so I doubt it was adopted in any context. The electric wires used in the network were brought from India and, therefore, were made of iron. The materials were shipped directly from India to Ceylon on large freight ships such as the "Pelorus." The purpose of using Indian technology, according to the Secretary to the Governor of India, was "to maintain uniformity in the working of the system throughout the British possessions" and to establish less competitive telegraph tariffs. However, the island's network had many unique characteristics unrelated to India's system. For example, the telegraph posts were not made of bamboo like in India. Instead, they were taken from the trees found on the island and fitted to the island's particular topography and geography.

Rather than achieving uniformity, as was the intention, nearly each section of the network was distinct in some way. The section between Galle and Colombo used the ubiquitous coconut trees that lined the coast as posts to which they mounted the wires using Jackwood brackets. Stop-posts were placed every mile to protect the wires against falling trees and the telegraph line was suspended with a deflection of four feet between the support posts so that it would be able to give way to any heavy weight falling on it. The meandering and mountainous terrain between Colombo and Kandy required a team of laborers to clear jungle and lay posts made of iron and Moulmein Teak; these high quality

[196] Ibid., 31 October 1857.
[197] Liyanage, *The History of the Sri Lanka Post Office: 1815-1987*, 46.
[198] CO/54, 16 November 1878.

posts were procured under contracts between Mr. Layard, the Assistant Government Agent of the district, and the headmen of different villages in 1857. From Kandy to Tallamannar Bailey's team had to cut a road twelve feet wide through forests for about five miles and through low jungles for about eight miles. Rocky soil had to be dug to fit ironwood posts of a lesser quality than those used in the second section. Along the route from Dambool to Mantotte jungle had to be cleared and the telegraph posts there had to be able to withstand attacks by packs of wild elephants. Here they used large, top-quality posts, two to three feet in circumference and fourteen to twenty-two feet in length, made of iron and satin woods which were predicted to last at least 20 years. They were taken from young trees stripped clear and cut to the desired length. They were supplied in 1857 on contracts through the Assistant Government Agents of Anuradhapura and Manaar. The section connecting the Manaar Flats was a body of water, two miles wide, which separated the island of Manaar from the mainland of Ceylon. The water was mostly shallow–two and a half feet deep–except in the channel at the opposite side where it was deep enough to float vessels of "one hundred ton burden."[199] Here, a submarine cable was cut from part of the Mannar Strait's cable—and laid by Indian vessels and workers—across the flats through an intermediate testing house on a dry mound in the center. The sixth and final section, crossing Manaar Island, was quite a difficult task given the density of the jungle, through which posts made of the same material as those of the Dambool to Mantotte line were installed. A lack of uniformity in the network is telling, revealing the multifarious dimensions of technological adaptation. It also shows that it was not a west to east expansion but something which assimilated to the local context. Commerce and the natural environment shaped the network and its material dimensions.

Over the course of the century, as the network expanded and changed so too did the materials used. By 1867 the Colombo to Kandy line had been dismantled and the wire was brought to Colombo to replace the line on the Galle Road. The Colombo to Kandy line was replaced by an entirely new line constructed alongside the railway and was supported by iron posts insulated by Siemens insulators.[200] And, a flying line supported on

[199] 6/2463 "1858 Inspector of the Electric Telegraph Report," 31 October 1857.
[200] SLNA 31st October 1857 6/2463 1858 Inspector of Electric Telegraph Reports: This was a big improvement given that the first insulators used on the Ceylon lines were made of an earthenware block

"good sound posts" was erected across the Manaar Flats replacing the submarine cable laid by Bailey. In 1891 a telegraph line from Jaffna to Point Pedro was erected. Instead of being strewn across timber or Siemens posts, it was suspended on posts which were also sections of the local Palmyra tree,[201] saving transportation costs.[202] In 1894, the telegraph line from Ambalangoda to Galle was constructed and on the portion closest to the sea Weiller's patent bronze wire was used.[203] In the same year, the Nuwara Eliya to Uda Pusselluvia line was carried on steel rails. [204]

In addition to costs and durability, the materials of the telegraph network were also adapted to extraneous circumstances. According to the Superintendent of the Post and Telegraph Department, on main roads, especially between Galle and Hambantota and between Lanngala and Batticaloa, men and boys "amuse themselves with throwing stones at the insulators," 50 percent of which had been broken by 1894. Because of this, it was reported, brown earthenware insulators, less conspicuous to the eye, were used to replace them; however, damages continued and non-breakable ones made of vulcanite rather than porcelain and earthenware were used to replace all of them.[205] These acts of destruction interest me greatly, but unfortunately I have not found other information or reports to make any assessment on them, beyond speculation. They may have been sabotage or, as the reports suggest, boys being boys. It does suggest a social gap between the natives and those who used the telegraph, and throwing the stones can be read as a symbol of inequality between those wealthy enough to employ the technology and those who were not.

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divided in two pieces, two inches square and two and a half inches deep, fitted into the top of the post and secured to it by an iron strap. According to Bailey, these insulators were "all of the worst description and in my poor opinion of no greater protection from the wet than would be pieces of common brick." The glass coating was either missing or came off easily and the brackets were liable to leakages. Even in dry weather the insulators worked poorly. Batteries of 400 and 500 cells had to be used to send messages over them whereas India's network functioned on 40-cell batteries. Administration Report 1867 for the Post, p. 295

[201] A local fan palm that could grow to 30m high.

[202] Administration Report, 1891, p.284 B6.

[203] Administration Report, 1894, B11.

[204] Ibid.

[205] Ibid., B12.

The Rationale of the Network

We now know where and how the network was laid. But it still remains to be seen *why* it was laid in the places it was. Why were Galle, Colombo, Kandy, Mannar, and south India connected? Why were other locations excluded? Why did it expand in the patterns and ways that it did and not in others? Environmental and engineering factors certainly played a part but they did not make up the entire answer. While there is little in the way of direct evidence, there are a few possible explanations for the network's particular outlay and growth. Knowing why the network expanded is important for us because it, firstly, brings us a visual image of the ideas that went into the network, especially those intended to foster commerce. Secondly, it enables us to understand more deeply the relationship between colonial government and technology. As I show, the technology was established for commercial ends, but Ceylon's telegraph network was, nevertheless, a technology of colonial government. Ceylon's government had its hands in all manners of the technology from its development to its operation.

It was the critical relationship between Galle and Colombo and the desire to complement its preexisting connection with telegraphy that had first and foremost made establishing telegraphic communication in Ceylon a reality. Without the important relationship between Galle and Colombo and the need for fast communication between the two areas, it is likely that the telegraph would not have been established anywhere in Ceylon in 1858. Across the board the significance of this portion of the network is clear: Ceylon's government agreed to connect the network to India *only if* Galle and Colombo were first telegraphically joined; the topic of concern for the committee and subcommittee had been the relevance of connecting Galle and Colombo, not other locations; the merchant and commercial communities had emphasized their desire for telegraphy between Galle and Colombo and nowhere else; and, it was this part of the network that first completed in 1858. The connection of these two locations was not just influential, but foundational, to the telegraph network in Ceylon.

The natural harbor at Galle made the city one of the most important trading centers of the Indian Ocean for centuries—even before the island's experience with western

colonialism. Persians, Arabs, Greeks, Romans, Malays, and Indians traded there and James Emerson Tennent conjectured that its trading history may even be documented in the Judeo-Christian Bible, as it "may possibly have been from Ceylon and certainly from India that the fleets of Solomon were returning when once in every three years came the ships of Tarshish, bringing gold and silver, ivory, apes, and peacocks."[206] He believed that Solomon's ships had sailed from Point de Galle.[207] Under European control Galle retained its importance as a trading center and functioned as a main port of call for the Portuguese and the Dutch. Under British occupation, until the completion of the Colombo breakwater in 1883, Galle was the island's main port for receiving and transmitting goods, people, and political information. It was also a fueling station for ships and steamers traveling through the Indian Ocean region, since it was nearly equidistant from the eastern colonies and the Middle East. Connecting Galle to Colombo was significant because, Colombo, located 72 miles north of Galle, was the British colony's political capital. The capital was established after the fall of the Kandyan Kingdom in 1815. Before then, Colombo had functioned primarily as a military base for the British as well as the Dutch and the Portuguese. Its location in the center of cinnamon production had also made it a significant *entrepôt* in the cinnamon trade.

The connection between Colombo and Galle was considerably important for the colony throughout European and, in particular, British rule. Firstly, the cinnamon harvested in and around Colombo was sold to merchants whose ships departed from Galle. Secondly, after Colombo had become the colonial capital of the British, the two cities linked the administrative flow of information and news. Political mail and public news traveled regularly between Colombo and Galle. Correspondence from Colombo to London left the colony from Galle and correspondence from the metropolitan government was introduced to the colony through Galle. Also, Galle functioned as the gateway between Western and Eastern colonies. Imperial mail addressed to locations in India and Great Britain traveled frequently through Galle from Australia, Singapore, and other Eastern colonies—and vice versa. Thirdly, as expressed by the minutes of the committee and

[206] James Tennent Emerson, *Ceylon: An Account of the Island, Physical, Historical, and Topographical with Notices of Its Natural History, Antiquities and Productions*, 1860, 555.
[207] Ibid.

subcommittee, the connection was critical for local merchants who required knowledge of market and shipping information between the two areas. Communication between Galle and Colombo was therefore critical for an array of people and associations both politically and commercially.

Prior to the establishment of the telegraph, a communication network formed by human and animal agencies had linked Galle and Colombo. During Dutch occupation messages were relayed by message runners who traveled the distance between Galle and Colombo along coastal roads. The trip took up to 72 hours. The Dutch also established a pigeon service that operated between the various Dutch forts in Colombo and Galle as well as in Jaffna and Batticaloa. The British continued this practice. News that was shipped to the port of Galle was transferred by bullock carts, horse coaches, and mail runners which could make the journey to Colombo in at least nine hours. From 1850 to 1858, the *Ceylon Observer* used pigeons to send abstracts of news ahead of the carts traveling to the printers in Colombo.

The importance of establishing telegraphic communication in Ceylon was initially to substantiate the important relationship between Galle and Colombo and to improve upon the system of communications which had existed between these two areas. Telegraphic news was thought to travel more quickly than pigeons (this was not true in the early years, however). Moreover, merchants and shippers would have quicker access to market and docking information, much more readily than information obtained from posted materials. The establishment of the telegraph between Galle and Colombo did not replace but rather supplemented preexisting methods of communication; mail carts and message runners existed alongside telegraphic communication.[208] The pigeon service, however, was disbanded in the same year that the telegraph was introduced, which may or may not have been a coincidence.

In addition to the relationship between Galle and Colombo, India's government also played a substantial role in determining the outlay of Ceylon's telegraph network. It not

[208] Liyanage, *The History of the Sri Lanka Post Office: 1815-1987*, 2.

only influenced the island's government to connect its lines to the subcontinent but also instigated the expansion of the network north of Colombo in general. Correspondence between the two governments from 1856 to 1857 supports this claim. According to letter no. 19 of 1856 from the Home Department to the Court of Directors of the British East India Company, the Home Department had informed the Court in a previous letter, no. 1 of 1856, that it had "intimated to the Ceylon Government that if that Government would construct a line from Galle to the Straits, we should be prepared to bear half the expense of forming the communication between the Island of Ceylon and the mainland of India; and would connect that line with the general Indian line, at some convenient point in one of the southern districts of the Madras Presidency."[209] However, Ceylon's government was reluctant and responded that "they were unable to close with [the] proposal" on the grounds that its interest in establishing telegraphic communication was limited to the 72 miles between Galle and Colombo. It

> […] would not be furthered by its extension to the mainland of India…There is no population north of Colombo to warrant the outlay, and no trade with India that calls for it, whereas the Indian government would seem to have some direct interest in the communication with Galle for the sake of the earlier information that might thus be obtained from China and the Eastward, as well as from the Australian colonies, when steam communication with them is reopened.[210]

Although connecting Galle and Colombo was a priority for the colony, it is doubtful that Ceylon's government had no interests "north of Colombo" given that the committee and subcommittee had verified that the network would greatly benefit from being connected to both Kandy and India. The Secretary to the Government of India, C. Beadon, expressed that the Secretary of State for the Colonies also disagreed with the validity of the Governor's response:

[209] Home Government to Court of Directors "Electric Telegraph," no. 19 0f 1856 located in CO 54, 24 October 1857
[210] Ibid., no. 14 0f 1856 located in CO 54, 24 October 1857

> His Lordship in Council is unable altogether to concur with the Governor General of Ceylon in conceiving that the interest of Ceylon in this line is limited to the 72 miles between Colombo and Galle and would not be furthered by its extension to the Mainland of India, but he is willing to admit that a greater measure of advantage may be expected to accrue to India from the connection than to the colony, and is disposed to accede to the proposal that the expense of constructing it as far as the western coast of the island of Manaar should be borne by the Government of India.[211]

However doubtful, it was in response to the Secretary's final remark, "that the expense of constructing it as far as the western coast of the island of Manaar should be borne by the Government of India" that India's and Ceylon's governments began negotiations to proceed with the construction of the network. In other words, because India's government decided to pay for the entire cost of connecting the mainland to the island, Ceylon's Governor agreed to extend its network north of Colombo.

In letter no. 19 of 1856 the Home Government—in accordance to the Secretary of State's decision—wrote that it understood Ceylon's reluctance to attach its network to India and offered to bear the entire expense of constructing the line from India as far as the western coast of the island of Manaar. The Indian government also offered to provide at Ceylon's expense officers to oversee the construction and materials at cost price. Ceylon's government accepted the offer. On 3 October 1856 Colonial Secretary of Ceylon MacCarthy conveyed to the Governor General in Council that "Ceylon willingly accepts and are prepared to act on as soon as the requisite staff and materials which the Governor General has kindly consented to place at the disposal of this government are available for work."[212]

Governor Ward's ultimate acceptance of India's offer casts suspicion on his earlier reluctance. It seems very probable that Governor Ward had been negotiating with India

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[211] C. Beadon Esquire, Secretary to the Government of India to the Honorable C.J. MacCarthy, 26 August 1856, located in CO 54, 24 October 1857.
[212] MacCarthy to William, 3 October 1856, located in CO 54, 24 October 1857.

rather than inflexibly disapproving the initial prospect of connecting the telegraph to India. Nevertheless, it is likely that if India had not continued its negotiations with Ceylon and offered to pay, the island's initial telegraph network would have connected only Galle and Colombo as stated by MacCarthy in letter no. 14 of 1856 and would not have connected to India—at least initially. That India paid for the construction of the Paumben submarine cable signaled the network's construction north of Colombo and its link to the subcontinent. Thus, although it is possible that Governor Ward was only bluffing to provoke a favorable response from India and would have constructed the network beyond Colombo anyway, the records indicate that the outlay of the network north of Colombo was first and foremost directed by India's government.

The offer from India was subject to four conditions, however. First, Ceylon's telegraphs should be constructed on the same plan in all material respects as the Madras line. Second, employees would be required to conform to the instructions of the Superintendent of the Electric Telegraphs in India—subject to final orders of the Ceylon government. Third, all receipts from messages between Ceylon and India should be credited to the two governments respectively in proportion to the length of telegraph line. Fourth, Indian messages should have next preference after Ceylon and vice versa.

Ceylon's government also laid down some conditions. MacCarthy expressed that he expected the line between Colombo and Galle to be constructed first, and he made clear that the line would be carried in the following direction: "The network would extend from Galle to Colombo and Kandy, and thence by the Central Road to Manaar, as the communication by this Route is considered to be of more importance to the island and capable of easier construction than that by the Western Coast from Colombo to Manaar."[213] The expansion of the network north of Colombo into Kandy and Manaar was thus born in the negotiations between India's and Ceylon's governments in determining the connection of the network to the subcontinent. Manaar was chosen for its proximity to the mainland. But, we should pause here for a moment to reflect on the telegraphic significance of Kandy and what MacCarthy had in mind when suggesting that the network

[213] MacCarthy to William, 3 October 1856, located in CO 54, 24 October 1857.

traverse it. At first glance, this might bear an easy answer. Kandy was located in the central highlands and was within reasonable distance of the majority of the island's coffee plantations. It was furthermore the site of administrative control over the central regions. Therefore, it seemingly would have been useful to the local communities in commercial and political correspondence. However, according to related documents, there was very little local use of Kandy's telegraph office. Rather, Kandy functioned as a switching or relay station between Galle, Colombo, and India.[214] Therefore, it is likely that Kandy itself had little impact on the network's initial outlay except for its central location and intermediary position between India and Colombo and Galle Therefore, to summarize the rationale behind the network's initial outlay, I would suggest that there were two major influences: first, the relationship between Galle and Colombo and, second, India's desire to connect its own network to Ceylon, coupled with its generous financial investments. And, Kandy and Manaar were byproducts that functioned as relay stations.

The rationale behind the network's expansion diverged from these initial factors. The importance of external communication affected telegraphic growth. According to the letters and statements to the Telegraph Superintendent in 1868 [215] the quantity of local telegraphic communication was trumped substantially by the telegraphic traffic along the Indo-Ceylon and Indo-European lines. Between 1865 and 1867,[216] tariffs collected from local telegrams accounted for only sixteen percent of total revenue. This meant that subsequent expansion was financed on revenue accumulated by external telegraphic communication, and the network was most likely to have expanded to connect locations in Ceylon to India, Europe, and other parts of the telegraphic world, not to each other. This differs remarkably from the idea behind the technology's establishment in 1858 that was primarily driven by local demands to connect Galle and Colombo. It shows that the efficacy of the network, once in place, went beyond a mere servicing of local merchants. The network reached international importance.

[214] SLNA 6/2463 1858 "Inspector of Telegraphs Report," Bailey to O'Shaughnessy 8 November 1858
[215] Ibid.
[216] The line from India to England was opened in 1865. Before this date, it was not possible to telegraph directly between Ceylon and Europe.

Secondly, the expansion of the telegraph was highly influenced by the trajectory of the railway. As the railway expanded so too did railway telegraph lines—this, like in India as well, was contrary to the establishment of telegraphy in England, where telegraphy followed the development of the railway. Another factor behind the telegraph's expansion was the growth of the island's postal department. From 1869, as the next section will explain, post offices became responsible for conveying telegraphic messages—even a telegram could be sent from an office with no telegraph, the message was carried on by a messenger to a nearby telegraph office or to the recipient. Each new post office subsequently became part of the telegraph network.

Institutionalization of Ceylon's Telegraph Network

Ceylon's telegraph network was entirely the business of the colonial government. There were legal ordinances substantiating the colonial state's power over the technology. By the authority of "The Electric Telegraph Ordinance of 1857," Ceylon's Governor was given control over all aspects of Ceylon's telegraph network from its construction to its expansion and maintenance, the Ordinance gave him power to enter on lands to install the system and to punish those suspected of tampering with the network in any manner—pending, of course, the sanction of the Secretary of State for the colonies. The Ordinance was substantially amended and expanded in 1892 by "The Ceylon Postal and Telegraph Ordinance, 1892" and again by "The Ceylon Postal and Telegraph Amendment Ordinance, 1899." However, the institutionalization of the network was not a straightforward affair and the Governor had very little hands-on involvement operating the network. Rather, government institutions such as the Electric Telegraph Department were responsible for the telegraph's operation in the island. This too was not simple, however. From the telegraph's introduction until the end of the century, the charge of the telegraph's operation went through four phases of institutionalization.

The first phase of the telegraph network's institutionalization included the years of its construction (1857-1858) until the end of 1859. During this phase the network was in an unclear position. On the one hand, Ceylon's government was paying for the construction

out of the island's surplus funding, while, on the other hand, Bailey of the Indian Telegraph Department was in charge of constructing and operating the lines.[217] There was no clear departmental framework established for running the telegraph and the majority of instructions continued to derive from O'Shaughnessy in India.

The second phase of institutionalization, which lasted from 1860-1869, witnessed a more organized approach to the island's telegraph network. India's involvement ended and Ceylon's government gained autonomy over the network. During this phase, expenditure for the network was taken from Public funding, which made the source of its payment on par with the civil service and the Public Works Department. More importantly, however, the Electric Telegraph Department was established with Skinner as its superintendent. Ceylon's government devised its own tariff charges, organized the office staff, and maintained the network in all it material and mechanical functions.

The third phase of institutionalization lasted from 1869 until 1879. During this phase, control over the network, under mutually agreed upon terms, was taken from Ceylon's government and given to the Indian Telegraph Department. The reason for this arrangement included the government of Ceylon's inability to lower tariff charges on European telegraph messages to the rate of India's.[218]

The fourth phase of institutionalization was the one which endured longest, lasting from 1880 into the twentieth century. This phase witnessed the return of Ceylon's network to a department of Ceylon's government. In 1880, the Postal and Telegraph Department of Ceylon was formed, combining the control and operation of the telegraph with that of the post into a single governmental body. According to the Administration Report for the 1880, "economy" was the reason for the network's return to Ceylon's government:

> The Director of telegraphs in India required a payment of Rs. 70,000 to meet the loss on working the Ceylon Telegraphs, and this Government, not being prepared to agree to such terms, it was eventually decided to combine the Post and

[217] SLNA 6/2463 "Inspector of Telegraphs Report," 6 November 1858.
[218] SLNA 10/70 "Letters and Statements to the Telegraph Superintendent 1858-1872," 2 March 1868.

Telegraphs in Ceylon in accordance with the example set by the United Kingdom, France, and other countries.[219]

Conclusion

I crafted this chapter for two reasons. Firstly, I wanted to write the telegraph in its global and local historical contexts and to create what can be considered as the first "history" of the island's telegraph network—although much more work, of course, could have been done in this latter area; however, the topic of the dissertation is not concerned with an institutional history of the telegraph, per se, and my point here was to introduce rather than exhaust the subject. Secondly, I wrote it to indicate the extent to which Ceylon's telegraph network was a technology of colonial government. Ceylon's government introduced the network for commerce. This point will be important, particularly in chapter four, where I show that a large portion of the colonial administration was precluded from accessing the network, given its capital-centric design. But the colonial government, nevertheless, had its hands in all manners of the technology from its development to its operation, and would go on to make use of the technology directly. The disjunction between intention and application provides a wider picture of the colonial government's relationship with the technology, enabling us to assess its utilization of the technology and the extent of its efficacy in administration. This dissertation turns now to refocus and commence its *raison d'être*, which will be delineated in the following two chapters and in the conclusion.

[219] SLNA Administration Reports for Ceylon, 1880.

CHAPTER THREE: TELEGRAMS AND OFFICIAL CORRESPONDENCE

INTRODUCTION

As the previous chapter argued, the telegraph was introduced to serve the needs of commercial capitalism. The government installed the technology to provide local businesses and private persons with an ability, in their pursuit of market-gains, to communicate market prices, to trade, to announce the arrival and departure of shipments, etc. The telegraph facilitated lightning fast communication which could convey and tap into knowledge of world market prices, thereby transcending constraints of local space and time. While the technology was not intended to serve government directly, it was nevertheless part of governmental state building. It was a technology deployed by the government for the intention of giving businessmen and traders greater access to the free market economy—the technology was purported to connect the colony to a global dimension of commercial capitalism, thereby reflexively bringing nineteenth-century ideals of civilization and progress, that had originated in Europe, to the local populations in Ceylon. In this sense, the introduction of the telegraph network symbolically represented the organization, control, space, and "governmentality"[220] of nineteenth-century colonial government; but, to repeat, it was not introduced as a *direct* tool of imperial communication.

After a decade of its introduction, this focus changed and the technology became a direct component of Ceylon's colonial government. In the mid 1860s, Ceylon's colonial government began to use the telegraph to send and receive a broad range of its own communications, from shipping news, which would later be published in governmental gazettes, to official correspondence between Ceylon and London. This chapter analyzes the role that these government telegrams played and how they served the colonial government as a direct part of its administration. In it, I focus on the incorporation of the telegraph in the particular channel of colonial government called "official

[220] Governmentality is taken up in chapter, 2 subchapter 2. For a discussion on governmentality, see Simon Gunn, "From Hegemony to Governmentality: Changing Conceptions of Power in Social History," *Journal of Social History* 39, no. 3 (Spring 2006): 705–720.

correspondence"—that is, the communication between the Governor of Ceylon and the Secretary of State for the Colonies. I seek to understand how the telegraph became incorporated in this official channel and what consequences it had on the imperial government. I go on to show that the telegraph added a number of new dimensions to the ways in which the Governor and the Secretary of State communicated; but it did not revolutionize the administration. Letters continued to mediate official correspondence, acting as the main medium used in official correspondence. Rather than replacing letters or transforming the system of communication, telegrams became part of the system, working alongside and in conjunction with letters and other forms of communication.

There are three main reasons that justify the chapter's focus on telegraphic communication and official correspondence. Firstly, as the exclusive chain of communication between the Secretary of State for the colonies and the Governor of Ceylon, official correspondence was the single most important channel of communication between the colony and the imperial center. Secondly, telegrams were used at a regular pace in official correspondence following the Governor of Ceylon's first transmission of a telegram to the Secretary of State on 10 December 1865.[221] From then, telegrams were a normal component of everyday exchanges between the two highest ranking officials responsible for governing the colony. Finally, telegrams enlarged the scope of official correspondence by enabling colonial government officials to communicate in hitherto unknown and unparallel ways. Their use thus marked a watershed in the history of official correspondence, as the new medium altered the capacity of, and the forms and symbols previously ascribed to, the official exchanges between the Secretary of State and the Governor in their pursuit of governing the island of Ceylon. A study of telegraphic communication thus offers fresh grounds for exploring and questioning the relationship between imperial communications, power, and technological change in the nineteenth-century.

The analytical framework of this chapter is rather straightforward. I first explain the system of official correspondence that was in operation before the telegraph was

[221] NA CO 54/406 10 December 1865. The telegram was about the colony's surplus fund.

introduced and then gauge the ways that telegraphic communication became integrated into (and excluded from) it. I delineate the multitude uses and benefits of telegraphic communication in official correspondence as well as its limitations, explaining the extent of its utility. Before proceeding, however, I will briefly reintroduce Ceylon's British political history and explain the basic operational structure of its colonial government. I will then define official correspondence and highlight its significance to the colony and its political history.

Brief Overview of Ceylon's Political History

Until the island's independence in 1948, Ceylon had been a target of colonial contact and imperial intrigue for over four hundred years.[222] This colonial legacy is typically divided between Portuguese rule (1505-1658), Dutch rule (1658-1796), and British rule (1796-1948). Following what Nira Wickramasingha has stated, "for four hundred years the island of Sri Lanka was the prey of successive naval powers that controlled parts or the totality of its land…Colonial conquest was predicated on superior sea power and arms, military organization, political strength and economic wealth."[223] In the wake of these colonial encounters all aspects of life—including the relation between peoples and places, economies, local and global social ties, systems and rationalities of government—underwent significant changes, transformations, fractures, and contestation. For, through all periods of the island's encounter with colonialism, the methods for, the motivations behind, and the extent of territorial conquest differed, as well as the ways in which colonialism became negotiated into the everyday lives of the colonized people. "The 'rule'

[222] For a more in-depth understanding of the British occuupation of Ceylon, espeically in regard to the early years of rule, see: K.M. de Silva, *A History of Sri Lanka* (New York: Penguin Books, 2005); Lennox A. Mills, *Ceylon Under British Rule 1795-1932: with an account of the East India Company's Embassies to Kandy 1762-1795* (London: Oxford University Press, 1933); Garrett Champness Mendis, *Ceylon under the British* (Colombo Apothecaries' Co., 1948); Colvin R. de Silva, *Ceylon under the British occupation 1795-1833*, vol. 1 (Blacksburg: Navrang, 1995); K.M. de Silva, "Chapter I - The Coming of the British to Ceylon," *University of Ceylon, History of Ceylon (from the beginning of the 19th century to 1948)* 3 (1973): 1-11; Vernon L. B Mendis, *The advent of the British to Ceylon, 1762-1803*, 1st ed. (Tisara Prakasakayo, 1971).

[223] Nira Wickramasinghe, *Sri Lanka in the Modern Age: A History of Contested Identities* (Sri Lanka: Vijitha Yapa Publications, 2006), 7.

of these three powers was," finally, "sometimes nothing more than a presence that grew, spread or declined in space time."[224]

British rule differed markedly from that of the Portuguese and the Dutch in a number of notable ways. Firstly, Britain's annexation of the Kandyan Kingdom, located in the central highlands of the island—which later became the site of coffee and then tea plantations—under the auspices of the Kandyan Convention in 1815, signaled the first time in which the entire island came under a European colonial authority. From the perspective of the British, the effects of this conquest included a reengagement with and reformation of the island's political territory, to involve what had until then remained the island's traditional "heartland"—a process which encompassed a significant reorganization of the colony's administrative structures.[225] The fall of the Kandyan Kingdom also signaled a redefinition of British rule in Ceylon. No longer threatened by counter-presence on the island, the focus of expanding commercial capitalism began to trump the attention formally ascribed to military expenditure. This process culminated in the second important unique characteristic of British rule, which was the institution of liberal economic policies beginning in 1833.

The popularly noted Colebrooke-Cameron Reforms of 1833 brought substantial changes to the island's government and, consequently, the formal relationship between colonialism and the island's people. It reconfigured and recast the structure of the island's government, political machinery, and social economy in a multitude of ways. Most notably mercantilism, which had been the *raison d'être* of all three European colonial powers up to this point, was formally abolished. The cinnamon monopoly, which had dominated colonial revenue for centuries, was disbanded and replaced by commercial capitalism. The exportation of coffee, then tea, and rubber by entrepreneurs, with the aid of migrant labor mostly from Southern India, became the highlights of high-noon British imperialism in Ceylon.

[224] Ibid., 8.
[225] K.M. de Silva, "The Development of the Administrative System, 1833 to c.1910", 217

The advent of British rule is itself divisible by a few noteworthy circumstances. Firstly, the British originally encountered Ceylon as a profit seeking business venture under the guise of the English East India Company, which seized Jaffna and Colombo from the Dutch in 1796. It was not sought as a potential location for a colony. The British government, however, was also implicated in the capture. It had militarily backed up the East India Company in order to be able to use the island's maritime regions, such as Trincomalee, as naval bases to secure ships against any possible future threat from the French in India. If the French attempted to siege India, the British would have at their dispose closely located military ships to counterattack.

Secondly, it was not until a few years later that the formal British Crown became involved in ruling Ceylon. In 1797, the failure of peace negotiations at Lille triggered the British government to place Ceylon more emphatically under the Crown than before.[226] Responsibility of ruling Ceylon was then divided between the Company and the government—whilst the director of the Company was in charge of financial and commercial matters, the Governor General controlled issues of law and order. This dual rule quickly ended because of pressure from the central government and, on the 1st of January 1802, Ceylon was placed under the sole rule of the British Crown. It was formally ceded by the fifth article of the Peace of Amiens in March of the same year.[227] The early history of the British in Ceylon was thus marked by significant changes in the structure of its power. But, from 1802 until its independence, Ceylon remained what historians have called a "Crown Colony."

The Colonial Office List (1878), 1878. The 1878 *Colonial Office List* provides us with the first formal definition of a British Crown Colony. In it, a Crown Colony is defined as a colony in which the crown held absolute control over legislation, whilst the administration was carried on by public officers under the control of the Home Government. The definition is only loosely defined, however. It did not take into account any of a colony's unique

[226]Nira Wickramasinghe, *Sri Lanka in the Modern Age*, 26.

[227] K.M. de Silva, "Chapter I - The Coming of the British to Ceylon," 10; G.C. Mendis, *The Colebrooke-Cameron Papers: Documents on British Colonial Policy in Ceylon 1796-1833*, vol. 1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1956), 30; de Silva, *Ceylon Under the British Occupation 1795-1833*, 1:249; Mills, *Ceylon Under British Rule 1795-1932: With an Account of the East India Company's Embassies to Kandy 1762-1795*, 41; A.E. Buultjens, ed., "The Dutch East India Company and the Peace of Aimens, 1802," in *Ceylon Antiquary and Literary Register*, vol. I, pt IV, 1916, 237–242.

characteristics. For example, although Crown Colonies functioned within a constitutional framework laid down by acts of Parliament, constitutional uniformity was not ensured throughout the empire. Making light of the subject, but reflecting seriously on it, T.O. Lloyd wrote "Perhaps there really was a rule at the Colonial Office that no colony should have a constitution exactly like that of any other colony; if so, it was enforced with an entirely untypical uniformity." [228] Also, the type of rule implicated in each territory varied at different points in the colony's history. For example, India, which began as a venture of the English East India Company, became directly ruled by the Crown following the intense altercations between the British government and Sepoys in northern India in 1857. As described above, British occupation in Ceylon followed a similar, albeit less bloody, trajectory, in which the island began as a British East India Company venture and later developed into a territory under the sole power of the British Crown. The category, Crown Colony, thus while useful in imagining the identity of a colony generally, does not account for a colony's constitutional or historical details.

The Crown only virtually controlled Ceylon, in any case. Real authority rested in the representative bodies of the Governor General appointed to the island and the Secretary of State for the colonies. Their individual duties and interactions constituted the foundation of Ceylon's government. The Secretary of State was the representative of the Crown for the colonies. He was responsible to the British Government, and thence to Parliament, for the affairs of the colonies under his domain. All decisions regarding the ways in which colonies under his jurisdiction were run ultimately began and ended with him. All legislative, executive, and judicial decisions were under his authority and all individual Acts depended on his consent. An official was given title to represent him and enforce his decisions within the colonies.

The Governor General represented the Secretary of State in Ceylon. The full extent of his authority was impressive. He had executive and legislative powers and responsibilities within the colony—and he exercised virtually all the constitutional functions of the Crown within his territory. The breadth and scope of his duties were officially declared in

[228] T.O. Lloyd, *The British Empire 1558-1995* (Oxford, 1996).

the both *Rules and Regulations for Her majesty's Colonial Service*,[229] of 1843, and in the *Colonial Office List* under the "Rules and Regulations" chapter concerning the behavior of the Governor[230] (figure 1). According to the texts, the Governor was in charge of everything that occurred in his colony, from the smallest of bureaucratic details such as granting leaves of absence to the institution of large scale public infrastructural projects, civil servant appointments, dealing with riots, and managing the colony's finance; and, he was even the final verdict on criminal trials.[231] While his powers were supreme in Ceylon, however, he was subject to the Secretary of State in London. As his subordinate, the Governor was expected to obey the Secretary of State's instructions on matters of any importance; or, he was obliged to postpone action until he had obtained the higher official's prior consent.[232] In cases of emergency like riots or famines, however, the Governor had discretionary authority to take immediate action and could disobey unnecessary directions. Still, the Governor had to inform the Secretary of State of any course of action which he took and all measures remained provisional, not official, until consented.[233] So, while the Governor had the right and duty to rule Ceylon directly, the Secretary of State was wholly implicated in the process. Ceylon was thus ruled, on a fundamental level at least, by the hierarchically distinct officials of Governor and Secretary of State. Official correspondence was the formal medium of exchange between these two powers and therefore representative of the Crown itself.

Official Correspondence

Official correspondence, also known as official "despatches," formed the core of Ceylon's colonial government.[234] It was any and all communications between the

[229] Great Britain. Colonial Office, *Rules and Regulations for Her Majesty's Colonial Service* (Printed by W. Clowes and sons for H.M. Stationery off., 1843), 1–9.
[230] *The Colonial Office List (1878)*, 1878; Arthur N. Birch and William Robinson, *The Colonial Office List for 1867, Comprising Historical and Statistical Information Respecting the Colonial Dependencies of Great Britain: With an Account of the Services of the Principal Officers of the Several Colonial Governments* (Pall Mall: Harrison, 1867).
[231] Birch and Robinson, *Colonial Office List for 1867*, 136.
[232] Mills, *Ceylon Under British Rule 1795-1932: With an Account of the East India Company's Embassies to Kandy 1762-1795*, 101.
[233] Ibid., 101.
[234] R.B. Pugh, *The Records of the Colonial and Dominions Offices* (HMSO, 1964), 34.

Governor and the Secretary of State in administering the colony.[235] While its primary purposes were to inform, instruct, and to inquire on various subject matters related to colonial government, it was, more importantly, the medium through which colonial government articulated itself; being both the practical and representational link between the Home government in London and the colony. Whether related to fiscal matters, legislative enactments, executive decisions, or even descriptions of cultural events and ideas, most aspects of Ceylon's government was discursively bound in the form of official correspondence. [236] The majority of communicated topics dealt with everyday administrative business, including, but not limited to, descriptions of account balances, official appointments, public expenditure, and requests for leave of absence. Extraordinary events such as the outbreak of riots, famine, and disciplinary problems were also, but less frequently, communicated. Whatever the topic: official correspondence was the means by which the Governor and the Secretary of State communicated and managed the colony.[237]

Official correspondence also articulated and represented the hierarchical relationship between the Governor and the Secretary of State. Take this event for example, in which the Governor made a decision knowing beforehand that the Secretary of State would not have approved. Lord Granville had appointed Sir William Gregory as Governor of Ceylon in 1871. The following year he set sail with his wife to uphold his position.[238] As

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[235] Rules 153 and 154 of the "Rules and Regulations" section of the *Colonial Office List* expressly indicate this rule.Arthur N. Birch and William Robinson, *The Colonial Office List for 1867, comprising Historical and Statistical Information respecting the Colonial Dependencies of Great Britain: With an account of the Services of the Principal Officers of the Several Colonial Governments* (Pall Mall: Harrison, 1867), 146.

[236] It is useful to note that individual governors had considerable but varying authority to "run their territory as they saw fit," subject to instructions issued on the governor's appointment, the agreement of legislature, and pressure from local interest. Thus the degree to which events were mentioned in despatches varied accordingly. See: Mandy Banton, *Administering the Empire, 1801-1968: A Guide to the Records of the Colonial Office in the National Archives of the UK* (Institute of Historical Research, 2008), 52-3.

[237] This is not to say that other types of correspondence were not important to decision-making. It is just to say that only correspondence between the governor and secretary of state counted as official language in respect to colonial government. In fact, a great deal of correspondence which reached either London or Colombo derived from other people and places. There was a lot of correspondence, for example, between the governor's secretariat and the Colonial Office's upper class staff. For example: NA CO 54/292 29 August 1873.

[238] Governor Gregory writes in his autobiography that upon arriving in Ceylon he was struck by scenes of beauty—not uncommon to contemporary observers.He was in awe over the island's pleasant natural landscape. 'The morning was beautiful', he wrote, "and the scenery absolutely enchanting…" Gregory, Sir. William Henry, *Sir William Gregory, K. C. M. G., formerly member of Parliament and sometime governor of Ceylon.*

other Governors before him, his first night's stay in Ceylon was ceremoniously commemorated at the Queen's House in Galle. He was met by the civil and military elite of the town and put up in the best of the building's rooms, replete with privileged amenities. While he was struck pleasantly by the beauty of the "hibiscus flowers in the little garden attached"[239] to it, he was at incommensurable odds with the enormous size of the estate bed that he was to sleep in, which was, in his words, "large enough to allow at least a half a dozen folks to sleep in comfort."[240] Not that he thought of himself too humbly to be met by such grand circumstances, but the fact that the greatness of the Queen's House came at the expense of the colony was considered to be impractical and unnecessary, especially since there was already a most "admirable hotel in the town."[241] Selling the Queen's House at Galle for £1500 and buying another at Newara Eliya, "for about the same amount,"[242] was one of his first actions as Governor. Whether the new house was less ostentatious than the one in Galle is irrespective. What is interesting here is the way in which Governor Gregory executed his decision. Warned by his Colonial Secretary Mr. Irving that the Secretary of State would not approve of the sale, Governor Gregory decided that the best course of action then was "to act first and inform the Secretary of State later."[243] That meant, he would sell the house and then declare in a "despatch" that he had done so. The despatch was sent as a telegram; it was handed to the Colonial Office on the 10th of November 1872 at 10pm. All it said was "Galle House sold last month."[244] "Great was his [the Secretary of State's] wrath," continued Gregory in his autobiography, "and an angry desptach was sent to me, stating that I was not warranted in disposing of a public building of that kind."[245] Governor Gregory said that he replied "in a penitent, but somewhat sarcastic missive" and he did not meet any further consequences.[246] I use this example because it shows how official correspondence was used for purposes that transcended the practical. It was also representational.

An autobiography: Gregory, William Henry, Sir, 1817-1892, ed. Lady Gregory (London: William Clowes and Sons, Limited., 1894), 270-71.
[239] Ibid., 270.
[240] Ibid.
[241] Ibid.
[242] Ibid.
[243] Ibid.
[244] NA CO 54/480, 10 November 1872
[245] Gregory, Sir. William Henry, *Sir William Gregory*, 270–71.
[246] Ibid., 271.

Irrespective of the Governor's non-compliant actions, sending official correspondence redressed his subversive actions by showing symbolically that hierarchy was respected.

Governor Gregory's course of action was not uncommon; in fact, it exemplified quite well the characteristic of his position. The relationship between the Governor and the Secretary of State functioned under, what early twentieth-century historian Henry L. Hall has called, an unspoken "policy of trust."[247] When the question of Governor Salaries was presented before the Parliamentary Committee of 1847-48, Earl Grey said it was "sound economy to pay them well" because the best men were needed: "To attempt to conduct the details of the administration from this country is absolutely impracticable."[248] At the end of the 1870s, Charles Adderly, Parliamentary Under-Secretary, remarked that "in distant Crown Colonies the Home Government can only supervise—they cannot judge except on the Governor's information. Their original act is sending a good Governor, and their check is dismissing him. He may not initiate essential changes without consulting them and obtaining their sanction, but he may have to guide and influence local opinion and test and even agitate local feeling on questions of reform…"[249] Selling a public building behind the Secretary of State's back may have challenged to some extent the policy of trust inherent in their relationship, but it did not warrant the Secretary of State's main method of checking his authority, which would have been the dismissal of the Governor from his position in office. While he was by description an appointee subordinate to the Secretary of State and was therefore required to follow his superior's every command, the Governor in actuality held far yielding executive powers and exercised a significant amount of autonomy in the colony. It was a matter of expressing his behavior as a subordinate in official correspondence in a proper protocol which was most important for the retention of their relationship and the representation of hierarchy. Official correspondence was thus the channel of expression through which colonial rule and policy were maintained and shared; and, it was the plane on and through which the hierarchical distinctions between the Secretary of State and the Governor were practiced

[247] Henry L. Hall, *The Colonial Office : a History* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1934), 113.
[248] Referenced from: Hall, *The Colonial Office*, 113-114; located in, Parliamentary Paper 543 of 1847-48.
[249] Hall, *The Colonial Office*, 113–114.

and actualized. Ceylon's colonial government was therefore dynamically fashioned together by the words contained in official correspondence.

System of Communication

By the time the telegraph arrived on the island, a system of communication designed to circulate official correspondence was already well established. This system had formed the basis of Ceylon's colonial government, as it was the channel through which Ceylon and the Home government exercised Crown authority in the island, and the vehicle through which decisions about the colony were articulated, transferred, and executed.
The official correspondence letter and its flow between and within the Colonial Office and Ceylon were the most important and noteworthy components of this system of communication; a system which I now attempt to explain.

The Letter

Before the advent of the telegraph, the system to communicate official correspondence communication was fundamentally dominated by letters. Supplementary materials such as blue books of statistics and legislative and executive proceedings were also part of the parcel of official correspondence despatches. However, letters were the start and end of any and all conversations between the Governor and the Secretary of State in regard to government; all other materials played and ancillary role.

There are a few main points consider about letters. Firstly, letters were not just manifestations of the Governor's thoughts at random, an idea thought up in the middle of the night and written on personal stationery. Rather, official correspondence letters, and the kind of information they contained, were officially drafted, structured, ordered, and regulated. The appearance of official correspondence letters was standard and uniform. Their pages were made of parchment, slightly larger than today's 'A4' size. They were often composed on multiple sheets of paper. And letters arrived as parts of a parcel of despatches.

Next, letters were uniform. Most official correspondence letters were almost always formatted in the following ways (figure 2). First, the name of the colony in concern appeared in dark black ink at the top of the first page. Second, below that the location from where and the date on which the letter was sent were described. Third, the body of the message began in the middle of the page, starting with a proper address to the Secretary of State or the Governor, referring to his official title. Their names, therefore, were preceded with indications to these respective titles, usually with Lord or Sir—a typical written address to the Secretary of State would commence with "Dear Sir or My Lord," for example.[250] Whichever title, the Governor and the Secretary of State most always indicated, following the address, "the Honor" with which the message was written to their superior or subordinate, or, in cases of tragedy, their deep felt "regret." Fourth, the addressee's name and title were repeated at the bottom left of the same page. Fifth, the message was divided into paragraphs, which were numbered if more than one was used. And, the message of the letter conveyed and articulated a specific topic of government, such as a request for opinion, affirmation, or advice, and/or a descriptive and qualitative report. Sixth, any information therein that the Governor or Secretary of State cited from other sources, including other despatches, was written into the margins of the letter next to the cited words. Seventh, the closing of the letter and the sender's signature were given on the final page. Finally, the back side of the final page included a sentence describing the title of the letter and an abstract summary of its content. These eight characteristics were found on nearly every official correspondence letter sent between the Governor of Ceylon and the Secretary of State.

Finally, a letter's appearance, structure, and uniformity were regulated by the Colonial Office. Beginning in 1825, when the Colonial Office recognized the "want of some uniform mode in which all official communications should be addressed to this Department,"[251] the conduct of official correspondence became regulated by detailed instructions included in the "Rules and Regulations" of the *Colonial Office List*—first

[250] Governors too held titles. General Henry Ward was Sir, for example. And, many secretaries of state carried titles such as Duke, Baron, Earl, Marquess, or Viscount as well.
[251] Banton, *Administering the Empire, 1801-1968*, 50-51. cites: CO 854/1, circular despatch of 26 July 1825.

compiled in 1837, and amended from time to time thereafter.[252] The instructions explained and set out the requirements for the layout of letters and their numbering.[253] For example, rule 155 stated that "The Governor's despatches should be written in a large and distinct hand, with dark ink, on folio paper of uniform size; and an inner margin of about one-third of the paper should be left."[254] The following few rules dictated how to docket and make notes in the margins.[255] There were twenty-five rules related to the fashion and procedures of letter writing and sending between the Governor and the Secretary of State. Finished, submitted letters therefore resembled each other, albeit differing in subject matter and size (figure 3). Such regulations enforced a rationally uniform system of correspondence which instilled regularity in appearance, structure, and language in letter writing.

Flow Between and Within the Colonial Office and Ceylon

The monthly mail was a fundamental component of the movement of letters between Ceylon and London.[256] Essentially, the official correspondence system was predicated upon on the regular and predictable intervals of mail delivered by way of sail and then steam ship. Letters were written, placed on a mail ship, and then sorted methodically and rationally each month, on a planned day, at the Colonial Office and in the Colony. Once a letter was signed by the proper authority, it was put into the post, shipped across thousands of miles of ocean and terrain, and then received at the other end. There it was circulated through bureaucratic channels. The information of the letter was examined and informed the necessary course of governmental action. Official correspondence letters, thus, followed a rational pattern of transmission and circulation. It flowed between two main sites: the Governor's secretariat in Colombo[257] and the Colonial Office in London.

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[252] Ibid.
[253] Ibid., 50–1.
[254] Birch and Robinson, *Colonial Office List for 1867*, 46.
[255] Ibid., 46.
[256] For an account of the P&O, which were the ships used to transport mail, see: David Howarth and Stephen Howarth, *The Story of P & O: Peninsular and Oriental Steam Navigation Company* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1995), 7-37; Boyd Cable, *A Hundred Year History of the P&O: Peninsular and Oriental Steam Navigation Comp* (London: Ivor Nicholson & Watson, 1937).
[257] Arnold Wright, *Twentieth Century Impressions of Ceylon: Its History, People, Commerce, Industries, and Resources* (Asian Educational Services, 1999), 106; The governor's secretariat was a block of buildings adjoining the

For the purpose of analysis, however, I will restrict the scope of this chapter to the flow of correspondence in the Colonial Office and will exclude a detailed examination of the system of official correspondence from the perspective of the Governor's secretariat. [258]

The Colonial Office located at thirteen and fourteen Downing Street, London, was created to deal specifically with the needs of the colonies and assigned to the Secretary of State for the colonies.[259] The Colonial Office was in essence the Secretary of State's secretariat, "the tool with which he does his work,"[260] although in practice his subordinate staff was responsible for a great deal of the actual colonial administration. Under his authority there was an army of subordinate officials to aid in the duties of handling and administering official correspondence letters.[261] These subordinates included the posts of three assistant undersecretaries, the permanent undersecretary, his assistants, senior and subordinate clerks, office keepers, and messengers.[262] All official correspondence letters were written, read, and processed on premise by these official persons.

Regularity of transmission and circulation was not always a characteristic of official

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legislative council chambers near the Queen's House in Fort, Colombo. It comprised the chief government offices. And the secretarial, clerical, and administrative affairs of the island were handled on premise. It was the island's office of records, containing the documents, or the substance of the documents, connected with every branch of service. The Colonial Secretary's Office and its staff, hailed on premise. The colonial secretary, the principal assistant, the second principal assistant, a maha modliar, approximately five writers, a printer and his assistant were responsible to write, prepare, and process official correspondence letters for the governor. *The Colonial Office List (1878)*, 37.

[258] There were other important institutions involved in the transmission of official correspondence letters—including the Postal Departments and the steam ship companies such as the Peninsular and Oriental Steam Navigation Company, which were critical in the transmission letters across the waters. However, a detailed analysis of them falls outside the scope of this study.

[259] For a more indepth history of the Colonial Office, see R.B. Pugh, "The Colonial Office, 1801-1925," in *The Cambridge History of the British Empire: The Empire-Commonwealth*, ed. E.A. Benians, Sir James Butler, and C.E. Carrington, vol. 3 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959), 711-68; R.B. Pugh, *The Records of the Colonial and Dominions Offices* (HMSO, 1964), 7-9; Paul Knaplund, *James Stephen and the British colonial system, 1813-1847* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1974), 3-66; Helen Taft Manning, "Who Ran the British Empire 1830-1850?," *The Journal of British Studies* 5, no. 1 (November 1965): 88-121; Banton, *Administering the Empire, 1801-1968*, 35-46; Hall, *The Colonial office*, 1-87; Sir Charles Jeffries, *The Colonial Office/ by Sir Charles Jeffries; with a foreword by Sir Thomas Lloyd*, New Whitehall series ; no. 3 (London and New York: Allen & Unwin; Oxford University Press, 1956).

[260] Banton, *Administering the Empire, 1801-1968*, 36.

[261] "Following the outbreak of the Crimean War in 1853, an additional post of Secretary of State was created, and the dual functions of the formerly united War and Colonial Department were split in 1854. It is only from this date that therefore that there can be said to be a Colonial Office proper." In Ibid.

[262] Robert V. Kubicek, *The Administration of Imperialism: Joseph Chamberlain at the Colonial Office* (Durham: Duke UNiversity Press, 1969), 15.

correspondence letters, however. The sending and recording of letters in the 1820s and prior were unmistakably sloppy and irregular. Incoming letters were arranged haphazardly; drafts of replies were infrequently unavailable. And it was difficult to assess the course of action taken on any case presented in the letters, or by whom.[263] By the early 1840s, though, the operations of the Colonial Office became rationalized under what has been termed "Stephen's system,"[264]named after its progenitor Permanent Undersecretary James Stephen (4 February 1836—May 1848).[265] Under this system, the errors of the previous decades were rectified. Stamps were introduced on all papers and contained the names of officials down to the rank of senior clerk, "to permit at a glance the determination of who has seen a given document and when." Drafts of outgoing letters were retained. In general, the most notable effects of Stephen's system were that whereas before channels of communication were uncertain, they were then made precise, knowable, and routine.[266] The system remained relatively unaltered until the early 1870s.

Stephen's system was applied more or less similarly to every letter. Typically, once a batch of official correspondence letters was received at the Colonial Office the following routine ensued. The first step was that a letter was sorted and registered.[267] Normally, this involved entering specific details of it into the "register of correspondence,"[268] which was in essence an official ruled entry book. The letter was given a number, depending upon the date on which it was sent in relation to other despatches. These numbers started with 1 for the first item opened and registered on the first working day of January each year. This number was stamped or written onto the despatch, normally in the header, and onto any accompanying minute sheet and often the enclosures too. The number was again marked in the register of correspondence. This number was important because it acted as

[263] John W. Cell, *British Colonial Administration in the Mid-Nineteenth Century* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1970), 9.
[264] Knaplund, *James Stephen and the British Colonial System, 1813-1847*, 6–36; Cell, *British Colonial Administration*, 10.
[265] J.C. Sainty, *Office-Holders in Modern Britain VI Colonial Office Officials: Officials of the Secretary of State for War 1794-1802, of the Secretary of State for War and Colonies 1801-54 and of the Secretary of State for Colonies 1854-70* (London: University of London Institute of Research, 1976), 49.
[266] Cell, *British Colonial Administration*, 10.
[267] There were different ways to register the received letters, depending on a letter's place of origin, its sender, and the type of information it contained.
[268] Colonial Office, "Colonial Office and Predecessor: Ceylon Register of Correspondence" (Kew, London), National Archives. (hereafter CO 337). This series contains registers of correspondence relating to Ceylon.

a "unique identifier" for the item, making possible cross-references to it among other papers. The layout of the register of correspondence was divided into eight categories. One entry covered a double page spread. Columns from left to right provided the following information:

1. Date of receipt in Colonial Office.
2. Colonial Office registered number.
3. Name of correspondent.
4. Date on which the letter was written.
5. Reference allocated by the Governor or other correspondent.
6. Subject of correspondence.
7. Cross-references to previous and subsequent papers on the same or a closely related subject.
8. A note of the action taken.[269]

After the letter was registered it was handled in turn by members of the upper level office staff. Although the Secretary of State had the final say on the content of a letter, each staff member was responsible to some extent to comment upon it beforehand.

It was first and foremost read by the senior clerk of the department. His duty was to make the first evaluation of the despatch to determine its relevance, immediate importance and, in pen on the letter, express his opinion about its content. For example, he would give his judgment on situations such as: should an engineer be given an extended leave of absence? Should the Kandyan peasants be granted additional land for cultivation? (However, messages regarding greater importance such as the outbreak of a mutiny or famine crises went straight to the Secretary of State's desk.) With the help of the junior clerks under his control, the senior clerk collected all the relevant information within the despatches—i.e., "those prominent points which his experience and constant reference to the general correspondence suggests, and proposes, in ordinary cases, the

[269] CO 337.

form of the answer, or the practical course of dealing with the subject."[270] If the correspondence required an explanation or analysis, he forwarded it along with statements, prepared either by himself or under his supervision, to the assistant undersecretary, or to the permanent undersecretary, according to the nature of the subject. Each of whom then passed the information to the parliamentary undersecretary with their respective observations jotted upon it. From him, the despatch reached the Secretary of State to consider all that had been submitted thus far, to request additional information, and to record his decision upon the letter.

After, the papers returned through the same channel to the senior clerk, whose duty it was to examine the minutes and drafts, "in order to see whether any point in the instructions may be at variance with facts, regulations, or precedents not known to the Secretary of State or Under Secretaries; and to execute all the final instructions he may receive, by preparing the drafts, or causing them to be prepared by his assistants, and superintending the copying and despatch of the letters to be written from them."[271] All drafts finally received the sanction of the parliamentary undersecretary and the Secretary of State. While not all letters went through this rigmarole exactly, nearly every level of the colonial office staff was implicated in the process of reading a letter, administering its content—and, thus, taking part in colonial government administration. Almost every letter reached the Secretary of State's desk, no matter how perfunctory the subject matter.[272]

Bureaucratic Trail

The flow of a letter through the office left behind a discernable bureaucratic trail. Decision making at the Colonial Office was generally by personal discussion until 1830, which left no paper trail. Over time, however, Stephen's system of note taking, writing recommendations, and marking decisions in ink onto official correspondence letters in and around the margins became a standard administrative practice. Thus, the bureaucratic

[270] *Reports of Committees of Inquiry into Public Offices and Papers Connected Therewith* (London: George E. Eyre and William Spottiswoode: Printers to the Queen's Most Excellent Majesty. For Her Majesty's Stationary Office, 1854), 47-48.
[271] Ibid., 47-48.
[272] Cell, *British Colonial Administration*, 34; Brian L. Blakeley, *The Colonial Office: 1868-1892* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1972), 7.

process of official correspondence letters within the Colonial Office can be traced by examining these marks and initials on letters.[273]

The notes in the margins of a letter written by Governor MacCarthy on 24 November 1860 at the Queen's House, Colombo, represent this process well.[274] In the letter, the Governor announced the death of a Civil Servant of fairly high ranking and responsibility, who held simultaneously the offices of District Judge, Commissioner of Requests, and Police Magistrate of Chilaw; and he described the steps taken to replace the vacated positions. The Governor sent the letter to describe and make official the decisions he had made in replacing the deceased civil servant.

An examination of the markings on the first page of the letter reveals a fair amount of detail about the reception and registration of the letter. For example, on figure 2, it is known that the letter was numbered twenty six, thus being the twenty-sixth letter received that year. The content of the letter concerned the "Civil" branch of government according to the bold letters on the left. The letter was received on the 1st of January 1861 and was page 219 of the despatch documents. In the center, to the left of the message body, the letter was discernibly answered by the Colonial Office on the 15th of January.

As we turn the pages, we can see how the letter traveled through the different staff hands at the office (figure 4). On the fourth page of the letter a staff member wrote a note in pencil in the right-hand margin of paragraph four. He remarked, "a very desirable thing," indicating that he was in favor of the Governor's appointment of Mr. Mooyaart as assistant agent and police magistrate of Kaigalle, as well as the Governor's attitude that such an appointment was the best possible arrangement for the interests of public service. Hardly legible, however, were the initials of the person who wrote the note. Given that these notes were written alongside the letter's message, it is very likely that the notes belonged to the senior clerk, since his were the first pair of eyes to read official correspondence letters. As far as I can tell, the initials confirm this, and belonged to

[273] Knowing who, exactly, can be quite difficult because of illegible handwriting.
[274] CO 54/355, 24 November 1860

Senior Clerk, Cox, C., appointed 1 January 1860.[275] On page six of the letter, as indicated by the same initials, Senior Clerk C. Cox's notes again appeared (figure 5). Here, in the margins of the sixth paragraph, he wrote "In April, I think," thus giving his opinion about, as pondered by the Governor in the text, "the return of Mr. Cairns now in England on leave of absence."

The backside of the last page is covered in many notes (figure 6). Although it is difficult to decipher when or by whom each individual note was made, since they appear together, these notes represent the final process of a letter's trail through bureaucracy. The initials here were made by high ranking office staff officials, such as the undersecretary and his assistants. Some information is plainly legible. The text on the top left of the page was written by Mr. Ellis, who had been assistant undersecretary from 20 November 1847 until 3 December 1868. The note was: "I conclude the Duke of Newcastle [the Secretary of State for Colonies] will confirm these appointments, in which case a writership will be at his disposal." Below this note again appear Senior Clerk C. Cox's initials with an illegible note. Below that, the word "confirm" is written, and to the right are a signature and two sets of initials. The Secretary of State's initials are not represented on the letter, however, which is normal given that all notes on the letter were written specifically for him to read. His executive decision was based on these notes.

Although a bit shaky, it is possible to construct a narrative of the letter as it made its way through the various hands of the Colonial Office's staff, from its registration to the Senior Clerk's first responses and notes, as well as the final marks made by the undersecretary and his assistants. Letters flowed continuously in such a fashion, through the staff's hands until they reached the Secretary of State, who then either put by the letters or drafted a response. As indicated by the markings, the Governor's appointments were positively received at the Colonial Office. Referencing the Secretary of State's personal response to the Governor's letter is the only way to truly affirm this assessment, however. Most, if not all, letters between the Governor and the Secretary of State were

[275] J.C. Sainty, *Office-Holders in Modern Britain VI Colonial Office Officials: Officials of the Secretary of State for War 1794-1802, of the Secretary of State for War and Colonies 1801-54 and of the Secretary of State for Colonies 1854-70*, 15.

placed through similar bureaucratic procedures. From the 1860s, however, such marks were written onto an attached minute sheet (figure 7). However, notes and initials still appeared in the margins of letters.

Official correspondence, which was based on the circulation and flow of letters, was subsequently challenged to incorporate the telegraphically technology. To what extent were telegrams used? Did they replace letters? Did they improve official correspondence communications? I turn now to these questions and analyze the uses and limitations of telegrams as official correspondence in the context of this system.

USES AND LIMITATIONS OF TELEGRAMS AS OFFICIAL CORRESPONDENCE

At first glance, telegrams seem to have made great improvements to official correspondence. The Governor was able to communicate quickly with the Secretary of State, information was shared rapidly, and the Secretary of State was given greater opportunity to control the Governor's decisions and actions on a day-to-day basis. There is plenty of evidence to support these benefits as well, many of which I will represent below. Telegrams were indeed dynamic instruments of communication and were adopted and used in a variety of creative ways. One way of showing how useful telegrams were is by making a comparison of them to letters. The slow speed of writing and sending using letters brings the many benefits of telegrams into sharp relief.

Limitations of Letters

Except for several telegrams sent before 1870, letters had constituted official correspondence between the Secretary of State and the Governor of Ceylon.[276] Although

[276] Although there were a few official correspondence telegrams sent over the Karachi to London over ground line between 1865 and 1870, the submission of these telegrams took just as long as letters, approximately one month. It is for this reason that I focus on the telegrams sent from 1870 as these were stable and sent within a few hours. The following are the telegrams used as official correspondence between 1865 and 1870: CO 54/406, 7 December 1865; CO 54/ 412, 28 May 1866; CO 54/ 414, 15 September 1866; CO 54/417, 26 December 1866; CO 54/424, 14 January 1867; CO 54/427, 31 August

letters were the primary form of communication, they were incessantly slow and tended to drag on the process of official correspondence. Drafting a letter not only took time but a letter traveling by ship and mail carriers took approximately one month to across the thousands of miles of ocean and terrain in between Ceylon to London. A response at minimum, therefore, took two months. For the function of Ceylon's colonial administration this was at times problematic. The Secretary of State did not know immediately what was occurring in Ceylon at any given moment, which left little possibility for him to interject in decisions made by the Governor, if needed. The Governor, in turn, could not ask the Secretary of State for advice or gain reference to matters which may have required immediate action and assistance.

At the apex of the so-called Indian Mutiny, on 6 June 1857, Governor General Henry Ward submitted a letter to Secretary of State for the Colonies Henry Labouchere.[277] Governor Ward wrote in the letter that he had received a letter on 29 May from the Governor General of India, requesting urgently "that a portion of the European Regiment station in Ceylon might be shared, temporarily, for the purpose of restoring safety to our Indian possessions."[278] According Governor general, the supply of available British troops in northern India was severely limited and would not suffice to hold back the riotous groups against which the British were then at arms. The Governor General of India was in dire need of assistance from Ceylon as the deployment of troops from the island to the mainland could be assured with relative haste, given the geographic proximity of the two colonies. In addition to describing the Governor General of India's request for Ceylon's troops, the letter continued for twenty three more pages and included details of Governor Ward's response to the Governor General's letter as well as his reaction to the situation in India more generally. To summarize: Governor Ward amassed and deployed 500 troops to India by way of steamer; because of the anxiety caused by thinking that the disorder occurring in India would soon spread to Ceylon he also gave "considerable sanction to the police force, both at Colombo and Kandy" for

1867; CO 54/428, 14 December 1867; CO 54/433, 12 March 1868; CO 54/435, 11 June 1868; CO 54/433, 14 May 1868; CO 54/436, 8 July 1868; CO 54/445, 11 July 1869; CO 54/448, 25 November 1869; CO 54/448, 29 November 1869.

[277] CO 54/329, 6 June 1857.

[278] Ibid.

the ostensible protection of the island; and, he described conversations contained in letters he had had with other but relevant individuals, such as General Bailey, in the course of framing his response and actions.[279]

According to the registration stamp on the letter, Henry Labouchere did not receive Governor Ward's letter until 15 July.[280] This was more than one month since Ceylon's Governor had written it and nearly two months after the Governor General of India's urgent letter had reached Ceylon's Governor. A consideration of such disconnected dates is of importance as it indicates that all actions taken by the Governor in respect to Ceylon's assistance to India, as well as the measures taken to serve the safety of the colony itself, were not known by the Secretary of State until after they were executed by the Governor. Henry Labouchere's thoughts on, and immediate reactions to, such decisions were therefore rendered irrelevant. By this point in time Governor General Ward's mind and his decisions had been made, the troops had been sent, and the island's administrative centers were teeming with a new police force armed and geared to preserve and protect the peace. This delayed absence of the letter, therefore, fixed the Secretary of State and the Governor of Ceylon at a muted divide. Not only was the Secretary of State at the receiving end of information about events occurring in Ceylon, but the Governor, too, was isolated from the opinions, expressions, or concerns that the Secretary of State may have had. Although the situation was handled without impunity, the slow transmission of the letter nonetheless removed the Secretary of State from interjecting and placed limitations on how he may have reacted.

It was not only during times of crises that the slow speed of letters posed problems. Even in everyday administrative practices, such as the sending and receiving of expenditure reports, the slow pace of the letter limited the Governor's and the Secretary of State's ability to communicate. A rather lengthy and complex letter regarding the administration of the colony's surplus funds, sent to the Secretary of State by the Governor of Ceylon on 5 December 1865, illustrates this point well.[281] To begin with, the letter represented

[279] Ibid.
[280] Ibid.
[281] CO 54/406, 5 December 1865.

the Governor of Ceylon's recognition of the changes to an expenditure policy which the Secretary of State had supposedly mandated in a previous letter, dated a year earlier, on the 31 October 1864. Until the reception of this letter, the Governor had written, it had been the normal practice of Ceylon's administration "for the appropriation of [each year's budget] to be expended within the year."[282] This had meant that all sums unexpended on public works at the termination of each year were added to the surplus balance and thus became unavailable except under the expressed sanction of the Secretary of State. It also entailed that "the completion of all works unfinished on the 31st December in each year had therefore to be provided for out of the revenue of the following year."[283] The Governor wrote that this had caused many difficulties. It not only made finding and paying for labor challenging, but it also complicated the engineers' ability to estimate the costs of upcoming, or in progress, projects, as they "would have to arrange for funds for the following year in the middle of the current year."[284]

According to the Governor, the Secretary of State in the letter dated 31 October 1864 had, presumably, changed this policy. The Governor remarked that he had taken this letter as an indication by the Secretary of State to "place a relaxation of this [previous expenditure] practice," thus allowing "sums voted in the annual Appropriation Ordinance for any work to be expended upon if it were commenced or contracted for within two years from the date of the ordinance."[285] If this were true, he conjectured, projects remain funded, without interval, for up to two years at a time; and that, as a result, the older, abovementioned practice would be altered. The Governor continued to write that the prospect of changing the expenditure policy along such lines was received well in Ceylon. An announcement of it was made and it was "held as a boon" among members of the "legislative Council, the local press, and all intelligent members of the community."[286]

However, the Governor's reason for writing the letter, dated the 5 December 1865, was not to share this satisfaction with the Secretary of State. Rather, he wrote it because he

[282] Ibid.
[283] Ibid.
[284] Ibid.
[285] Ibid.
[286] Ibid.

had "just received" another letter bearing the stamp of the 14 October 1865, which presented information that contradicted the letter of the 31 October in the previous year.[287] The Governor wrote: "It now seems questionable whether it was ever your [the Secretary of State's] intention that unexpended balances on unfinished works should be brought forward at all against surplus funds, and whether, if brought forward, they should not have been re-appropriated?"[288] The information in the previous letter, dated 31 October 1864, which had been well received, was suddenly thwarted by the information found in the letter dated 14 October 1865. Because of this, the Governor, and his plans to change the expenditure policy, became perplexed. The letter, according to the Governor, was received just two days before the Session of the Legislation was at its close and that "the Supply Bill has already been passed through Committee."[289] Unable to communicate straightaway with the Secretary of State and ask what he should do on the matter, the Governor was thus left to act alone. In the December 5th letter, the Governor expressed the frustration this had caused him: "Your Letter [dated 14 October 1865] has been received too late to admit any change being made in the form of next year's Estimates and Appropriations, even if I were sure of your wishes, which I am not, [your last letters] being apparently contradictory…"[290] However, continued the Governor:

> given that this [subject of expenditure] has formed the subject of correspondence between the Colony and Her Majesty's Government for the last sixteen months, but through doubts, misapprehensions, and delays no definite instructions have yet been received, that if [unambiguous instructions] should not now reach me within the next two days, another twelve months must elapse before the amount can be released, and submitted to the legislation for appropriation…. I will have therefore no choice but to follow the course adopted last year in the respect which has at all events been formally approved by you, and to ask that if Her Majesty's Government desire the adoption of any other course I may be apprised of it before the commencement of another session.[291]

[287] Ibid.
[288] Ibid.
[289] Ibid.
[290] Ibid.
[291] Ibid.

No such instructions, by the Governor's lettered request, arrived on time in Ceylon, however, and, whether or not the Secretary of State had wished it, the Governor went through with the policy change. Without knowing the Governor's confusion during this time the Secretary of State was enlightened when, finally, on 19 January 1866, he received the letter dated 5th December in which the Governor's dissatisfaction and confusions were expressed and realized; albeit over a month too late.[292]

[292] Ibid.

§ III. *General Powers of an Officer appointed to conduct a Colonial Government.*

14. The duty and powers of every Officer, who may be called upon to administer a Colonial Government, are defined in Her Majesty's Commission and the Instructions with which he is furnished. The following is a general outline of the nature of the powers with which he is invested, subject to the special law of each Colony:—

15. He is empowered to grant a pardon or respite to any criminal convicted in the Colonial Courts of Justice.

16. He has the power of remitting any fines, penalties, or forfeitures which may accrue or become payable to the Queen (not exceeding 50*l.*), and to suspend the payment of any fine, &c., exceeding that amount, until Her Majesty's Pleasure can be known.

17. The Moneys to be expended for the Public Service are issued under his Warrant, as the law may in each particular case direct.

18. The Governor of a Colony has, as a general rule, the power of granting licences for marriages letters of administration, and probate of wills, unless other provision be made by Charter of Justice or local law. He has also, generally speaking, the presentation to benefices of the Church of England in the Colony, subject to rules hereinafter laid down. (See Ch. III. sec. 1.)

19. He has the power of issuing, in the Queen's name, writs of summons and election, to call together the Representative Assemblies and Councils where these exist, and for the election of their Members; and also that of assembling, proroguing, and dissolving Legislative Bodies.

20. He confers appointments to Offices within the Colony, either absolute, where warranted by local laws, or temporary and provisional, until a reference has been made to Her Majesty's Government.

21. He has the power of suspending Public Servants from the exercise of their functions under certain regulations, which must be strictly observed. (See Ch. III. sec. 2.)

22. He is empowered to administer the appointed oaths to all persons, in Office or not, whenever he may think fit.

23. He has, generally speaking, the power of granting or withholding his assent to any Bills which may be passed by the Legislative bodies.

24. He is required, in various cases, by his Instructions, to reserve such Bills for the Royal Assent, or to assent to them only with a suspending clause, preventing them from coming into operation until confirmed by the Crown. These cases are not defined alike in all Instructions; but they comprise, generally speaking, matters touching the Prerogative, the Currency, the rights of Her Majesty's subjects not resident in the Colony, and any enactments of an unusual nature requiring special consideration.

25. He is required to direct his particular attention to the erection and maintenance of schools, and to all necessary measures for the conversion of Aborigines to Christianity, and for their advancement in civilization.

26. He is specially required to execute all laws for the suppression and punishment of every species of vice, profaneness, and immorality.

27. He is strictly enjoined to send home, punctually, copies of the Journals and Minutes of Proceedings of the Legislative Council and Assembly, together with lists of the Members of Councils, both Legislative and Executive.

28. If anything should happen which may be for the advantage or security of the Colony, and is not provided for in the Governor's Commission and Instructions, he may take order for the present therein.

29. He is not to declare or make war against any foreign State, or against the subjects of any foreign State. Aggression he must at all times repel to the best of his ability; and he will use his best endeavours for the suppression of piracy.

30. His attention is at all times to be directed to the state of discipline and equipment of Militia Forces in the Colony, and whenever the Militia may be embodied, he should send home monthly Returns, with a particular account of their arms and accoutrements.

31. Periodical Reports on this subject, which may not call for immediate attention, may be included in the annual "Blue Book" hereafter noticed.

32. He is on no account to absent himself from the Colony without Her Majesty's permission.

33. He is prohibited from receiving Presents, pecuniary or valuable, from the Inhabitants of the Colony, or any class of them, during the continuance of his office, and from giving such Presents; and this Rule is to be equally observed on leaving his office.

34. In cases where money has been subscribed, with a view of marking public approbation of the Governor's conduct, it may be dedicated to objects of general utility and connected with the name of the person who has merited such a proof of the general esteem.

Figure 5. Arthur N. Birch and William Robinson, *The Colonial Office List for 1867, Comprising Historical and Statistical Information Respecting the Colonial Dependencies of Great Britain: With an Account of the Services of the Principal Officers of the Several Colonial Governments* (Pall Mall: Harrison, 1867), 136.

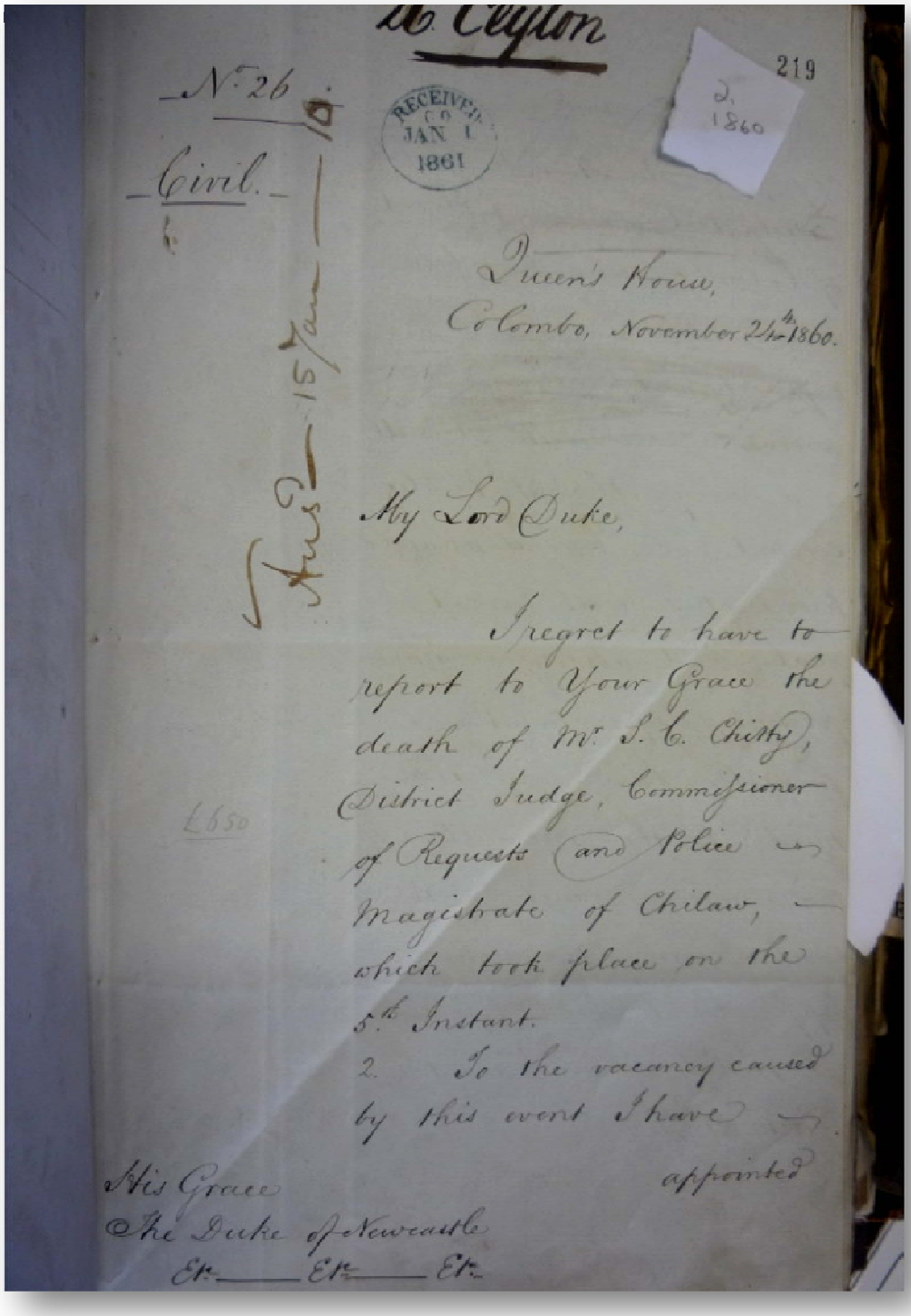


Figure 6. First page of despatch. CO 54/357, no. 26., 24 November 1860.

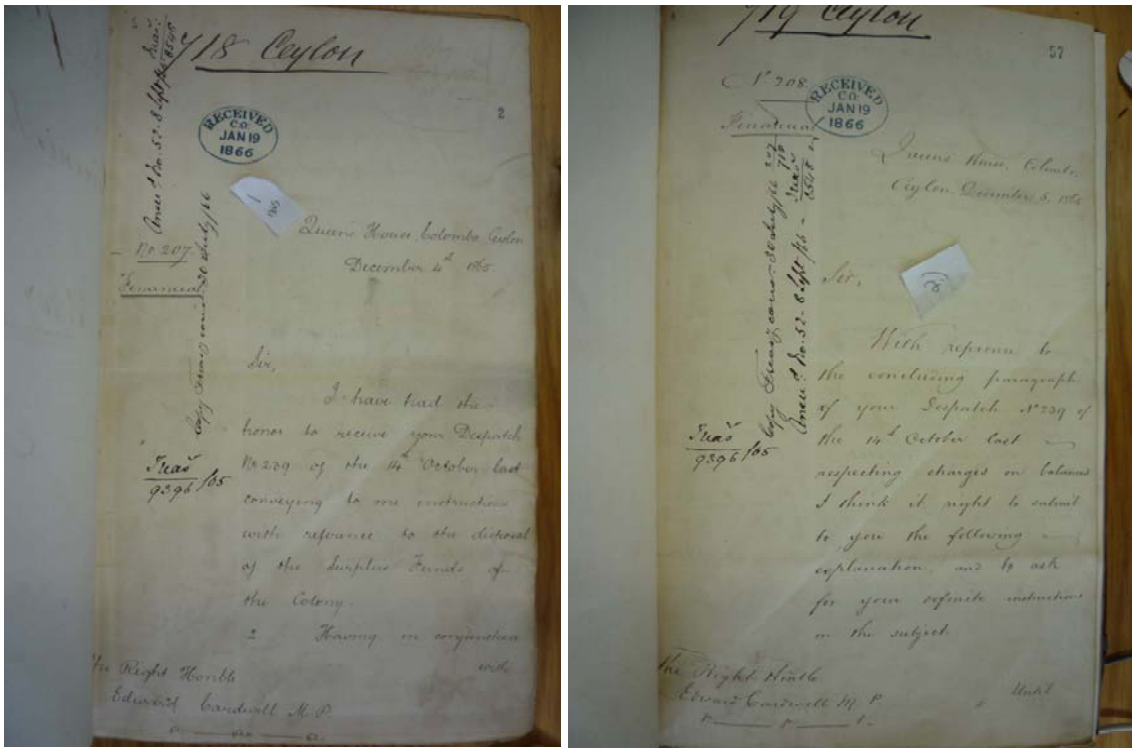


Figure 7. This shows the first page of two separate despatches. Notice how they look almost identical. CO 54/406, 4 December 1865; CO 54/406, 5 December 1865.

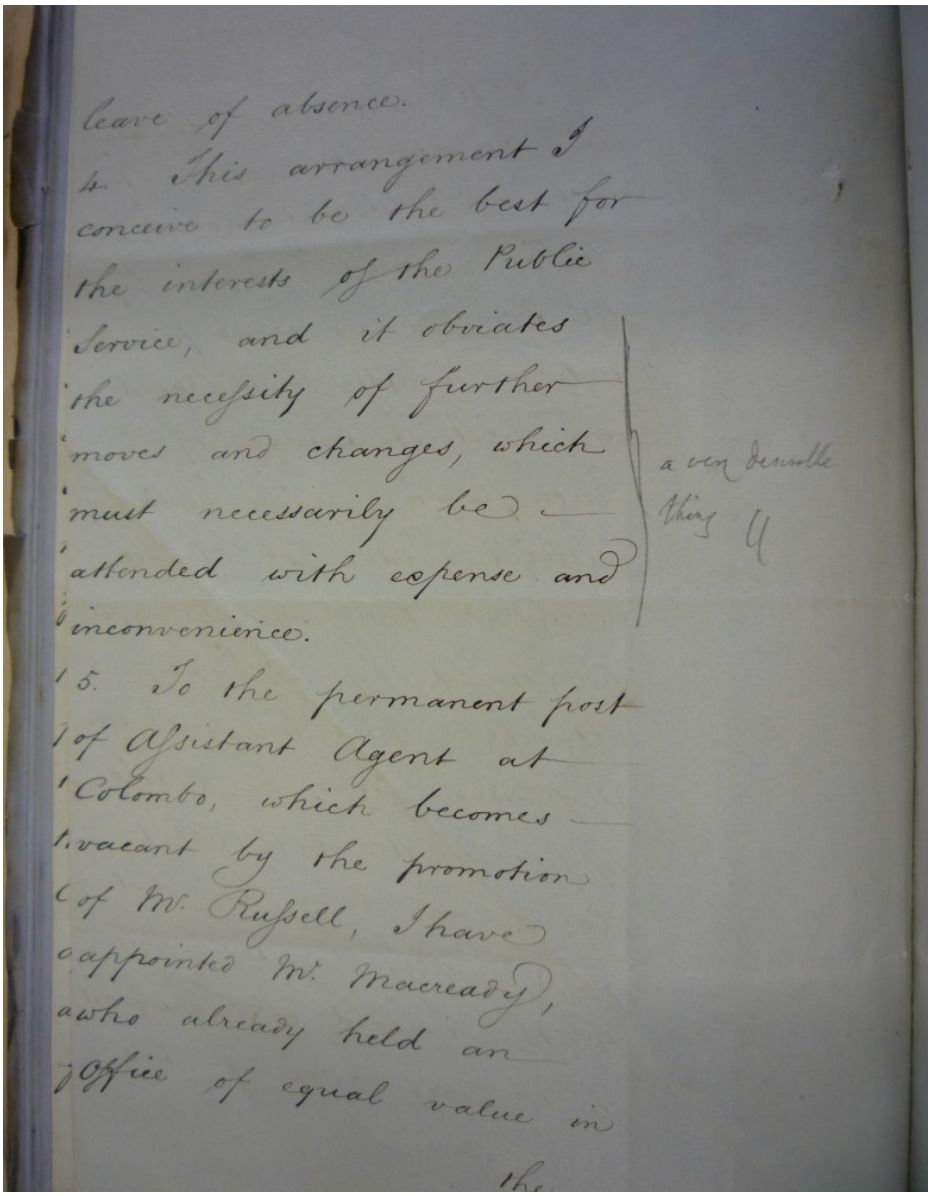

leave of absence.
4. This arrangement I
conceive to be the best for
the interests of the Public
Service, and it obviates
the necessity of further
moves and changes, which
must necessarily be
attended with expense and
inconvenience.
5. To the permanent post
of Assistant Agent at
Colombo, which becomes
vacant by the promotion
of Mr. Russell, I have
appointed Mr. Macready,
who already held an
Office of equal value in
a very desirable thing U

Figure 8. Fourth page of letter. CO 54/357, no. 26., 24 November 1860.

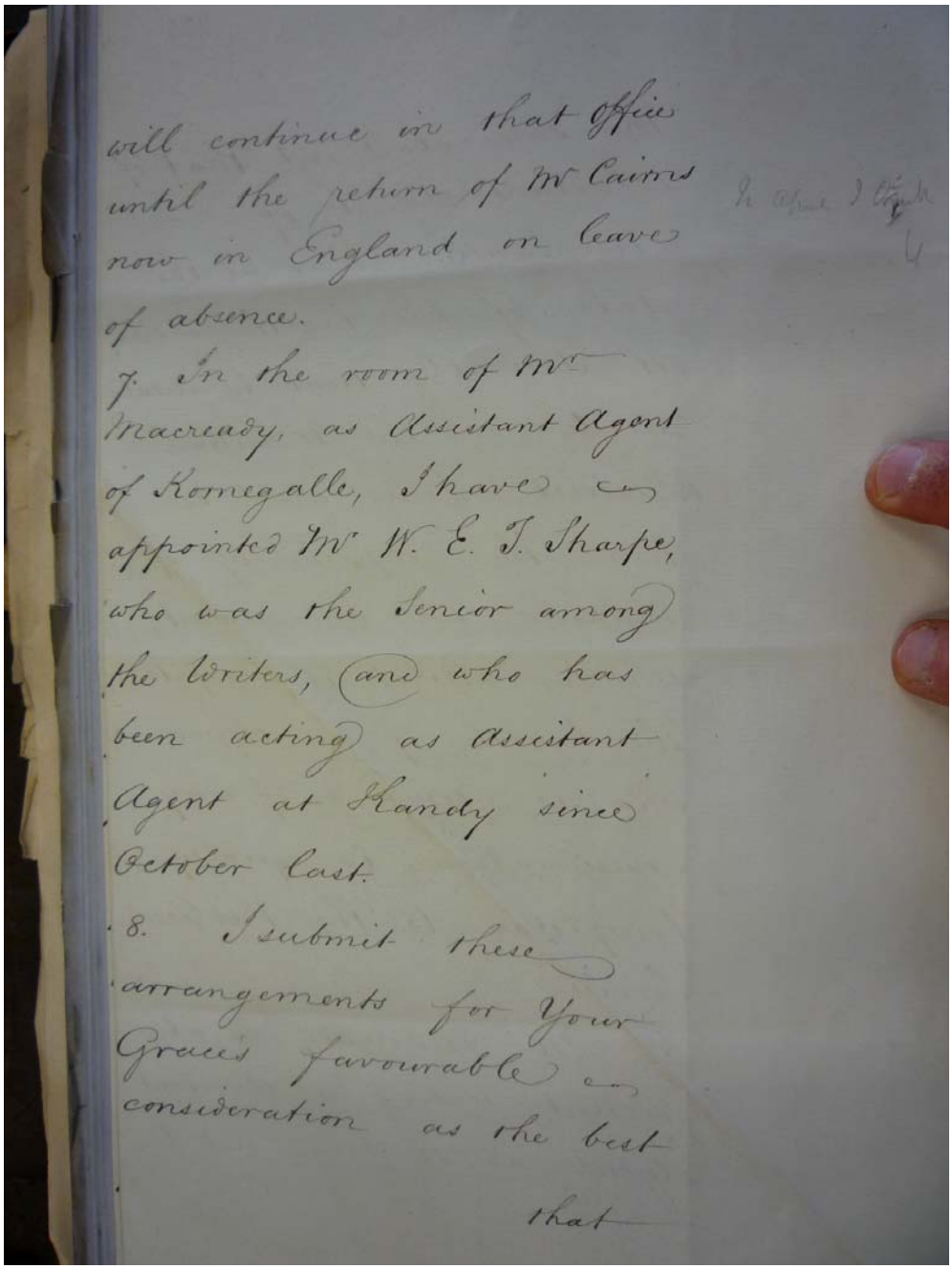

will continue in that office
until the return of Mr Cairns
now in England on leave
of absence.
7. In the room of Mr
Macready, as Assistant Agent
of Komegalle, I have
appointed Mr W. E. T. Sharpe,
who was the Senior among
the Writers, and who has
been acting as Assistant
Agent at Kandy since
October last.
8. I submit these
arrangements for Your
Grace's favourable
consideration as the best
that

Figure 9. Sixth page of letter. Co 54/357, no. 26., 24 November 1860.

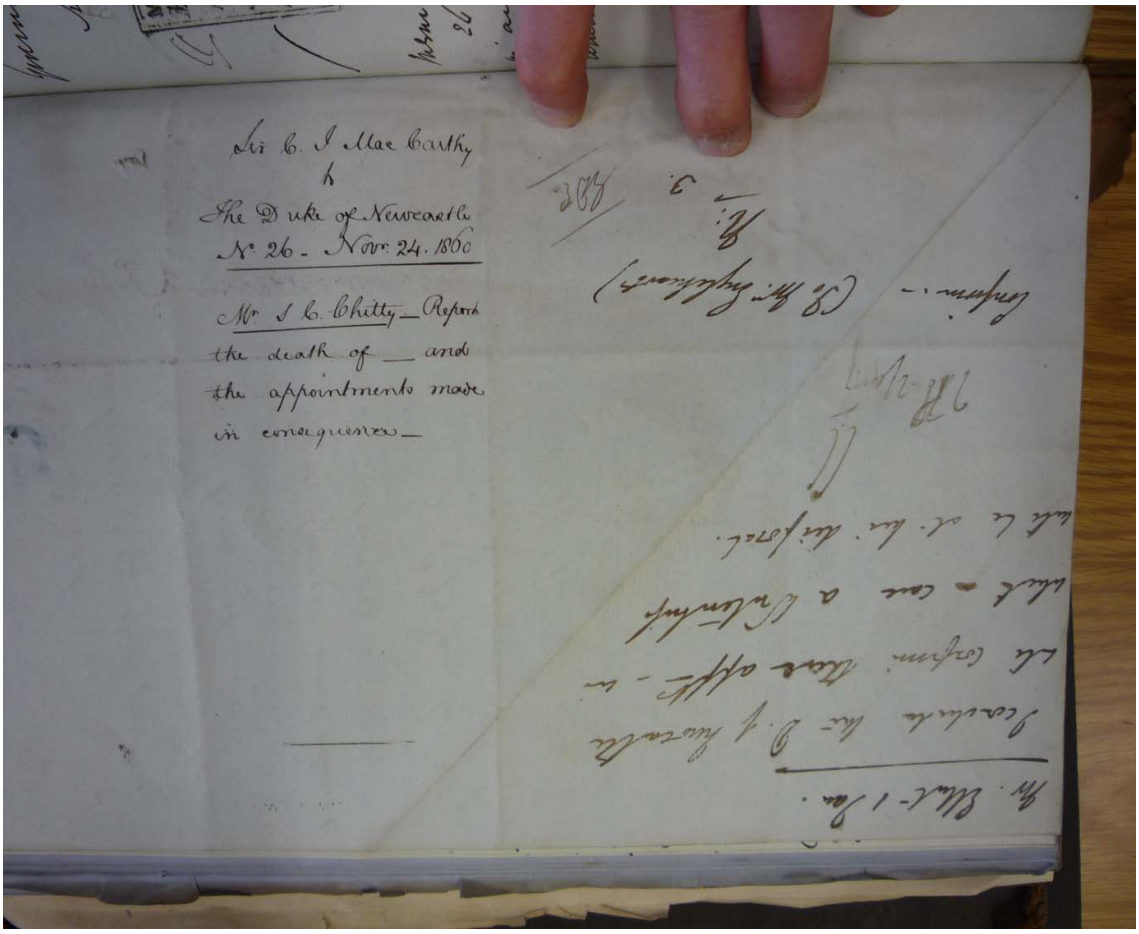


Figure 10. This is the backside of the last page of the letter. Notice on the left: the title and content summary of the letter. On the reverse side are the minuted notes and initials. CO 54/357, no. 26., 24 November 1860.

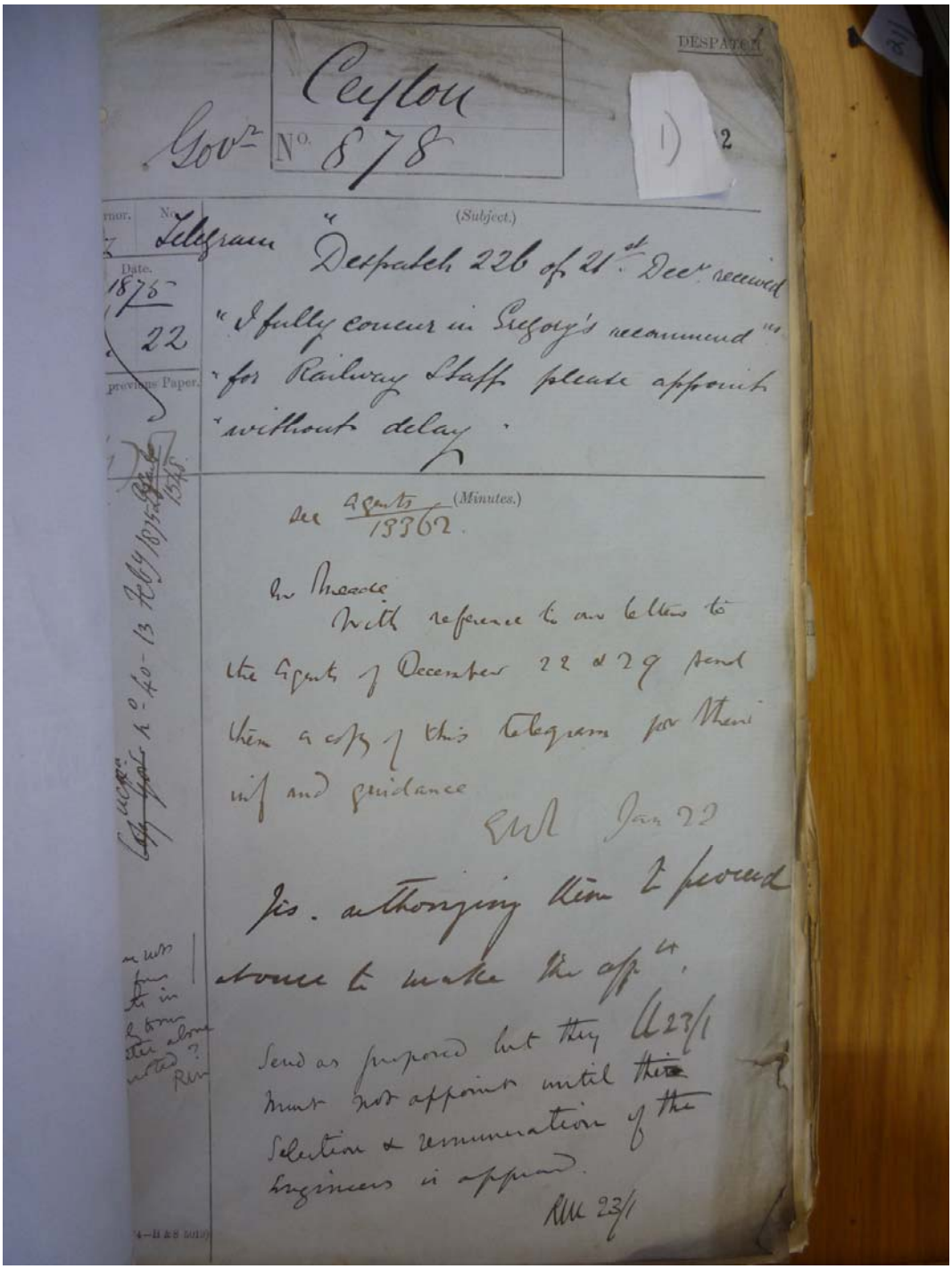


Figure 11. Example of a Minute Sheet. Minute Sheets preceded a letter, which would commence on the next page. CO 54/496, 22 January 1875.

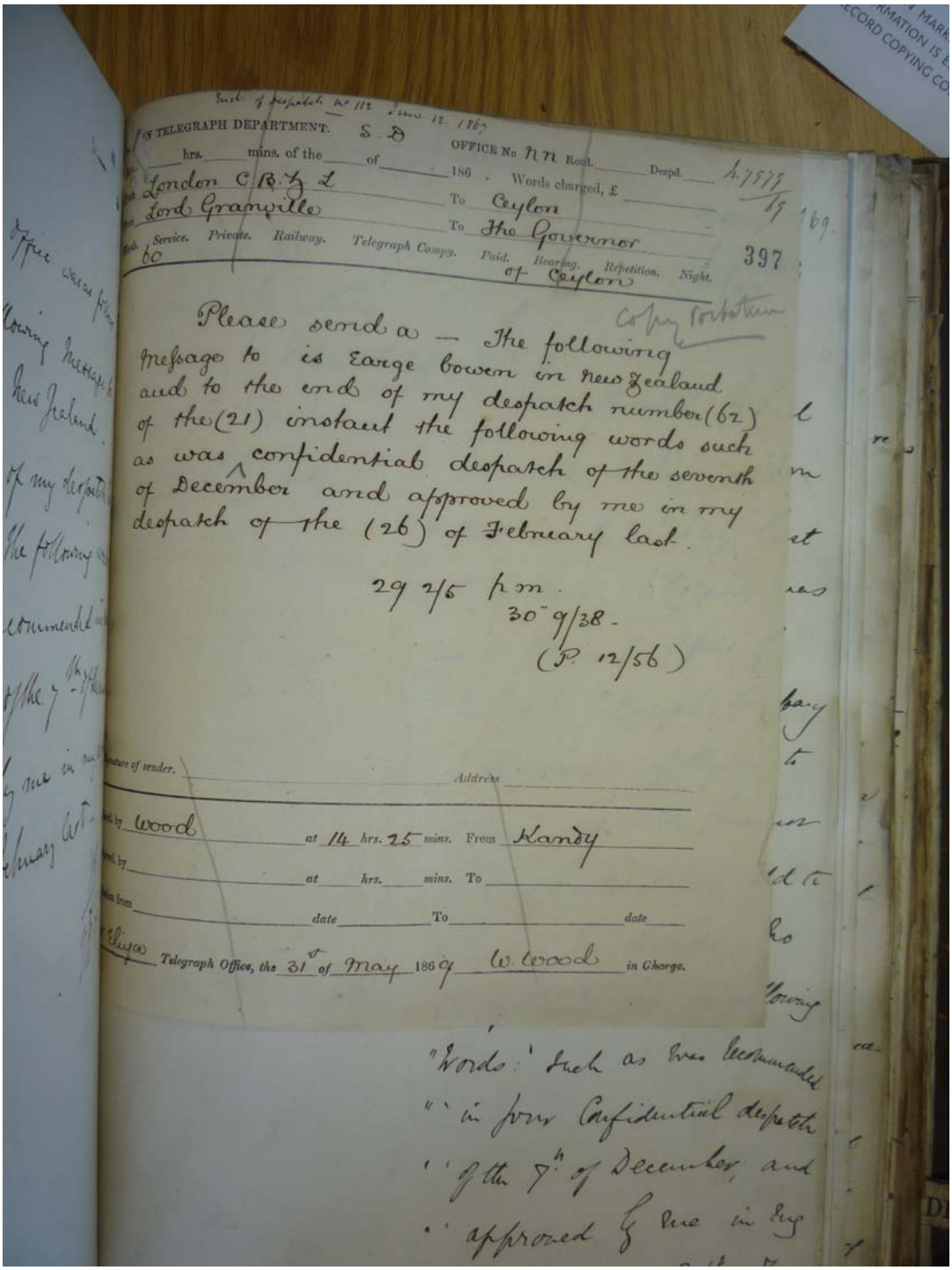
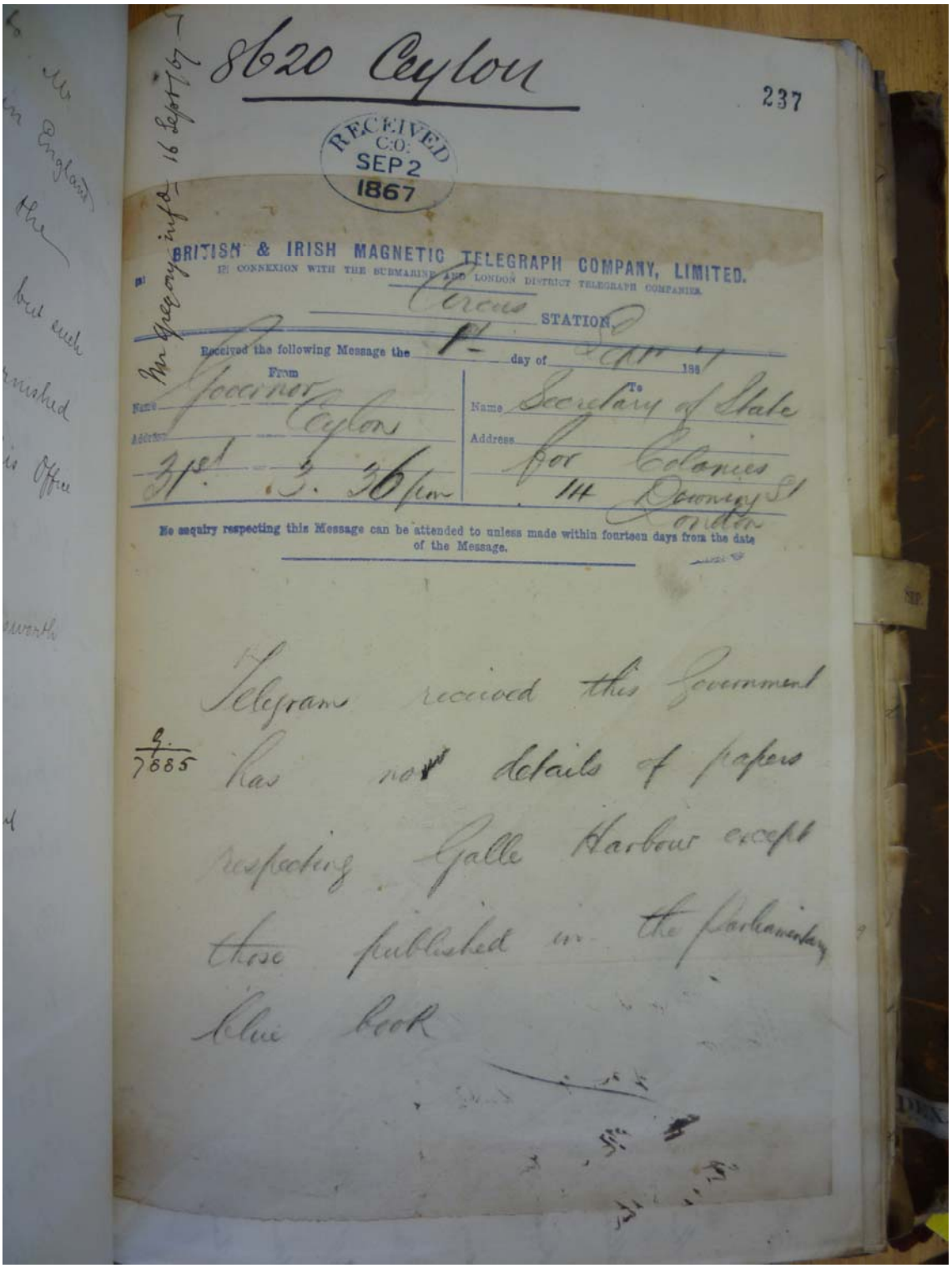


Figure 12. An example of a Telegram. CO 54/426, 12 June 1867.


8620 Ceylon

237

RECEIVED
C.O.
SEP 2
1867

16 Sept 67

Mr Gregory info

BRITISH & IRISH MAGNETIC TELEGRAPH COMPANY, LIMITED.
IN CONNEXION WITH THE SUBMARINE AND LONDON DISTRICT TELEGRAPH COMPANIES.

Received the following Message the 1st day of Sept 1867

From
Name Governor
Address Ceylon

To
Name Secretary of State
Address for Colonies
14 Downing St
London

21st 3. 36 pm

No enquiry respecting this Message can be attended to unless made within fourteen days from the date of the Message.

Telegram received this Government has not details of papers respecting Galle Harbour except those published in the parliamentary blue book

9/7885

Figure 13. An example of another telegram sent by a different telegraph company. CO 54/427, 2 September 1867.

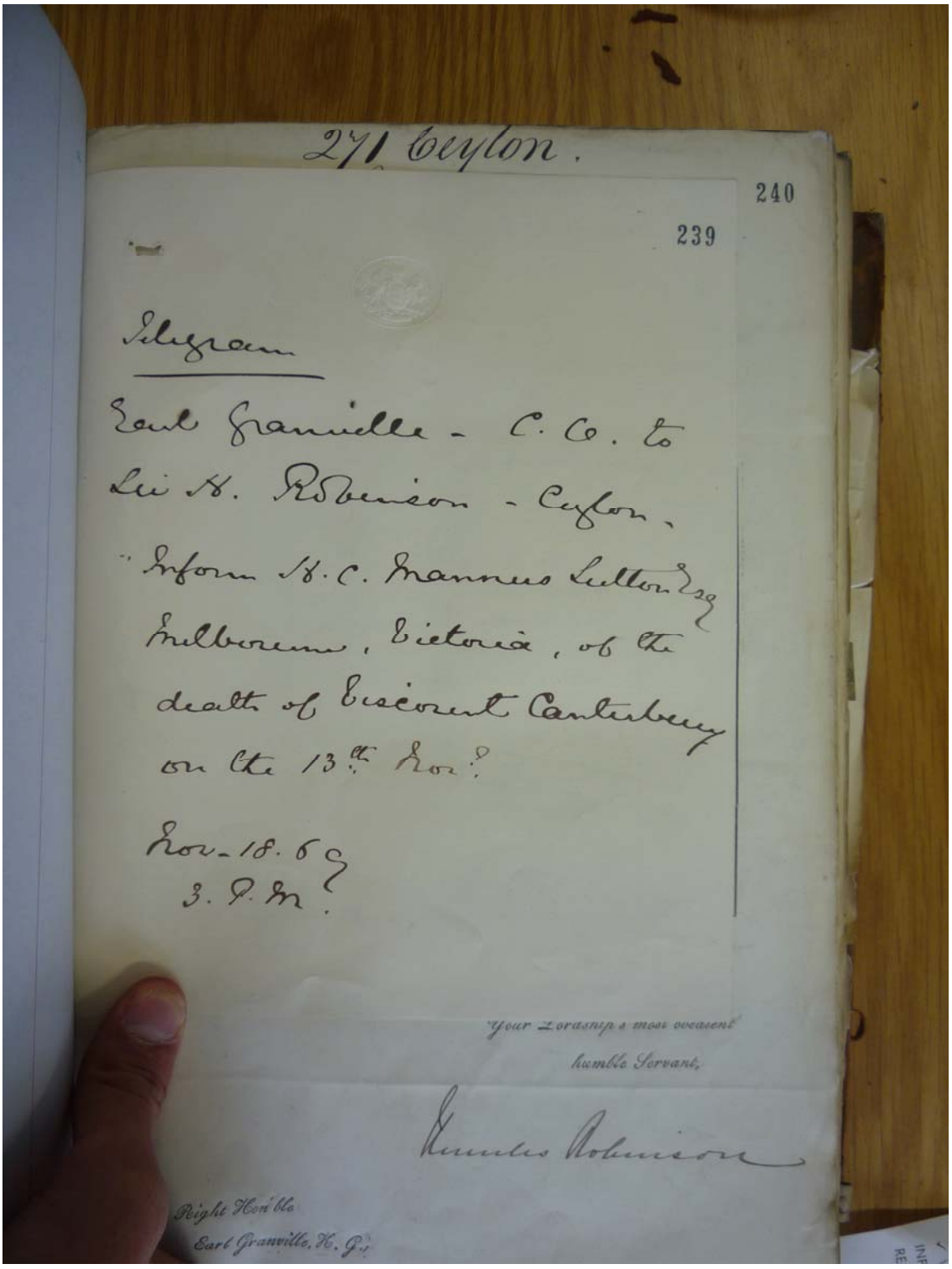


Figure 14. This is how telegrams began, as notes on official stationery paper. CO 54

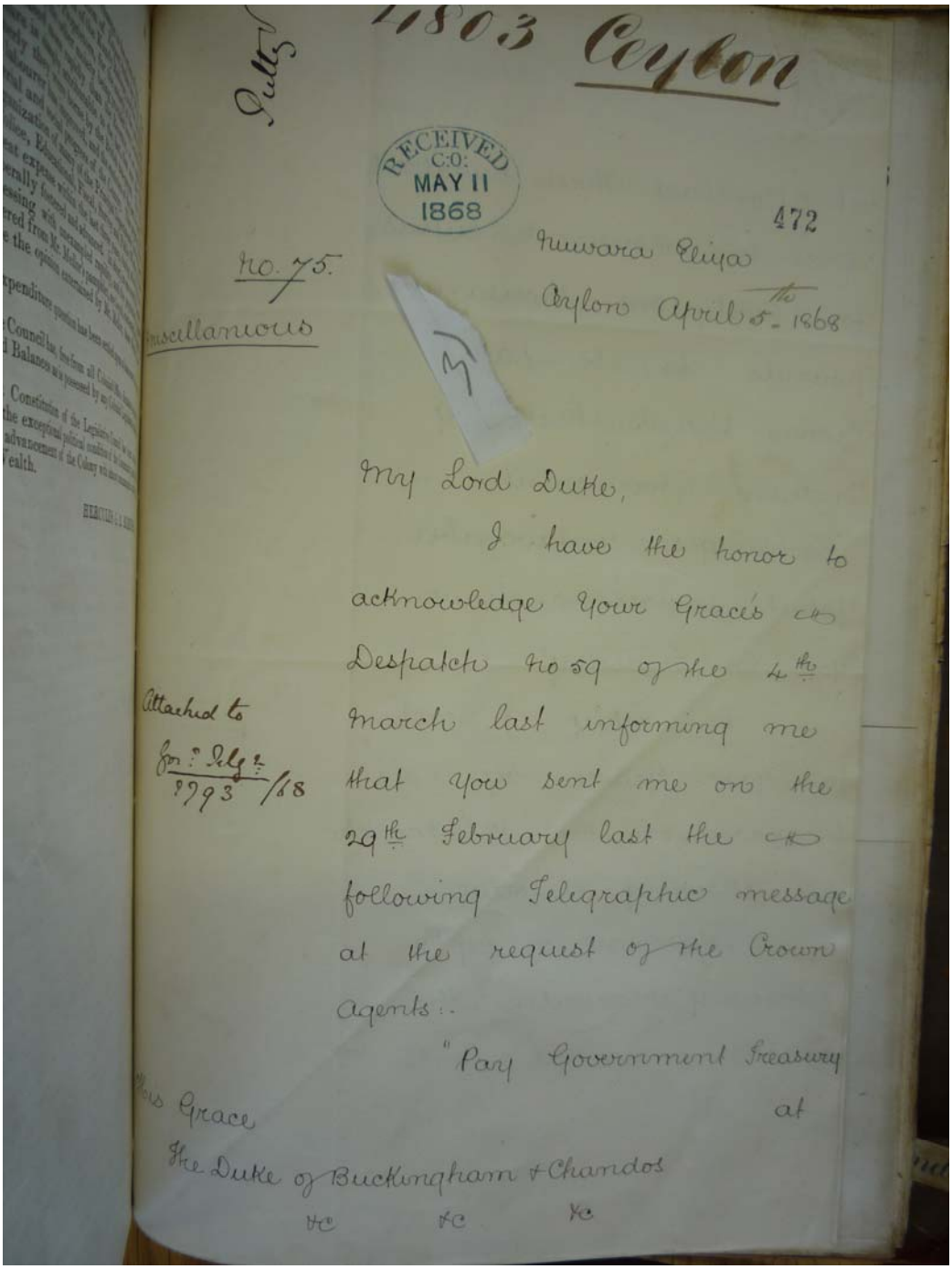


Figure 15. Example of a telegram receipt. CO 54/434, 11 May 1868.

Use of Telegrams

The use of telegrams in official correspondence was regularly incorporated into official correspondence from 1870, and, to some extent, redressed the problems aforementioned by providing both the Governor and the Secretary of State with an ability to communicate within a single day. Given the telegram's speed of transmission, the possibility of exchange between them was broadened in impressive ways.[293] Firstly, news of events could be shared by the Governor with the Secretary of State on, or in approximation to, the day of their occurrence. For example, on 25 October 1900, for instance, the Secretary of State received the following telegram from the Governor: "*L. White, engineer, Jaffna, died. Snakebite: arrange for successor.*"[294] This telegram informed the Secretary of State of the engineer's unfortunate death on the day of its occurrence, and enabled him to nominate a successor shortly after. The posted letter, in contrast, would have extended the process of delay on this issue by over a month.

Telegrams could also be used by the Secretary of State to share current events in London with the Governor. For example, on 2 March 1872 the Governor received the following telegram from the Secretary of State: "*yesterday a youth presented a pistol at the Queen when about to leave her carriage at Buckingham palace on returning from her drive. He was immediately seized and found pistol not loaded. Her majesty behaved with greatest courage and composure and is in good health and spirits. This is sent to prevent exaggerated reports*…"[295] From this telegram the Governor became aware of the Queen's attack the day after it occurred and the Secretary of State was able to mediate the potential outbreak of exaggerated news reports in Ceylon. In this way too, the telegram offered possibilities that the letter could not—that is, as a form of exchange which could be used to mediate experiences of moments, current in both London and Ceylon.

Official correspondence telegrams could not only be used to inform but also to communicate details, thus providing the Secretary of State with a more present voice in

[293] Mandy Banton has made note of this as well, in Banton, *Administering the Empire, 1801-1968*, 53.
[294] CO 54/665, 25 October 1900.
[295] CO 54/475, 2 March 1872.

the daily affairs of Ceylon's colonial administration. In the autumn of 1871 the Secretary of State requested by telegram that the Governor should participate in the scientific observations of the upcoming total eclipse, to which the Governor replied, after viewing the cosmic phenomenon, that it had been a great success;[296] on 24 January 1872, the Secretary of State demanded that the Governor "*send immediately a copy of that year's Blue book of Statistics*;"[297] and, on 19 July 1875, the Secretary of State urged that the Governor must not make judicial appointments "*till heard from by next mail*."[298] Such flexibility, as exemplified by these few telegrams, gave the Secretary of State an ability to direct the Governor on very minute details, such as scientific observations, the necessity to have a certain colonial document, and to request that he wait for further news, thus allowing the Secretary of State to send quick, concerted information which was valuable to him, and of which the Governor was pressed to address.

Telegrams also provided the Governor with the capacity to enquire and question the Secretary of State. In preparation for the Princess of Saxony's visit to Ceylon in 1875, for example, the Governor wanted to know if "*special leave duties is necessary for officials and others at levee and other public entertainments during the princesses' visit, or will simple evening cheers suffice in cases where there is no recognized official uniform*."[299] While ambiguous to us, this telegram was, nonetheless, a request to the Secretary of State for advice on a subject which the Governor was at a loss by himself to know. With the princess' nearing arrival, a lettered response would have never reached either the Governor or the Secretary of State in time for such a consideration. Similarly, the Governor was able to express any concerns that he may have had, such as that, for example, he had experienced during the preliminary construction of the breakwater in Colombo's harbor. On 14 March 1873 he telegraphed to the Secretary of State: "*has the engineer for the Breakwater been decided on are anxious to begin in preliminary work*."[300] In this way, too, the Governor was able to get advice from, or express concerns to, the Secretary of State regarding situations that he would have normally dealt with alone. The telegram thus enabled expressions, commands, and

[296] CO 54/467, 17 Sept 1871, 18 September 1871; CO 54/469, 12 December 1871.
[297] CO 54/473, 24 January 1872.
[298] CO 54/497, 19 July 1875.
[299] CO 54/498, 20 September 1875.
[300] CO 54/484, 14 March 1873.

questions to be made with the understanding that they would be received and then dealt with promptly.

The capacity of telegrams in official correspondence was not restricted to these few cases, however. As the hundreds of telegrams in Ceylon's colonial records attest, there were nearly as many telegrams as there were possibilities of communication itself. Telegrams were used to express thanks for appointments immediately following the given appointment,[301] to describe the current financial status of the island's revenue,[302] to disambiguate information in a letter on the same day the letter was received,[303] to send word ahead of vessels to quarantine them in light of epidemic outbreaks,[304] to track the travels of widows returning home to England,[305] to report on someone's health,[306] and to request a leave of absence or an extended leave of absence,[307] even a week or a day before the leave's expiration. In many ways, therefore, the telegram created new techniques in which Ceylon's Governor and the Secretary of State could communicate, in ways that the slower system of letter writing and the post could not.

Given the benefits of telegraphic speed, we might assume that the use of the letter in official correspondence would have gradually diminished during the period under consideration; that the technology had, in some way, determined the course of official correspondence for the rest of the century. However, the letter, and not the telegram, continued to serve as the main form of official correspondence. Not only were there thousands more letters than telegrams used; but, as the organization of the colonial records indicate, telegrams were treated as secondary or supplementary forms of communication in respect to the letter.[308] It was letters which substantiated the final word on any given situation. Why, then, in light of the telegram's dynamic capabilities,

[301] CO 54/603, 4 October 1892.
[302] CO 54/524, 4 January 1880; CO 54/621, 6 March 1895; CO 54/629, 16 January 1896; CO 54/644, 7 February 1898; CO 54/664, 17 July 1900.
[303] CO 54/466, 6 July 1871.
[304] CO 54/507, 23 March 1877; CO 54/586, 28 February 1890.
[305] CO 54/587, 2 May 1890.
[306] CO 54/497, 23 August 1875; CO 54/604, 30 November 1892; CO 54/665, 17August 1900; CO 54/666, 29 November 1900.
[307] CO 54/458, 15 November 1870; CO 54/586, 1 January 1889; CO 54/625, 10 September 1895.
[308] CO 337/3-19.

did the letter, rather than becoming eclipsed by the telegram, continue, and to such a large extent, as the main form of official correspondence?

Limitations of the Telegram

Price may have been a great disadvantage to telegraphic communication during the nineteenth century. Though, for Ceylon's government this is only accurate to a small extent, if at all. The price of a telegram was significantly higher than penny-postage letters. The telegrams sent by the Governor of Ceylon on 15 February and 4 June 1868 cost, respectively, £10.12.8 and £21.4.0. Nevertheless, the costs of both telegrams were eventually refunded by government subsidies and debited directly to Ceylon's treasury account on 10 June 1869.[309] So, cost may not have prevented officials from sending telegrams if refunding the price of telegrams remained a standard practice. Regardless, cost was only a minor reason telegrams remained subordinate to letters. There were greater issues at stake located in the medium itself as well as a strong resistance to adopt the technology by the Colonial Office.

First of all, the language found in telegrams presented real limitations to its use. The standard 20-words-or-less telegraph format, established in Ceylon in 1862,[310] ensured that fewer words could be written in a standard telegram than the unlimited amount of words allotted in letters. This is not to say that there were no successful attempts to exceed the 20 word limit. The very first telegram that the Governor of Ceylon sent to the Secretary of State makes a case in point. Submitted on 10 December 1865 and received on the 16th of the same month, this telegram is one of the few telegrams comparably as lengthy as a letter. It read:

> *The Despatch number two hundred and thirty nine of fourteenth October about… [illegible] surplus balance has been read there is no doubt whatever as to the existence on the first January last of the net cost surplus [illegible] namely one hundred & fifty four thousand pounds it is composed of the*

[309] CO 54/444, 10 June 1869.
[310] CO 54/369, 14 May 1862.

accumulated during eighteen sixty three & previous years there was no real surplus in eighteen sixty four under the terms of the despatch now acknowledged no part of this balance can be appropriated the season will shortly close there is therefore no time to wait & it will be most disastrous to the colony if this large sum so urgently needed be locked up unproductive in the vault for another year your instructions are requested by telegraph and authority is asked to bring forward a surplus funds bills for at least one thousand pounds the one hundred thousand pounds now asked for is not in addition to the fifty thousand pounds for by general O'brien which has been asked.[311]

This was not just a matter of novelty. Ten years later in 1870 on 7 March a telegram was sent comprising well over 20 words was sent to the Governor: "*R. Bersce accepts the Colonial Secretaryship of the Straits settlement but I beg he may be allowed to remain here until after the Duke of Edinburgh visit it is desirable that he should go round all the irrigation works in the Eastern province with Mr. Birsch before he leaves for Singapore which he will be able to do towards the end of May.*"[312] These two cases were not the only examples, but exceeding 20 words was exceptional. The Governor and the Secretary of State typically wrote telegrams within or near the confines of the 20 word limit. Telegraphic messages were more often curt and succinct, such as: "*arrangements being made for summons embarking for Sydney in a fortnight," as on 19 July 1899.*[313]

Thus, while telegrams were useful in breaching some of the problems inherent in the speed of letters, they were not useful to expand upon a subject matter. Therefore, it was often the case that a letter rather than a telegram was used to communicate. Telegrams, often but not always, preceded a letter—encompassing a coherent and rounded description of the same topic. For instance, the Governor transferred a telegram on 28 March 1883 to the Secretary of State, informing him of the chaos engulfing Kotahena,[314] in Colombo, during the Buddhist and Catholic riots: "*Serious riot here on Sunday between Roman Catholics and Buddhists…outnumbered by thousands and were overpowered, military called in when mob dispersed. Mob again attempted on Monday and suppressed by….town now quiet. 50 rioters*

[311] CO 54/406, 10 December 1865
[312] CO 54/454, 7 March 1870.
[313] CO 54/656, 19 July 1899.
[314] Kotahena is a town on the outskirts of Colombo. For more information, see Tessa Bartholomeusz, "Catholics, Buddhists, and the Church of England: The 1883 Sri Lankan Riots," *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 15 (1995): 89-103.

apprehended waiting trial, 20 rioters injured taken to hospital…Riot caused by false stories that insults were offered by Buddhists to Christian symbols. Merchants took no part in mob."[315] Additionally, two other telegrams were used to communicate the circumstances of the riot succeeding this telegram.[316] They, too, pronounced the beginning stages and anxieties of the riot. However, in addition to these telegrams, the Governor later mailed a letter to make sense and extrapolate upon the subject of the riot in all its facets—to provide explanations, specific details, and consequential deliberations—something, which the short blurbs of language used in telegrams, did not equal.[317] More will be said on the communication of this riot in the following chapter. But I discuss it here because it was exemplary of how telegrams and letters worked together: Telegrams were sent to inform of situations quickly. Letters expanded on the facts. Although long, I think that it is important for the sake of understanding the elucidated language common among these colonial letters to represent at least part of the letter here. The full document can be found in Appendix 1:

> My Lord, With reference to my telegram of the 28th March reporting the riot of the 25th
>
> I have the honour to state that legal proceedings are being taken against some of the rioters the results of which shall be reported when they are concluded…..
>
> 2—. I visited the Colombo Hospital last Wednesday and saw the men who had been admitted after the Riot, and I learnt from Dr. Kynsey that there had been no more deaths among them, but all were in a fair way to recovery.
>
> 3—. The proximate cause which led to the riot was the jealousy of the Roman Catholics, fanned into a flame by rumours spread (whether designedly or not ascertained) that the Buddhists were carrying in a procession images or pictures in ridicule of Christianity. The Buddhists of Colombo have just completed the building of a new temple which is said to have been begun fifty years ago. Like all Buddhist temples this contains a statue of the Buddha, and the closing ceremony of the construction was to be celebrated in the Buddhist manner of painting the eyes of the statue. This ceremony which may be compared in some respects to

[315] CO 54/545, 28 March 1883.
[316] Unfortunately, these other telegrams were "destroyed under statute" of the Public Office Act of 1877. Banton, *Administering the Empire, 1801-1968*, 99.
[317] CO 54/546, 2 April 1883.

> the consecration of a church in Europe is usually accompanied by Persheras or processions from the country round varying according to the sanctity or otherwise of the new Temple. In the present case the new temple was widely known, and many Buddhists were prepared to go there in procession offering gifts. The ceremony of opening the eyes (as it is called) is usually performed on the day of the full moon, and the High Priests fixed on the full moon which, according to the Sinhalese reckoning, fell on the 23rd of march for their ceremony[…][318]

It was quite unusual for any telegram to be as long and detailed as even the shortest of letters. But, there is one particular exception that I have located. It is a telegram from John Pender, the telegraph chairman of the Eastern Telegraph Company, London. "At the request of the Prince of Wales," he had sent the Governor of Ceylon a telegram of the minutes of the Colonial Exhibition Address given by the Prince, His Royal Highness the Executive President of the Exhibition, to Her Majesty the Queen at the opening of the 1878 Exhibition in Paris. It is an extraordinarily sized telegram comprising 1,317 words and was composed on a series of twenty-nine telegrams. (The message is included in the appendix, and I encourage the reader to consider it).[319] The beginning reads like a formal letter, "*May it please your majesty*," and the language is so fluent and eloquent that it could easily be mistaken for a letter. This telegram, however, was an absolute exception to the typical size and detail of telegraphic messages during the period. As Chairman of the Eastern Telegraph Department his ability to send the telegram was easily facilitated. The telegram does show, though, that telegraphic messages had the capacity to replicate letters—that essentially they could be used to write as much as letters.

But they were not used as such. I suspect that the amount of effort to dictate a telegram, even a quarter the size of the Prince's, would have taken enormous effort and time. According to Superintendent of telegraphs B.C. Bailey's letter to the Colonial Secretary

[318] CO 54/546, 2 April 1883.
[319] Sri Lanka National Archives, Colombo, Sri Lanka. Series: Lot 6, (hereafter SLNA 6); SLNA 6/8127

on 3 April 1858, it would have undermined the intrinsic value of telegraphic communication which, according to him, was its speed:

> Sir,
>
> I have the honor respectfully to call attention to the Bulletin of mail received from Galle yesterday, and to point out the great difference between the number of words therein contained and the number (viz 250) named by me in a former communication as the utmost limit for the short lines [telegraph lines] of this island.
>
> The Bulletin of yesterday as received in this office contains 623 words which is only 17 less than the utmost limit allowed for telegraphing from Bombay to Calcutta, a distance of 1600 miles, along which an Express Post cannot be conveyed in less than eight days, while the postal difference between Galle and Colombo is only nine hours.
>
> The message under notice could not have been prepared in less than two hours after the anchoring of the steamer, two hours were occupied in signaling it, and a further delay of two hours in making the copies required for the Colonial Secretary and the News Papers. Thus it will be seen that the message was not clear of this office till about six hours after the arrival of the steamer, and if the time occupied by the Printing Offices in "Setting up" and distributing the News is taken into consideration and idea may be formed of the inconvenience and little worth of a dispatch issued only an hour before the arrival of the coach with the papers and letters from which it was compiled.
>
> And, in such cases as this, not only is the dispatch itself made useless but also the private paying messages brought by steamer, or rendered necessary by her arrival, whilst those received at this office for transmission to Galle, are in danger of reaching there too late to serve the purposes for which they are intended.

> In conclusion I would beg that the Compiling Officer may be instructed to report facts only, and not opinions or rumours, which in my poor judgment may be well left for the Newspaper Extras.[320]

Although Bailey wrote the letter specifically about news telegrams between Galle and Colombo, his message reveals a few fundamental principles about telegrams that may answer why lengthy telegrams, although possible, were not the norm.

As Bailey suggested, a telegram must reach its destination much earlier than the more detailed letters and papers from which it derived. He did not have to explain the reasons behind this concern. To both him and his contemporaries it would have been obvious that the telegram's value was its inherent ability to communicate information quickly, that to send a telegram slowly was a superfluous investment in colonial state time and money. His complaint raises issues beyond the mere practicality of an unnecessary telegram, however. He hints at an important functional distinction between letters and telegrams, a distinction that structured British colonial incorporation of the technology more generally. According to Bailey's logic, the two mediums (letters and telegrams) communicated different sets of things, sometimes to distinct audiences. Bailey wrote that the telegram should contain "facts only, and not opinions or rumours, which in [his] poor judgment may be well left for the Newspaper Extras." Telegrammed news, according to Bailey, should contain only "facts" because it was directed toward government readership, while written materials, with their "rumours" and "opinions," would more appropriately find their way into newspaper extras. Thus telegrams were distinct from hand-written materials and did not just present a shorter version of the same story. Reading a telegram, as Bailey suggested, was not equivalent to reading a diminutive letter. It was reading a message intrinsic to the medium of telegraphy itself: telegrams were short, concise, and factual and, one could say, less burdened by the time-consuming strictures of grammar and analysis; letters, on the other hand, were the platform for longer, clearer exposition. According to Bailey, then, telegrams in nineteenth-century Ceylon were meant not to replace, but to coexist with letters, to function in combination, not separately. Thus, although telegraphy was the super-highway of the age, it provided just one facet of the

[320] SLNA 6/2463: 1858 Inspector of the Electric Telegraph Reports.

colonial government's communication arsenal. Telegrams had their role. And, letters, albeit slow and tedious, had theirs as well. This distinction, according to Bailey, structured a telegram's length and general purpose.

TELEGRAMS AND THE SYSTEM

We can go much deeper into an analysis of telegrams, by considering them in relation to the system of communication above described. The Colonial Office system, as explained, was based on the principles of rational order, regularity, and consistency. Letters that were structured according to Colonial Office rules and regulations constituted the fundamental basis of this system. They were uniform. They represented hierarchy. They were well written. Information was configured on them in similar patterns. They arrived at regular and predictable intervals at the Colonial Office, in bulk. Colonial Office bureaucracy was embedded into and based on these characteristics and patterns. Telegrams, on the other hand, were not only inconsistent with but also contradictory to these fundamental tenets of the Colonial Office system. What they provided in speed, they lacked in structure, uniformity, order, hierarchy. The incorporation and limited use of telegrams as official correspondence can be explained to a large extent by bringing into focus these incongruities.

Unlike letters, telegrams were not standardized. Even a cursory examination of telegrams during the period reveals heterogeneity rather than uniformity. If we turn to the image of the following telegram, see figure 8, we will notice that it includes the name of the telegraph department which sent the message, the office from and to which it was sent, and the sender's and the recipient's names. The amount of words which the message contained is also given—in this case there are sixty words. At the bottom of the telegram the name of the telegraph clerk, the time at and date on which it was sent, and the other offices through which it traveled were described. The middle of the telegram contained the message, the time of its reception, and additional notes. However, a telegram from September of the same year, 1867, was structured differently (see figure 9). It contained the name of the station to which it was sent in London, Circus, on top. The other did not.

Although it contained the recipient's and sender's names, in a location similar to that of the other, it did not contain the telegraph clerks' names, or the telegraph offices, as had appeared at the bottom of the former telegram. Furthermore, the telegram was sent by a different company, British and Irish magnetic Telegraph Company, Limited, not the Ceylon Telegraph Department. The letter font was set in a different color and in a different format. [321] And, these only explain superficial characteristics.

Also, compared to any letter of the period, the language used in the telegram was disorderly. Letters were well written, grammatically and stylistically mastered. They gave details about events and elaborated on ideas in well-structured, numbered, and paragraphed compositions. Telegrams, on the other hand, were short, sometimes unintelligible, and they did not usually describe or deliberate on an event in any successful detail. Telegrams were often sloppily transcribed and misspelled, like this one from the Secretary of State to the Governor on 2 March 1875 (as it appears): "*London de Colombo 1310 20 19 3 SR=Lord CARNORVOR LNDN= MARCH NINETEENTH NO SUV EYORS AVAILABLE FROM SURVEY FOR DEPETREMENT RALWAY SURVEYS SENDS OUT MORE RAILWAY SURVEYORS= GOUVERNOR.*" [322] I replicate here a few more representative telegrams to give a sense of the language typically found in telegrams. On 4 January 1880, the Governor telegraphed: "*extraordinary local expenditure probably two millions rupees of…* [illegible] *not drawing one million can be paid from revenue leaving one million uncovered.*" [323] This sentence was the extent of the message, and it noticeably lacked sound syntax, correct spelling, and proper capitalization and punctuation, which more than likely would have appeared in a letter on the same topic.[324] Similarly, a telegram from four years later: "*Your tel 23 sept pray do not make arrangements with Mercantile bank involving conditions as to giving circulation to govt notes. There will be no occasion for conditions as they will come at once into circulation without any difficulty. Madras Bank will at once purchase Rs. 2,000,000 worth without any conditions. Pray wait for dispatch before concluding any*

[321] Unfortunately, original telegrams disappeared from the colonial archives beginning in the 1880s due to reasons which will be explained below, so a complete study of telegram heterogeneity is not possible.
[322] CO 54/496, 2 March 1875.
[323] CO 337/13, 4 January 1880.
[324] CO 337/3, 24 October 1857.

arrangement which would impose any fresh obligations on us."[325] How was the Colonial Office able to incorporate telegrams in its system of communication if they were not only heterogeneous but also, at times, illegible?

An even greater disjuncture between the two mediums lay within the hierarchical representation of official correspondence. Official correspondence was the medium through which the Secretary of State and the Governor communicated. It was therefore a hierarchical and formal exchange as it represented the two seats of government and thus Crown government itself, in all its representations and physical manifestations—and was not merely a practical means of conveying communication. This was not just a matter of cordiality, as I have described above, as there were strict instructions concerning official correspondence laid out in detail in the *Rules and Regulations for the Information and Guidance of the Principal Officers and Others in His majesty's Colonial Possessions*.[326]

Letters, and not telegrams, embodied such rules of hierarchy. In fact, the entire first page of most letters was used to describe only the honor of receiving and writing the letter, before the main issue of the letter even began. The closing was then again formal as it indicated the humbleness with which the letter had been written; and it was signed, certifying officially the identity of the person by whom the letter was written. Also, the colonial government hired professional letter writers to compose its correspondence, to ensure perfect grammar and handwriting. In contrast, telegrams did not respect hierarchy and did not make a formal entreaty of address, save the completion of the mandatory to-and-from categories found on the face of the telegram. The writers of telegrams used short phrases, poor punctuation, crass grammar and sometimes mysterious language when addressing each other. Telegrams, therefore, did not exemplify a respect for the chain of command inherent in official correspondence, whereas letters wholly represented them.

Also, the material composition of telegrams made it difficult for the Colonial Office to incorporate them into its system. A telegram embodied a number of forms during the

[325] CO 337/14, 28 September 1884.
[326] *The Colonial Office List (1878).*

duration of its existence. For example, telegrams sent from the Governor began in noted form, see figure 10, written onto secretarial stationery, which was then transported by a messenger to a telegraph clerk for electric transmission. The message was translated into code and sent electronically over telegraph wires, before arriving at a telegraph office in London. The message was once again transferred onto a sheet of paper and delivered to the Secretary of State. The process occurred in reverse if the Secretary of State responded telegraphically. Telegraphic communication thus arrived as an abstraction upon an abstraction, upon an abstraction. Telegraphic messages were filtered through various processes that could potentially alter the meaning of the message itself. The Colonial Office was therefore responsible for transferring a telegraphic message onto a sustainable material that it could read and circulate through the echelons of bureaucratic administration.

For this reason, lettered telegram receipts became used (see figure 11). In most but not all cases, following the Governor's submission of a telegram, a letter concerning the telegram was sent either on the same day or a few days after.[327] In the letter the Governor pointed the attention of the Secretary of State to the fact that a telegram had previously been sent. Included was a direct quotation of the message found in the telegram; and, at times, any additional information that the Governor felt necessary was also added. Likewise, when the Secretary of State sent a telegram to the Governor, the Governor in return sent a letter to the Secretary of State to acknowledge the receipt of his received telegram. In it, he too pointed attention to the fact that he had received a telegram. He included a direct quote of the telegram's message as well as additional information, such as how he responded to the telegram. The important thing to consider is that the letter, and not the telegram, was entered into the correspondence register list. Even in cases in which the practice of writing a follow-up letter was not made, a telegram still did not become a separate, numbered despatch but remained solely described as a telegram. Telegrams were recognized as a form of correspondence only through the process of writing a supplementary letter in conjunction with it. Without the additional letter there would have been, partly, no respect paid to the formal and regulated structures of official

[327] CO 337/3-19.

correspondence as embodied in the form and content of the letter, and no sustainable record to circulate through the bureaucratic channels. During the 1880s, this practice was altered and, to some extent, exacerbated. From this period onward, there are rarely original telegrams in the colonial records. What remain, instead, are minute sheets of the telegrams—just like those attached to official correspondence letters.

A final point to consider is that the methodology of the Colonial Office system was very much based on the mode of the communication in use during Stephen's tenure. It was structured on the fact that mail ships took approximately one month to travel between the colony and London and that they arrived at known dates and times. The system, which was formed on the predictability and regular arrival and departure of letters, remained the basis of the Colonial Office throughout the century, all the way up to the introduction of telegraphy. As far as historian John W. Cell has argued, even "The advent of the oceangoing steamship caused little strain in the system: in the twenty years after it was introduced in the 1840s the routine of the office altered hardly at all. The exchange of abstractions from reality became somewhat more frequent and somewhat more predictable, but they continued to arrive in interrelated bunches."[328] The watershed point was the telegraph. Telegraphic communications arrived quickly, irregularly, and unpredictably; responses, too, had to be made hurriedly.[329] Staff members had to stay later than usual and other methods were applied to adapt to the new communication. The amount of effort in employing new, or retraining old, office staff to adapt to telegraphic communication, and to reconstitute Colonial Office bureaucracy to incorporate the unpredictable arrival of telegrams, placed significant barriers on utilizing the new medium in any comprehensible way.

[328] Cell, *British Colonial Administration*, 41–3.
[329] Ibid., 43.

CONCLUSION

The Colonial Office was notorious for its "antiquated" character. In a testimony given before the 1849 Committee of Inquiry into the Public Offices, the buildings located at thirteen and fourteen Downing Street, occupied by the Colonial Office, were described as 'inadequate to the present extent of public business, in parts unsafe and generally in [sic] a state of dilapidation'. The Colonial Office's means of arranging and preserving records were considered deficient also. The accommodation for the clerks was remarked upon as both inconvenient and unsuitable, that "copyists and their Superintendent carry on their occupation in cellars the dampness, closeness, and darkness of which must be very injurious to their health." Contemporary staff members too generally observed that the structure of the building was unsuitable. The ground floor librarian in the early 1850s, complaining of the smells and draughts which filled his room, noted that "scarcely a Day passes, in which Persons do not express their astonishment that anyone can inhabit it."[330] Within this unsuitable structure, the office staff operated with a minimum amount of equipment. Lord Carnarvon, Parliamentary Undersecretary (1858-59) complained, "We have no maps that are fit to be consulted—none of the mechanical apparatus for carrying on the Govt. of fifty Colonies in various stages of civilization and in different parts of the world. We have no furniture—carpets, chairs, tables are all decrepit."[331] The Colonial Office operated throughout the nineteenth century without typists, telephones, or dictaphones.[332] Rather, the chief clerk only had to provide a few essential materials such as paper, pens, ink, coal, oil for the lamps (until the introduction of electric lamps toward the end of the century), and the "proverbial red tape".[333] Despite these qualities, it was in this environment that official correspondence circulated, and the place where, ironically, one of the most advanced communication technologies of the nineteenth century, telegraphy, made its way into colonial government. Such descriptions may provoke an understanding of telegraphy's minimal and precarious role.

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[331] Cell, *British Colonial Administration*, 4. Taken from: Minutes on Office of Works to C.O., 25 Oct. 1858, CO 323/252.
[332] Ibid.
[333] Ibid., 5.

But, let us not become over skeptical and observe the Colonial Office as its staff may have viewed the people, cultures, and places under its authority: as backward, traditional, anti-modern. The Colonial Office did eventually adapt itself to the telegraph. As early as 1870, in fact, it began to make notable adjustments to its system of administration. Not surprisingly, it did so gradually—by incrementally hiring staff members and allotting more responsibility to lower level members over the years. This removed a great amount of pressure and responsibility on the secretaries who had before handled nearly all communication, including the arrival and departure of telegrams. This is not to say that the telegraph "impacted" on the Colonial Office system, forcing it, as it were, to change. There were many far more important factors involved than technological determinism in the Colonial Office reforms, such as the Treasury's role and reform-minded secretaries.[334] Rather, the introduction of official correspondence telegrams became embedded within a reformative Colonial Office, itself getting swept into the incremental changes. By the turn of the century, the amount of telegrams used as official correspondence between Ceylon and London more than trebled,[335] indicating that the Colonial Office eventually became adept at using and incorporating telegrams in its system of communication, which had not been the case during most of the period under analysis. By the beginning of the First World War, the telegraph, as far as my research can tell, was incorporated in the system even more so. The adoption of the telegraph was, needless to say, slow and precarious throughout the course of the century. But throughout the process, the letter remained. Telegrams added something new, unprecedented communication.

Telegrams made possible what letters could not. They allowed for immediate reactions to immediate subjects; they gave the Secretary of State the ability to enlighten the Governor of Ceylon on events of immediate importance occurring in London, as well as faster command over the Governor. Moreover, they provided the Governor with the ability to make specific, last minute requests. Despite these qualities, however, letters were not displaced. As I showed, this was because there were limitations to the medium of telegrams itself, and the Colonial Office had difficulties in incorporating telegrams into its

[334] Blakeley, *The Colonial Office: 1868-1892*, 20–60.
[335] CO 337/662-666, 1900; CO 337/10, 1873. In 1873, there were approximately twenty telegrams in the register list. In 1900, there were approximately eighty.

established system of official correspondence communication. Telegrams were irregular, not uniform, materially inadequate, did not represent hierarchy, and they were generally short and poorly written. These reasons delineated the colonial government's persistent use of letters in official correspondence—and ultimately, too, what shaped the uses and limitations of telegrams in Ceylon's colonial government.

CHAPTER FOUR: TELEGRAPHY AND CRISIS MANAGEMENT

INTRODUCTION

As shown in chapter two, the telegraph's utility as a tool for danger apprehension did not factor into the Council's 1852 decision to implement it in Ceylon. The reason for this, they wrote, was because Ceylon's state of affairs was not as tumultuous as it was in India, where the ever presence of danger rendered telegraphy a technology of necessity:

> In India, properly so called, instant communications of political events is of the utmost importance to the supreme government. Indeed its value cannot be calculated in a country almost always at war, or liable to be so, and that within its own territory! Ceylon has no such danger to apprehend, nor is there any Imperial political events, that I can conceive probable, which could be damaged in the least degree by the usual delay in communicating the intelligence from Point de Galle.[336]

The members, who were contentedly writing in the prosperous wake of the island's coffee resurgence, were not aware though that in just a few years thousands of refugees, fleeing a famine in south India, would spread cholera throughout the island; that a violent religiously motivated clash would break out in the streets of Kotahena, Colombo, leaving many wounded and two dead; or that the Oriental Bank Corporation would close and temporarily destabilize the colony's finances and crash the island's market economy. Perhaps the island colony did not experience uprisings and disasters at the same rate or to the same extent as in India, but Ceylon did have its fair share of problems to contend with, and its government, like India's, had to find ways to cope with and manage them when they arose. And, Ceylon's telegraph network—which encompassed a large portion of the island by the mid 1870s and had become part of the colonial government's official

[336] SLNA 10/166 "Correspondence Regarding the Introduction of the Telegraph," James Stuart, 10 November 1852.

system of communication—was very likely to have been implicated in apprehending these dangerous situations, therefore, challenging the Council's foresight.

Until now, the only studies on the role of technology in danger apprehension have been made in the context of India. Most have paid particular attention to the role of telegraphy in the 1857 Mutiny,[337] purporting that the East India Company's use of the technology in the uprisings saved India and led to the hanging of the anonymous Sepoy.[338] Recently, Deep Kanta Lahiri Choudhury has argued against these claims by stating that the telegraph did not save India but rather "India saved the telegraph,"[339] demonstrating both the perfunctory role of telegraphy in managing the mutiny and the Indian government's resolve to resurrect the technology from its dismal state.[340] As revealing and well researched as his study may be in demystifying the value of the telegraph in the 1857 mutiny, it does not take into consideration the use of telegraphy during other moments of crises in India or in other colonies. Thus, repeating the Council's foresight, modern historians have focused on the interplay between telegraphy and danger apprehension in India alone, but neglected to consider Ceylon as anything other than a tranquil location.

The purpose of this chapter is to address this neglect by analyzing three cases of emergencies that occurred in Ceylon during the second half of the nineteenth century: namely, the cholera outbreak of 1877, the Kotahena Riot of 1883, and the collapse of the Oriental Bank Corporation in 1884. It seeks to understand if and how telegraphy was used by the colonial administration in dealing with these emergencies in their attempt to bring forth stability and peace. Did the colonial government use the telegraph to communicate these events? Did the telegraph facilitate faster resolutions to these

[337]See, for example: Mel Gorman, "Sir William O'Shaughnessy, Lord Dalhousie, and the Establishment of the Telegraph System in India," *Technology and Culture* 12, no. 4 (October 1971): 581-601; Saroj Ghose, "Commercial Needs and Military Necessities: The Telegraph in India," in *Technology and the Raj: Western Technology and Technical Transfers to India, 1700-1947*, ed. Deepak Kumar and Professor Roy M MacLeod, illustrated edition. (London: Sage Publications, 1995); Daniel R. Headrick, *The Tools of Empire: Technology and European Imperialism in the Nineteenth Century* (Oxford University Press, 1981); Daniel R. Headrick, *The Tentacles of Progress: Technology Transfer in the Age of Imperialism, 1850-1940* (Oxford University Press, USA, 1988).

[338] P.V. Luke, "How the Electric Telegraph Saves India," *Macmillan's Magazine*, 1897, 401-06.

[339] Deep Kanta Lahiri Choudhury, *Telegraphic Imperialism: Crisis and Panic in the Indian Empire, c.1830-1920* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 49.

[340] Ibid., 31-49.

problems? Did it arm the colonial state with a formidable tool of authority to quell them? What role did telegraphy play in general during moments of critical importance? Answering these questions, the chapter will present each case in turn, chronologically. It begins with the cholera epidemic of 1877 and follows with the Kotahena Riot and the Oriental Bank Corporation's failure. Each case will provide a brief account of the most salient points regarding the event and continue with a quantitative and a qualitative analysis of the use and role of telegrams. A conclusion with a brief discussion will follow.

CASE ONE: CHOLERA

> If we view the progress of this terrific malady, as it tends to disorganise society wherever it shows itself, as it causes the destruction of human life on an extensive scale, or as it cramps commerce, and causes vast expense in the maintenance of quarantine and cordon establishments, no subject can surely be, at this moment, of deeper interest.[341]

Cholera was one of the most dreadful diseases of nineteenth-century Ceylon. Between 1841 and 1900, it caused nearly 80,000 deaths out of a reported 129,755 cases, and had an average fatality rate of 61.5%.[342] The disease broke out at various times in different parts of the colony and was contended to be the main cause of depopulation in certain districts.[343] The trajectory of its infection was unpredictable and was said to spread like fire "from hamlet to hamlet and station to station," or it would attack, lay dormant, and then attack again, the same village repeatedly. [344] It struck its victims unexpectedly. A person healthy in one instance could suddenly become seized by an acute onset of watery diarrhea and intensive vomiting and die hours later by severe dehydration; and it simultaneously produced gut wrenching cramps in the bowels, cold and clammy skin, and

[341] James Gilcrest and Sir William Fergusson, *Letters on the cholera morbus, containing ample evidence that this disease, under whatever name known, cannot be transmitted from the persons of those labouring under it to other individuals, by contact* (London, 1831), 3..
[342] S. A. Meegama, "Cholera Epidemics and their Control in Ceylon," *Population Studies* 33, no. 1 (March 1, 1979): 143.
[343] Ibid.
[344] W Fernando, *Kataragama and its festivals, 1819-1939* (Colombo, 1985), v.

a "deathly pallor" on the victim's face.[345] It could kill a person within 10 to 24 hours from the commencement of the attack.[346] The pattern of cholera outbreaks in Ceylon was therefore characteristically sudden and explosive. And, during most of the nineteenth century there was no certainty about when it would attack or why it spread or how to contain it, which also made it one of the most frightening diseases to contend with.

It is the purpose of this case study to determine how telegraphy was used in combating the threat of cholera. While it considers the island's relationship with cholera throughout the century, it focuses primarily on the cholera epidemic of 1877 that coincided with the Great Famine of Madras, India in the same year—during which time more people died from cholera in Ceylon than any other year before or after. Before attempting to answer how telegraphy was used to combat cholera in 1877, the case study will begin by analyzing how cholera was comprehended in the nineteenth century Ceylon; and it will examine the role and function of quarantine in cholera eradication.

Comprehending Cholera in Nineteenth-Century Ceylon

Ceylon's administration had a number of hypotheses regarding the disease's transmission. The most prominent was that cholera was not endemic to the island but an exotic import from India.[347] Reasons that India in particular was pinned as the origin of cholera in Ceylon included, firstly, the unprecedented levels of cholera-related mortalities found there, numbering around 15 million between 1817 and 1865, and 23 million between 1865 and 1947;[348]secondly, the earliest recorded outbreaks of cholera in Ceylon coincided with the arrival of Indian laborers to the newly emerging plantation centers from the 1830s; and, thirdly, that the largest pockets of cholera outbreaks were found in places temporarily occupied by Indian laborers, such as in Jaffna and along the Great Northern

[345] David Arnold, *Colonizing the Body: State Medicine and Epidemic Disease in Nineteenth-century India* (Univ of California Pr, 1993), 160.
[346] Arnold quotes the Secretary of the Madras Medical Board in August 1818Ibid., 161.
[347] "Administration Report for Ceylon, 1878: Report of the principal Civil Medical Officer and Inspector General of Hospitals for the year 1877", 1878, 213c-214c, SLNA.
[348] Arnold, *Colonizing the Body*, 161; David Arnold, *The New Cambridge History of India, Volume 3, Part 5: Science, Technology and Medicine in Colonial India* (Cambridge University Press, 2000), 81.

Road,[349] indicating that newly arrived Indians were sources of the infection.[350] It would not be until the mid 1890s, after Robert Koch's discovery of comma bacillus in a water tank in Calcutta in 1884, that there would be any consensus among the medical community in British south Asia that the disease was a microbiological agent. Until then, Ceylon's government took a hard contagonist stance that the disease emanated from people of the subcontinent. [351]

Indians, specifically south Indian Malabar "coolies,"[352] were held responsible as the main transmitters of cholera within Ceylon. The knowledge that we have today—that cholera is spread via fecal to oral transmission primarily through contaminated water supplies, and that "catching" the disease from a person through the air is not possible—was not known in the nineteenth century.[353] Rather, cholera was likened to a seed which, once planted into a person, could be "communicated" to others by virtue of close proximity.[354] The disease was more likely to spread, however, if there were certain conditions for the disease to grow. Ceylon's jungle-like environment and its native-social landscape were considered as the perfect conduits for cholera transmission.[355] Heavy rains, the monsoon season, stagnant water, heat, large crowds of people, dirt heaps, seasonal droughts, decaying matter, and uncovered latrines were considered by the British in Ceylon to provide the necessary conditions for the disease to run its course.[356]

Partly, this idea was a continued manifestation of Orientalist discourse, but the idea was, nevertheless, influenced by inductive observations of the Indian migrant communities who flocked to the island at the same time as cholera epidemics flared. For example, the famines in Madras in 1877, coupled with the severe and simultaneous cholera epidemics in the same region, influenced the movement of tens of thousands of south Indians to

[349] The famed road that migrant workers walked on for approximately 750 miles over a course of 20 days to reach the plantations.
[350] Arnold, *Science, Technology and Medicine in Colonial India*, 81.
[351] Even today, India is regarded as the historical source of cholera around world. This is a point taken up in: Christopher Hamlin, *Cholera: The Biography* (Oxford, 2009), 38-46.
[352] Unskilled labor.
[353] "WHO | Cholera", n.d., http://www.who.int/topics/cholera/en/.
[354] "Medical Report of Ceylon, 1878," 213c-214c.
[355] See the "introduction" to Fernando, *Kataragama and its festivals, 1819-1939*.
[356] "Medical Report of Ceylon, 1878," 213c.

Ceylon seeking refuge and work.[357] That year coincided with the largest cholera epidemic in Ceylon during the entire century, with 11,963 reported deaths.[358] While it is likely that some Indians were in fact infected with the disease before arrival, given the short incubation time of the disease, of only a few days,[359] it is perhaps more likely that most cholera victims contracted cholera once inside Ceylon. This is evidenced by the 1867 observation that most Indians did not appear sick upon entering Ceylon, but did so "very much on the road, as soon as they commenced their journey."[360] From this vantage, the majority of infections was born in Ceylon and then spread amongst and between other Indians and to neighboring villages along the journey.[361] Altered patterns of diet and behavior brought on by the conditions met in Ceylon, specifically those encountered on the "160 mile tramp"[362] along the Great North Road from Mannaar to the interior,[363] were perhaps significant factors in exposing individuals to infection, but it was nevertheless Indians, not environmental and social circumstances that the administration targeted as the source and the agents of cholera transmission.

Because south Indians, who constituted the bulk of the island's "unskilled" workers, were targeted as the source and agents of cholera transmission, the disease was understood, not as an unwarranted affront but as an unfortunate byproduct of cheap labor. The exceptional amount of immigration from south India to Ceylon in 1877, and the colonial government's reaction to it, makes a case in point.

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[357] CO 54/507, 18 May 1877 "State of the labour market in connection with distress prevailing in India."
[358] Meegama, "Cholera Epidemics and their Control in Ceylon," 144 who quotes the Administrative Reports of the Medical Department.
[359] "WHO | Cholera."
[360] From Cholera Commission, Sessional Paper 2 of 1867Meegama, "Cholera Epidemics and their Control in Ceylon," 145.
[361] There, the death toll raged highest. Ibid., 150.
[362] CO 54/507, 15 March 1877 "Anticipated Excessive Immigration from India and Difficulties Likely to Arise Therefrom."
[363] For a history of the perilous journey, see: I.H.Van den Drisen, *The Long Walk: Indian Plantation Labour in Sri Lanka in the 19th Century*, 1st ed. (Sydney: Prestige Books, 1998).

The Famine of South India and the Cholera Outbreak of 1877

Between the second half of 1876 and early 1878, Madras was the site of one of the most disastrous famines and cholera epidemics to ever hit British-ruled India.[364] Consequently, between January and April of 1877, the largest wave of south Indian immigrants fled to Ceylon by way of ship in a "miserable wretched state," seeking refuge and employment.[365] According to the Governor of Ceylon, in an official correspondence letter dated 15 March 1877, between January and April alone 60,000 immigrants arrived in Ceylon, placing a significant strain on the "island's resources," which, fortunately, were for the time being sufficient, given the proprietors' "heavy crops" for the year.[366] But, as soon as slack season began in May, he continued, there would not be enough jobs for the usual amount of seasonal Indian laborers (who were set to remain in Ceylon until the famine in Madras was rectified), the 60,000 refugees who had arrived since the first of the year, and the tens of thousands of immigrants who were still anticipated to appear.[367]

The Governor emphasized these points repeatedly to the Secretary of State to stress the gravity of the situation and to explain the strain of immigration on Ceylon's resources; however, he did so not to demand that the island should protect itself from such an incursion by stopping or limiting immigration, or that the colonial government should take extra steps to appease the suffering that south Indians incurred from the perils of immigration. Rather, the Governor argued that excessive immigration, which would have nothing better to do come "slack season," signaled an opportune moment to build a new railroad extension to Matale. "Please sanction the railway," the Governor begged repeatedly, "which will gain largely by the cheapness of the superabundant labour in the colony."[368] Although the Secretary of State sanctioned the railway extension on 23 April

[364] For a history of the Great Famine, refer to: Arnold, David, "The 'discovery' of malnutrition and diet in colonial India," *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 31, no. 1 (1994): 1-26; David Washbrook, "The Commercialization of Agriculture in Colonial India: Production, Subsistence and Reproduction in the"Dry South," c. 1870-1930," *Modern Asian Studies* 28, no. 1 (1994): 129-164.
[365] CO 54/507, 15 March 1877, "Anticipated Excessive Immigration from India and Difficulties Likely to Arise therefrom."
[366] Ibid.
[367] Ibid.
[368] CO 54/507, 15 March 1877

in a telegram,[369] the Governor's plans were, nevertheless, challenged because along with "superabundant labour" came the scourge of the worst cholera epidemic to ever hit the island colony.

The Governor's insistence to construct the Matale line was not marked without an at least shallow imprint of human sympathy toward cholera victims. But "apart from the question of humanity" wrote the Governor, "it would be unwise to do anything which might seriously threaten the supply of labor on which the cultivation of our main staple depends… I am clearly of opinion that it is in our first duty to see the resident population is made as secure as may be practicable from the ravages of cholera, which the gangs of famished and sickly coolies are importing in their pain."[370] The colony may benefit from immigration, in other words, but it should not enjoy it irresponsibly, at the expense of individuals living on the island. To counter the threat of cholera—under the authority of Ordinance No. 8 1866—the Governor took a strong contagonist stance and implemented a special system of quarantine that targeted newly arriving south Indian immigrants,[371] whereby healthy south Indians and other "classes" such as merchants were permitted entrance and separated from the sick laborers, who were locked in hospitals until proven healthy or pronounced dead.[372] The idea was simple. Remove the sick and let the healthy through, thereby protecting everyone else and ensuring that the "superabundance of cheap labour" gets to work. The method, according to the Governor, was a middle course that "[refused] on the one hand to put a stop to immigration, and on the other hand to facilitate the indiscriminate admission of Indian refugees and the consequent importation of cholera into our populous centres."[373]

The system of quarantine summarily functioned in the following ways. Firstly, all sailing vessels carrying "coolies" from the ports in southern India to the ports of Kalpitiya, Colombo, or any Ceylon port south of Colombo, were subject to fourteen days

[369] CO 54/507, 23 April 1877
[370] CO 54/507, 15 March 1877
[371] Quarantine imposed by the Government Gazette notification of the 10th February 1877. CO 54/508, 5 July 1877
[372] This measure was not well taken by the Chamber of Commerce, however, which was adamant against any form of immigration control, in the face of cholera or not, thus emphasizing the Governor's divergent opinion about the fate of his colony and economic ideology
[373] CO 54/508, 5 July 1877

quarantine.[374] They were scrubbed and fumigated before returning. Port duties were entrusted to health officers to inspect all south Indian "coolies" on vessels arriving from sites of cholera infection for disease and privation.[375] The healthy among them were taken to depots for the reception of passengers, where they were provided with temporary accommodation and employment.[376] Those found to exhibit cholera-like symptoms were conveyed to an infectious hospital, where they were detained, quarantined, and treated, like the "insane" at lunatic asylums, with such things as milk, fresh air, and, heat belts.[377] Anyone else onboard the vessel, of "higher social status" such as Indian merchants or travelers, was not checked. On 5 July, however, quarantine restrictions were loosened and ships were only quarantined for periods of five to eight days rather than fourteen, if they carried mostly healthy bodied immigrants. The idea, which was strongly put forward by the Chamber of Commerce, gave incentive to ships to discriminate against who they allowed onboard,[378] thus ensuring that planters and relief works received a healthier stock of labor. The sick, however, continued to be belted off and quarantined. The result of quarantine restrictions was characterized by a series of nasty side effects. The survival rate at an infectious hospital was less than 50% and there is a strong possibility that many people actually contracted cholera once inside them.[379] Sometimes, to avoid quarantine, passengers or staff members threw cholera victims "overboard from native crafts during the voyage."[380] Finally, for all the efforts of quarantine, cholera continued to ravage the island at an alarming rate until the early 1880s.[381]

The most salient points to consider regarding quarantine was that it was a system that targeted only south Indian laborers and was exercised only at the site of the island's borders. It was thus a system that sought to filter and isolate suspected cholera agents from entering the island, thereby attempting to stop transmission with very little emphasis on treatment or therapy. How telegraphy was used in the system of quarantine is a subject to which I now turn.

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[374] Government Gazette 10 February 1877
[375] Administrative Report of the Principal Civil Medical Officer, 1877, 218c
[376] Ibid.
[377] Ibid.
[378] CO 54/508, 15 July 1877
[379] Meegama, "Cholera Epidemics and their Control in Ceylon," 149.
[380] Administrative Report of the Principal Civil Medical Officer, 1876 (Colombo, 1877), p. 124.
[381] Meegama, "Cholera Epidemics and their Control in Ceylon," 143.

Telegraphing Cholera in 1877

How do we gauge telegraphy's function? We can surmise that the telegraph could have been used by port officials to announce known or suspected cases of cholera to the central government. Perhaps, also, it could have been deployed to track the travels of the sick to the infectious hospitals located along the Great North Road. However, none of these possibilities constituted the role of telegraphy in cholera eradication in 1877. Quantitatively, telegraphy does not have a strong presence in this case. There were only seven telegrams used by the colonial government in discussing the 1877 cholera outbreak, including local telegrams and those of official correspondence. Nevertheless, I would argue that telegraphy was an absolutely critical component in relation to the 1877 cholera epidemic, if we take the interest of the colonial government and not the disease itself into account. I would also suggest that an examination of telegraphic communication in relation to cholera indicates that the colonial state was not primarily concerned with immigration or cholera but what immigration and the disease could do for the colonial state. Before pursuing these ideas, let us first examine the telegrams themselves.

There was only one telegram about cholera that was utilized by government agents locally. The single telegram was sent on 5 March 1877 to Colonial Secretary O'Brien in Colombo from the Lt. Governor in Batticaloa. It was sent just ten days prior to the Governor's letter, mentioned above, regarding excess immigration, the threat of cholera, and his desire for the Matale line extension. In the telegram, O'Brien wrote:

> *Saunders writes that matters worse on Puttalam Road and requires authority to feed coolies…full authority to act as he considers best until my return. It would be well if Campbell would proceed at once to Kalpitiya and render such assistance with police as advisable. Quarantine of vessels should be strictly adhered to. Harbour master Tuticorin should warn shippers that Cholera at Kalypitiya.* [382]

There are a number of interesting points about this particular telegram. Firstly, the information was instigated by Tudor Saunders, the prominent coffee-planter in the

[382] SLNA 6/6545, 5 March 1877, "To Colombo, O'Brien, from Batticaloa, Lt. Governor"

Morawak Korale in the Matale District, seeking permission to feed a group of hungry workers, possibly battling cholera, somewhere along Puttalam Road—the route leading from the port at Kalpitiya to the interior coffee estates. This meant that rather than coming from the colonial state, knowledge of the epidemic derived from a private source that was, we can assume, motivated primarily by an interest in commerce. That no local telegrams were sent directly by the colonial state shows that the government was perhaps not concerned with transferring knowledge via telegram, and that private persons and that nongovernmental persons were concerned with the epidemic inside the colony.

Secondly, Batticaloa, where O'Brien was located, is an eastern city. Kalpitiya is in the west and was not connected to the telegraph network in 1877.[383] Therefore, the message was most likely conveyed from Morawak Korale in the center of the island to Batticaloa, thence to Colombo. Therefore, the message was not sent from the site of the problem but from an area approximately 200 km away. How the message made it to Batticaloa is not known exactly, but it is quite telling that it took a private message from a coffee planter to convey governmental troubles occurring at the western border to a government agent in the east. That no other telegraphic messages followed reveals the lack of consistency in using the technology to inform the colonial government about cholera epidemics. This telegram was, therefore, an anomaly in 1877 cholera communication.

General ignorance about cholera outbreaks was prevalent, irrespective of relatively muted telegraphic communication. Writing to the Governor on 19 June 1877, G.J.M O'Brien of the Chamber of Commerce stated that:

> I am further with reference to an allegation that was brought to His Excellency's notice by the deputation that 31 coolies out of a gang of 40 had recently died on their journey along the North Road, to request you to be so good as to furnish me with the name of the person responsible for the allegation, the name of the ship in which the coolies arrived, the date of their arrival, the pass on which they travelled,

[383] Blue Book of Statistics, Ceylon, 1880.

> if this can be procured, the name of their Kangany and the name of the estate on which the Kangany and the survivors of his gang are at present employed.[384]

In other words, there was little if no knowledge about the present state of immigration and cholera within the island's borders; and the Governor, like O'Brien, received his information by deputation rather than direct sources. It is suggestive that the colonial government was not well informed about other similar cholera-related cases.

Even in letters to the Secretary of State, Ceylon's Governor was regarded as not being well informed about the state of events. The Governor had sent an extensive letter, including dispatches from Paumben and Madras, to the Colonial Office on 15 May regarding the threat of excessive immigration and the problem of cholera.[385] It reached there on 9 April. Upon reading it, Permanent Undersecretary Meade noted on the minute sheet that the information in the letter did not "appear satisfactory"; it provided insufficient information about food supplies, could not ascertain the number of coolies immigrating to the island, did not provide ideas for possible public and relief works, and the amount of immigrants yet to be expected was not predicted. But he noted that the Governor wrote amply about wanting to use the coolies to extend the Matale Railway.[386]

The telegrams that passed between the colony and the Home government were slightly more numerous, there were four. All of which were sent before the 9 April letter. Reading them exposes a number of notable features. First of all, the official correspondence telegrams were not about conveying a pressing matter. That the telegrams and the letter were sent in March, and the waves of immigrants had been coming since the beginning of 1877, indicates that if the problem had actually been immediate the government would have communicated earlier. Also, the colonial office was well aware that telegraphic communication was an indication of emergency; that a telegram was sent rather than a letter meant that whatever was being sent was urgent and required a speedy response—especially if a reply by telegram was insisted. The Governor did not order telegraphic replies on any of his telegrams, and the Colonial Office found

[384] CO 54 19th of June 1877
[385] CO 54/507, 15 May 1877
[386] Ibid.

this to be informative itself of the situation. On an incoming telegram on 2 March, regarding the cholera outbreak, Meade noted that because the Governor "did not order a reply by telegram, [and] the fact that Mr. Birch replied by despatch [instead], which will be here about 8th April, shows that the danger apprehended was not so much present as anticipated."[387] Thus, the telegrams that the Governor sent were intended as one way communication. They were meant to communicate something; not to seek help, insistence, or, as noted above, to provide the colonial office with sufficient information—even the Permanent Undersecretary knew this was the case.

Secondly, the telegrams reinforced what would be said again in the letter. The two telegrams sent on 23 March, eight days after the letter was sent, included the following information: "Stoppage of immigration from India owing to outbreak of cholera on board a native vessel, by last mail you will be furnished with all information…." and "it is anticipated that relief works may be necessary in consequence of the famine in India and the large increasing supply of labour consequently seeking employment here, it would therefore be advantageous that the railway …to Matale should be sanctioned as early as possible."[388] Then on 16 April, eight days after the letter was received, a telegram titled "Telegram regarding railway to matale…" was sent. Not surprisingly there were no other telegrams sent after this one because on 23 April, the Matale line was formally sanctioned by the Secretary of State, and the Governor had no more need in deliberating on the subject via telegraph. The only telegram which did not recall the Matale line was the following telegram "deeply regret to report sudden death of sir M. Hackett this morning from cholera pray inform friends."[389] The announcement of a death by telegram was common practice. But, it was timely, nevertheless, since it was sent on 17 March just days before the letter would arrive; a dead Justice of the Peace was a good indication of the severity of cholera and would fit well in the narrative about immigration, cholera, and the need to contain the problem, via employment on the Matale line. Thus, by the time the colonial office received the letter, it was already informed that there was excessive immigration, that cholera was killing high-ranking Europeans, and that the Matale line extension was critically required.

[387] CO 54/507, 15 March 1877
[388] CO 54/507, 23 March 1877
[389] CO 54/507, 17 March 1877

To conclude, I suggest that the telegraphic communication about cholera in 1877 sent by the Governor was used to influence the metropolitan government to sanction the Matale railway. The logic was: there was an excess of labor and an epidemic of cholera; rather than stop immigration, open the borders and institute a system of quarantine that only marginally sufficed; then, rather than worry further, the excess labor ought to be taken advantage of and put to use building the railway. The one local telegram that actually considered cholera inside the island was sent by a private planter most likely because he was concerned for the coolies that were supposed to work on his estate. The telegrams to London were not used to negotiate the problem of cholera in any comprehensive or intelligent way; nor were they even about cholera eradication, but as the best way to utilize the immigrants supposedly carrying it. The quarantine system, which was the colonial state's only form of cholera eradication, did not use telegraphic communication. Inside the island, the colonial government was ignorant of cholera outbreaks regardless of access to telegraphy.

CASE TWO: KOTAHENA RIOT, 1883

The Kotahena Riot[390] began when 2,000 to 4,000 Catholics armed with bludgeons and swords of sword-fish,[391] attacked a procession of 2,000 to 4,000 Buddhists,[392] whose *perahera*[393] was meant to celebrate the completion of the decorations of and the setting of the "eyes of Buddha" at the *Dipaduttama vihara.*[394] It occurred in Kotahena, Colombo, on Easter Sunday, 25 March 1883 around one o'clock p.m. and lasted until the evening. It culminated in numerous injuries and two deaths, one Catholic and one Buddhist.

The factors which precipitated the violence were numerous. The first was based on demographic reasons. Kotahena[395] had been primarily a Catholic dominated subsection of Colombo since the rule of the Portuguese, and the Buddhists, who had only since the authority of British colonial rule been granted permission to build religious edifices in Colombo, were a religious minority in the area.[396] The Catholics desired to retain their majority status. Secondly, there had been a long standing oratory and pamphlet war between the two religions for decades, which created deep seeded animosity between the two groups.[397] Third, the Buddhists were purported by witnesses to have offended the Catholics publicly, therefore provoking violence. For example, it was widely rumored that a dead monkey was nailed to a cross and displayed during the *perahera*;[398] that some Buddhists carried images insulting to the Virgin;[399] and, M. Don John a Catholic and

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[390] A great deal of debt is owed to G.P.V. Somaratna for transcribing and publishing all official correspondence records, news papers, found at both the SLNA and the NA in Kew, related to the Kotahena Riot. G.P.V. Somaratna, *Kotahena Riot, 1883: A religious riot in Sri Lanka* (G.P.V. Somaratna, 1991).

[391] Ibid., 95.

[392] Numbers were enumerated officially. Therefore, there are many different estimates. John D. Rogers, "Social Mobility, Popular Ideology, and Collective Violence in Modern Sri Lanka," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 46, no. 3 (1987): 589; Somaratna, *Kotahena Riot, 1883*, 97, 100, 246.

[393] *Perahera* is s Buddhist procession or parade.

[394] A Buddhist Temple in Kotahena.

[395] Kotahena was the most densely populated of Colombo's eleven wards. According to the 1881 Municipal Census there were 26,692 people living in Kotahena, of which half were Christian. Less than a quarter was Buddhist and less than that were Hindu or Muslim.

[396] Somaratna, *Kotahena Riot, 1883*, 389-90.

[397] For a history of this oratory and pamphlet war, read Richard Young and G.P.V. Somaratna, *Vain Debates: the Buddhist-Christian Controversies of Nineteenth-Century Ceylon* (Vienna: Institute of Indology University of Vienna, 1996); see also,Tessa Bartholomeusz, "Catholics, Buddhists, and the Church of England: The 1883 Sri Lankan Riots," *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 15 (1995): 97-100 especially .

[398] Somaratna, *Kotahena Riot, 1883*, 101, 134, 143, 165.

[399] Ibid., 20, 106, 118, 155, 299.

assistant notary clerk, who, upon examination by the court, remembered that Gunananda, a prominent and often despised Buddhist orator, "held up a book (in red binding) and said this is the book of the Christians. Then he put it on the ground and put his foot on it. He then began to abuse and blaspheme the Lord Jesus Christ and the Virgin Mary."[400] Fourth, it was also an issue of sacred space since the procession was planned to move in front of the church on Easter Sunday, using tom-tom drums—which may have also been offensive to the austerity of the Catholics.[401] The police were also to blame since they were in charge of permitting collective processions; the documentary evidence shows the incompetence of the police in granting organizing the event, losing applications, forgetting that applications were processed, and scheduling the Buddhist and Catholic processions on the same dates and times. A number of times, the police had to cancel permission. [402] Finally, the collective violence which ensued was most likely not premeditated by all people from the groups, but violence was provoked as individual religious peers came under attack.

The Kotahena Riot was significant because it was the first large-scale act of religious violence that occurred in Ceylon during the second half of the nineteenth century, at a time which is characterized by economic and political stability.[403] Also, the riot coincided with the rise of Buddhist nationalism.[404] The Buddhist Defense Committee began in reaction to the riot, represented by H.S. Olcott;[405] the Buddhist flag was created in the aftermath of the violence.[406] It was, therefore, a symbolically critical moment in the island's Buddhist and British history. It was, furthermore, a test of the British authorities'

[400] Taken from SLNA Lot 33/991, 28 April 1883, in Ibid., 272.
[401] See especially Young and Somaratna, *Vain Debates*, 189-194.
[402] Taken from the Riots Commission Report: Supplement to the Ceylon Observer, July 17th 1883Somaratna, *Kotahena Riot, 1883*, 7-13.
[403] During the second half of the nineteenth century, Ceylon's history is characterized by the consolidation of British power over the entire island, and the rise of plantations and economic prosperity.
[404] For an interesting history of Buddhist Nationalism in Colombo, see Mark Frost, "'Wider Opportunities': Religious Revival, Nationalist Awakening and the Global Dimension in Colombo, 1870–1920," *Modern Asian Studies* 36, no. 4 (2002): 937-967; See also, L. A. Wickremeratne, "Religion, Nationalism, and Social Change in Ceylon, 1865-1885," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, no. 2 (January 1, 1969): 123-150.
[405] H.S. Olcott, "The government and the Buddhists of Ceylon.", January 1, 1871.
[406] K.H.M. Sumathipala, "The Kotahena Riots and their Repercussions," *Ceylon Historical Journal* vii (1968): 65-79.

capacity to contain intense violence,[407] and it provides fresh ground for examining the relationship between the telegraph and colonial power.

This Case study sets out with this in mind. It is divided into three parts. The first part will explain the riot in narrative form. The second part will analyze the ways in which the police stopped the riot and the telegraph's role in this process. The third part will examine the single telegram that the Governor used to communicate the event to London and its significance and purpose.

Narrative of the Kotahena Riot

The first report of violence, delivered by an unnamed messenger, reached the police accompanying the Buddhist procession at canal-bridge on Skinner's Road, less than half a mile from where the catholic mob had assembled, at St. Lucia's cathedral.[408] They were told that a Buddhist priest had been assaulted up ahead. In reaction to the news, the Buddhists became excited and men from the group furiously rushed to a nearby timber yard and took possession of "any stick or weapon they could find."[409] The Buddhists henceforth continued on with fervid speed to retaliate.

Outnumbered, the 20 to 90 police[410] who were responsible for securing the *perahera* were not able to prevent the fighting or stop it once it had commenced. To no avail, Major Tranchell, an accompanying officer, ordered both the Buddhists and Catholics to disband and turn back.[411] But, it was too late. As soon as the Buddhists arrived at St. Lucia's corner, fighting had begun. They threw sticks at one another, stabbed one another with knives; the Catholics sliced bullocks' throats, overturned and burned carts carrying

[407] For a history of Ceylon's police department during this period, see: A.C. Dep, *A History of the Ceylon Police*, vol. 2 (1866-1913) (Colombo Police Amenities Fund. Police Headquarters, 1970).
[408] Somaratna, *Kotahena Riot, 1883*, 14.
[409] Ibid.
[410] There was no official enumerations. And, opinions about the size of the police present differ substantially from each other. or example, the Governor says there were 80, Lot 5/70 No. 127 Miscellaneous, 28 March 1883; the police themselves say there were between 20 or 40Ibid., 38, 94, 100, 246.
[411] Ibid., 95.

religious ornaments.[412] The Buddhists hit back with their fists or whatever material they could use as a weapon. [413] In the inquest report into the cause of death of Juan Naide, the Buddhist who was killed during the riot, published by the *Examiner* on the 30th of March 1883, Major Tranchell testified that:

> As the carts neared the Catholics a body of the latter ran down, seized the bullocks, belaboured and killed five of them, and the carts were drawn up in a heap and set on fire…the police could not cope with the two parties, who were determined to fight, the Buddhist having declared they would kill the others or die themselves…During the conflict, I saw very heavy blows given on both sides and many men lying on the ground, who I thought would never recover. I never before thought that it took so much to kill a man. I ordered the wounded to be taken to hospital, but nothing could be done till late at night. I afterwards ascertained that there were 20 of the contending parties, and 11 police officers seriously hurt.[414]

Major Tranchell was right to ascertain the fragility of the human condition. The blows were in fact strong enough to kill a man: two people died during the encounter. Only the death of the Buddhist, Juan Naide, was officially declared or examined by police, however.[415] A reported one-eyed Malabar man hit Juan Naide on the head with a club and knocked him to the ground.[416] When Juan attempted to get up, "a dark man with a beard, dressed in a cloth with crosses painted on his forehead and shoulder, and a red handkerchief round his head," stabbed him in the stomach with a *Kris* (an asymmetrical dagger from south-east Asian origins).[417] Then another person came and began to kick him repeatedly in the ribs, saying "this man is still alive."[418] None of the police witnessed the murder and nobody is reported to have intervened to stop the attackers.[419] The three

[412] Ibid., 96.
[413] Ibid., 99.
[414] Ibid., 96-97.
[415] "Administration Report of Ceylon. Police Inspector.", 1883, 47c.
[416] Somaratna, *Kotahena Riot, 1883*, 109.
[417] Ibid.
[418] Ibid.
[419] For example,Ibid., 94.

attackers left Juan in the street to die alone. But, the sister of his wife, who reported to be present and witness the attack, summoned a couple bystanders to remove her brother-in-law from the road and move him to the side, into a field.[420] The victim's wife, who was informed of her husband's demise by her startled child, later arrived to the scene, and accompanied her husband to the hospital, where he died soon after from hemorrhaging.[421] The men responsible for his death were never caught or sentenced.

There is very little reference of the murdered Catholic man, Kutch Appu, or Cutch Appu as he is also named.[422] His name is completely absent from the Commission Report and the Administration Report of Police. His name and death are only mentioned during a bribery charge against Inspector Gunaratna and are scantily reported in a few newspapers.[423] *The Ceylon Observer* reported on 29 March that Kutch Appu died from complications due to puncture wounds "on his right side, about an inch in length and three inches in depth, penetrating the right lobe of his liver, and also a simple fracture of the right temporal bone."[424] It suggested, too, that Inspector Gunaratna was responsible for the man's death, that he stabbed him in the lung.[425] But, the Inspector was never brought to trial for it.

How the Police Stopped the Riot

The police were not able to stop the violence themselves. They were even at some points cornered and unable to contain the bedlam around them. Sticks, fists, and clubs were often aimed at them too.[426] The police had to retreat, even, and if not "they would not be here to the story."[427] It is precisely for these reasons, we would assume, that the police would have hurried to telegraph to ask for help. But, this is not at all what happened.

[420] Ibid., 108.
[421] Ibid.
[422] Ibid., 141, 150.
[423] Ibid., 141.
[424] Ibid., 150.
[425] Ibid.
[426] Ibid., 99.
[427] Ibid., 100.

The police were, nevertheless, able to stop the riot. Firstly, during a short lull in the fight, Assistant Superintendent Holland succeeded in persuading a body of the Catholics to follow him to the cathedral, where a Roman Catholic priest addressed them and asked them to cease.[428] Major Tranchell then sent a mounted despatch to call in the military, the Royal Dublin Fusilier's 1st Battalion, the infamous Irish infantry of the British Army.[429] The presence of the military was reported to have stopped the fighting and the injured were carried to hospital in the late evening.[430] It was reported to have rained heavily that afternoon too, scattering the remaining people, and washing the debris and human effluvia into the soil.[431] Thus, the 20 to 90 police who had endured the length of the violence, who were unable to defend themselves or protect the parties from injury and death, finally gained some peace when a Catholic priest, the military, and rain came to their rescue. [432] But, why did not other police come to help the defeated men caught in the violence? Why was the telegraph not used?

In 1883, the population of the Western Province was 897,329 and had a police force of 797 men, of which 756 were located in Colombo alone. Colombo was, in fact, the most heavily policed part of the island considering that there were only 1,579 police on the whole island.[433] This meant that there were, at least statistically, over 700 police located in Colombo who could have helped the police in the riot.

There is no direct evidence explaining why other police were not called, but there are at least two likely explanations. Firstly, the police were not the appropriate group to turn to in the face of such violence, since they were—as described by G.W.R. Campbell, Inspector General of Police, in the 1883 Administration Report for the Police—a poorly trained and meagerly armed band of men that would have been unsuitable, or unavailable, to assist the riot:

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[428] Ibid.
[429] SLNA Lot 5/70 No. 127 Miscellaneous, 28 March 1883Ibid., 96.
[430] Ibid., 15.
[431] Ibid.
[432] Military guards were placed at the convent and the *vihara*, and remained there until relieved by the police the following morning. On Monday, the military suppressed a Buddhist procession that was caught carrying weapons, but no more violence ensued.
[433] "Administration Report of Ceylon. Police Inspector.," 43c.

> It is a civil police with a semi-military training. It is armed with sniper rifles and swords, and drilled, but the men carry only batons when on any ordinary duty other than treasure or convict escort or jail guard… But even of the small force of 1,580 police, in Ceylon, from one-quarter to one-third are employed on duties which are not strictly police—the guarding of treasure and jails, for instance, and of convict gangs on such public works as the saltpans at Hambantota, the Mahara quarries, and the Breakwater. They are, further, the only relieving officers of the vagrant portion of the helpless poor, and they are now the jailers of several of the minor jails.[434]

Secondly, the Colombo police were as dislocated from each other as the city was spread wide and had no quick means of communicating. In Kotahena there were four police stations in various locations.[435] One of which was immediately near the site of the riot on Skinner's Road, directly around the corner from St. Lucia.[436] It is not known, however, which station assisted the police at the riot or which ones were equipped to do so. The other police stations in Colombo, which contained the majority of the 82 police stations on the island, were located in other parts of the city, which were far from the scene.[437] Calling to arms the police scattered throughout the city was not a viable option for the men locked in the riot. The city's network of communications, which was based primarily on the spread of rumors[438] and foot and mounted messengers, exacerbated the reality of this dislocation.[439] Despite the colony's advances in telecommunications—the telegraph network and the telephone system from 1880—there was no network coverage in Colombo, or any other city on the island.[440] Until the next century, only inter-regional telegraph lines, between the most important centers of commerce, constituted the

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[434] Ibid.
[435] According to a map of Kotahena in 1880. In Somaratna, *Kotahena Riot, 1883*.
[436] Ibid., 256.
[437] "Administration Report of Ceylon. Police Inspector.," 43c.
[438] The police based most of their intelligence on gathering and examining rumors.
[439] John D. Rogers, *Crime, Justice and Society in Colonial Sri Lanka*, 1st ed. (Routledge, 1995).
[440] In 1880, Ceylon's telegraph was made up of railway lines that stretched from Colombo to Galle, Colombo to Kalutara, Colombo to Kandy, an extra railway wire from Rambukkana to Kadugannawa, Colombo Breakwater Engineer's Office to Mahara Quarry, and Peradeniya junction to Nawalapitiya. Its main lines went from Kandy to Gampola, Kandy to Dambulla junction, Dambulla junction to Anuradhapura, Anuradhapura to Mannar, and Mannar to Talaimannar. Its branch lines were drawn from Kandy to Dambulla junction, Dambulla to Trincomalee, Mannar to Jaffna, Gampola to Nuwara Eliya, Nuwara Eliya to Badulla, and Badulla to Batticaloa. "Ceylon Blue Book of Statistics", 1880, 6.

island's network. The trajectory of the telegraph did not, therefore, follow the pattern of the island's population, which was quickly urbanizing, especially in Colombo. Therefore, communication was restricted to space and human agency, which in Colombo was wide and slow, respectively. Thus, the police did not use the telegraph because there was no network coverage in Colombo.

The riot accentuated the reality of this disconnection and signaled its address. According to G.W.R. Campbell:

> One great advantage the Colombo Police have derived from the Kotahena riots is that I got government to connect by telephone all my town stations and jail guards with each other and with the principal public institutions. This was most necessary, as we have never had even telegraphic communication, though Colombo is, by reason of its seaside position, and its spreading lake and cocoanut groves, one of the most widely scattered cities in the world in proportion to its population. Indeed the police is rather starved in every way, to justify which statement I would add to what I have stated before, that we have not one mounted constable in the Colony, and not a vestige of harbor police anywhere.[441]

Whether or not telecommunication would have helped the police, its absence in the Kotahena Riot nevertheless inspired it to become part of policing in Ceylon's cities.[442] According to sources of the 1915 Riot,[443] the police used telegraphy to organize their movements; and telegrams, alongside letters and telephone tapping, were used as evidence by the police to locate and ascertain the origins and instigators of the riot.[444] However, even by then police only had access to telegraphy in major metropolitan areas. According to L.M. Samarasinghe—who in 1945 was Divisional Regional Officer at Anamadua—despite having a high crime rate, there was no telegraphy or telephone in his district.[445] However, because of the high crime rate, he was necessarily in contact with the

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[441] "Administration Report of Ceylon. Police Inspector.," 44c.
[442] Rogers, *Crime, Justice and Society in Colonial Sri Lanka*, 54-55.
[443] For a brief survey of the 1915 Riot, please see: A. P. Kannangara, "The Riots of 1915 in Sri Lanka: A Study in the Roots of Communal Violence," *Past & Present*, no. 102 (February 1, 1984): 130-165; A.C. Dep's book cites heavily from primary sources and is, therefore, a good point of departure into the topic, see: A.C. Dep, *Ceylon Police and Sinhala-Muslim Riots of 1915* (Ratmalana: Vishva Lekha, 2001).
[444] Dep, *Ceylon Police and Sinhala-Muslim Riots of 1915*, 105-112.
[445] L.M. Samarasinghe, *Looking Back* (Colombo: Author Publication, 2006), 7.

courts, the police, and the kachcheri at Puttalama which was seventeen miles away.[446] He had no telephone or telegraph, so what he did was he sent a foot messenger and wait for him to return, usually taking an entire day.[447] To counter this, he devised the use of pigeons to contact the authorities in the other district, which took a total of seven to eight minutes. The full case of his story can be read in his autobiography.[448] The district did not receive the telephone until 1957.[449]

Telegraphing the Kotahena Riot

While the police did not use telegraphy to contain the Kotahena Riot, the colonial government made use of one telegram to announce the Riot to the metropolitan government. It was sent by the Governor on 28 March, three days after the riot:

> Serious riot here on Sunday between Roman Catholics and Buddhists. Police outnumbered by thousands and overpowered. Military called in when mob dispersed. Riot again attempted on Monday and suppressed without violence. Town now quiet. Fifty rioters apprehended awaiting trial. Twenty rioters injured taken to hospital one had since died. Neither police nor military fired. Riot caused by false stories that insults were offered by Buddhists to Christian symbols. Mohammedans took no part in riots.[450]

There are a number of significant points to make about this telegram. Firstly, the Governor had been on leave during the riot and returned only after the military had already quelled the violence, which could explain the three day delay. It was, furthermore, the first piece of information about the riot to reach London.[451] The transmission of the telegram was, therefore, not an invitation for help or a means of managing the crisis as much as it was a statement of resolution. It declared the success of the military and

[446] Ibid., 8.
[447] Ibid.
[448] See, especially: Ibid., 7-11.
[449] "Ceylon Administrative Report 1957", 1957, A 263 part I Report of the Asst. Govt. Agent, Puttalam & Chilaw Districts for 1957 .
[450] CO 337/14, NA 28 March 1883.
[451] The letter sent on the 2nd of April 1883 did not reach London until the following month.

government and the ineptitude of the police in stopping the riot. And, it blamed the Catholics for the violence.

Secondly, the information contained in the telegram appears to have been biased and incomplete. The Riots Commission Report of June 1883 consisted of Mr. Saunders, the government Agent of the Western Provence, Colonel Duncan, a senior military officer of the Royal Dublin Fusiliers, and one Eurasian, Mr. de Saram, the District Judge of Kurunegala.[452] It was their primary duty to determine the cause and to investigate the ways in which the government handled the crisis. Mr. Saunders, who was absent during the riot, never mentioned his absence in the report. [453]Colonel Duncan, the Governor's purported friend, was in the military that presided during the riots, a fact which would not cause suspicion if most of the final section of the report was not dedicated to the bravery and success of the Royal Dublin Fusiliers.[454] All three men were Protestants. The absence of Roman Catholic and Buddhist representatives indicates that the Commission was impartial to the views of either party.[455]

Another curious deception was the complete lack of recognition that Buddhists and Catholics had mutually strong grievances against one another, and had for decades engaged in a number of heated public debates. Both Buddhists and Catholics had been for years in a pamphlet and oratory war, in which both sides defamed the verity of the other. The report, instead, made the Buddhists into innocent victims of an enraged and jealous Catholic population that was being squeezed out of its majority position in Kotahena. While the report does consider that the Buddhists provoked the Catholics to battle, it sided with the Buddhists rather than taking into account that the riot was an almost inevitable consequence of years of embittered and bifurcated religious squabbles. Although there were eyewitnesses who later reported that they saw Buddhists carrying monkeys on a cross that supposedly angered the Catholics, this claim is denied by the Commission. Also missing from the report was the mention of the Catholic man, Kutch Appu, who was murdered during the riot. The omission of these details suggests that the Commission may have used the Catholics as scapegoats to explain the violence. Also the

[452] Somaratna, *Kotahena Riot, 1883*, 5-24.
[453] Ibid., 414.
[454] Ibid., 412.
[455] Ibid.

Commission heavily criticized the police for granting the Buddhists permission to have a procession on Easter Sunday, of all the days when a disturbance was predictable.[456] They were blamed for granting the permission to Gunananda, a Buddhist monk who they claimed was famous for his verbal and written attacks against Christianity. By this reason alone, the report hinted, it was enough to incriminate the Catholics because of their hatred for this man. However, the testimony of witnesses subpoenaed by the Commission, who claimed that Gunananda's language did not seem inappropriate, was totally ignored.[457] Finally, the Governor's letter of 2 April 1883, sent months before, and the Riot Commission Report of 26 June 1883, contained near identical information.[458] To this end, an unswerving narrative, found in the letter and continued in the report, had been constructed which supported the government and condemned the Catholics. Thus, the seemingly biased judgments and details remained consistent in all manners of opinion. The government's certainty is curious given that no person was ever condemned for the riot, despite the government's consistent knowledge of culprits and "facts" from the end of March until June.

All of this goes on to suggest that the colonial government perhaps tailored the telegram, the letter, and the report to show the Home government that it had remained consistent throughout the ordeal, a value which was essential in maintaining the bond of trust between the imperial center and the colony. Consistency bespoke confidence, intelligence, and resolve—all such characteristics were positive attributes of a government in the face of emergency. The telegram began this process of consistency by quickly indicating to the Home authorities that measures were verified, contained, and controlled, thus creating a space in which the government could further cover-up the realities on the ground, to render a positive image of a government challenged by its own subjects. Telegraphy as a tool of emergency management in relation to the Kotahena Riot ends on somewhat dubious grounds, therefore. Telegraphy was not used during the riot. The police did not have access to it. And, when the Governor did deploy it, he did so as a tool of declaring a resolution to find time to construct a positive image of the government at Home. But, it

[456] Young and Somaratna, *Vain Debates*, 192.
[457] Ibid., 193.
[458] CO 54 2 April 1883

did not offer real-time benefits to the colony, its authority, or its ability to control violence in Colombo.

CASE THREE: COLLAPSE OF THE ORIENTAL BANK CORPORATION

The Oriental Bank Corporation collapsed on 3 May 1884. The significance of this event was manifold for Ceylon and its government. Firstly, the island's currency had been based on Oriental Bank Corporation notes, which became valueless immediately following the bank's failure; a problem that was not resolved until the end of the year. Traders and merchants in Ceylon, consequently, lost confidence in paper currency and demanded the value of their notes in silver. Many traders would, in fact, only trade in the currency of silver or other precious metals. Secondly, Ceylon's government held a large portion of its revenue balance in the bank, which it subsequently lost in the crash. These consequences of the bank's collapse had substantial effects on the island's economy as a whole. For example, trade was slowed down. The price of rice and other subsistence foodstuffs became inflated. But, most importantly, it signaled the colonial government's intervention in banking, which had hitherto remained a private enterprise. How the colonial government utilized telegraphic communication to mediate and regulate the collapse is the focus of this case study. Before analyzing the use of telegraphy, the case study will briefly describe the origins and role of banks in Ceylon, the events that led to the Oriental Bank Corporation's collapse, and the effects of the collapse on the colony, respectively.

Origin and Role of Banks in Ceylon

Until the introduction of the plantation system in the mid to late 1830s, Ceylon's economy was mercantile in character, dealing in the export of a few natural products. It had some activity of shipping and trading, with a very small agricultural sector, and meager manufactures. [459] Both foreign trading companies and the administration

[459] Kumari Jayawardena, *Nobodies to Somebodies: The rise of the colonial bourgeoisie in Sri Lanka* (Colombo: Social Scientists' Association, 2000), 7.

continued to operate monopolies that had existed since the pre-colonial era, such as the cinnamon trade. There were no major innovations in the economy or society during this pre-capitalist phase of British occupation. Rather, European merchants adapted to existing structures of trade and capital accumulation. This included the accumulation of capital based on local currency and loaning agencies.[460] Banks did not exist during this period. However, "Chettiars" or "Chetties" from south India provided the majority of exchange services necessary for the island's balance of trade and money lending.[461] And, merchant houses sold sterling bills with a six month sight. While these services suited the demands of the pre-capitalist economy, the Chettiars and the merchant houses could not sufficiently service the island's economy in the wake of the plantation era.

From the mid to late 1830s Ceylon's economy experienced a significant acceleration of its import-export trade with the rise and expansion of plantations.[462] According to *Ferguson's Ceylon Directory* for the year 1880, there was a sharp distinction between the value of exports in the pre- and plantation years. The value of exports rose from £224,000 in 1825 to £1.2 million in 1850 and £4.7 million in 1880.[463] The value of exports was composed primarily of unprocessed commodities, of which coffee constituted the bulk. Between 1850 and 1880, coffee accounted for 75% of total exports.[464] The value of imports increased alongside, and at times ahead of, the rise in exports, indicating a direct relation of imports to the expansion of the plantation sector. Imports mostly included foodstuffs for the growing number of plantation workers, luxury goods for the British, administrators, and planters, and the food and textile requirements of the population in

[460] H. A. De S. Gunasekera, *From Dependent Currency to Central Banking in Ceylon: An Analysis of Monetary Experience 1825-1957* (London: The London School of Economics and Political Science, 1962), 22-23.
[461] Meeting Ceylon's trade deficit with India out of its receipts of sterling from its exports had always been the main problem of exchange in Ceylon. Put in another way, Ceylon sold the majority of its exports to the U.K. and imported mostly from India. Ceylon merchants, therefore, earned sterling but had to spend rupee. As a result, Ceylon's trade balance was constituted on the conversion of sterling into rupee. The Chettiars were involved in the business of importing rupees from India, which were acquired at minimum cost, and negotiating their conversion at the island's merchant houses, whose own services operated in cash. According to H.D. Andree in 1864, "Judging from the fact that the entire grain trade was in the hands of the Chetties, and that coffee-planting was in its infancy, the exports consisting principally of cinammon, coconut oil and coir, we may conclude that they met all the requirements of the merchants and that their importations of specie were but rarely required H.D. Andree, "The Progress of Banking in Ceylon," *Ferguson's Ceylon Directory 1876-78* April (1864): 87.
[462] For an overview of the history of coffee plantations in Ceylon, please see: Roland Wenzlhuemer, *From Coffee to Tea Cultivation in Ceylon, 1880-1900: An Economic and Social History* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 53-59.
[463] Quoted in: Jayawardena, *Nobodies to Somebodies*, 131.
[464] The other main commodities included: cinnamon (2.7%), coconut products (10%), arecanuts (3%).

general.[465] The sharp increase in export and import values created a high demand for capital which the monetary system of exchange and money lending under the Chettiars and merchant houses, which had serviced the colony since the start of the century, were not able to meet. As a result, banks were instituted to meet the planters' and the attendant industries' increased demand for capital.

The Bank of Ceylon was the island's first bank. It commenced operations on 1 June 1841 by Royal Charter. It remained the only bank on the island until the commercial crisis of 1845 to 1847, when the price of coffee fell from 68s per cwt in 1844 to 43s per cwt in 1847.[466] During this time, the Western Bank of India, established in 1843, moved its head office from Bombay to London and changed its name to the Oriental Bank. Two years later it established a branch office in Colombo. Having survived the crisis, in 1847 it took over the Bank of Ceylon and in 1851 they merged to form the Oriental Bank Corporation. By 1878, the bank grew and had branches and agencies in Kandy, Jaffna, Galle, Badulla, Nuwara Eliya, Dambulla and Haldummulla.[467] It also had agencies throughout southern and eastern Asia, including India, China, Mauritius, Hong Kong, and the Straits Settlements.[468] In 1854, the Chartered Mercantile Bank of India, London, and China established a branch in Colombo. The Oriental Bank Corporation was the larger of the two, however, with dividends that remained steadily above the Chartered Mercantile Bank's, ranging respectively from 16 to 10 in 1860 and 12 to 6 in 1870.[469] In 1884 it had 7 branches, 5 agencies, and 25 sub-agencies, including its head office in London.[470] Therefore, until the bank crash in 1884, there were two banks in operation in Ceylon, the Oriental Bank Corporation and the Chartered Mercantile Bank, of which the former was the largest.

These banks functioned in three primary ways. Firstly, they provided credit to planters for the rent of land and the cost of its cultivation, and they gave credit to the ancillary industries which developed alongside the plantation sector. The loans were somewhat problematic since they had a six-month turnover which placed the planting community in

[465]Value of imports was £296,000 in 1825 and £5 million in 1880. Jayawardena, *Nobodies to Somebodies*, 131.
[466] Andree, "The Progress of Banking in Ceylon," 81-82.
[467] Gunasekera, *From Dependent Currency to Central Banking in Ceylon*, 56.
[468] Ibid., 48.
[469] Ibid., 57.
[470] Ibid., 60.

a position sensitive to the short-term fluctuations of the market, making foreclosures and defaults an easy reality—although the majority of the period experienced sober expansion. The British, foreign businesses, and the Chettiars were the main customers of bank loans.[471]

Secondly, banks were agencies of currency exchange. According to Arnold Wright in *Twentieth Century Impressions of Ceylon*:

> The chief business of an 'exchange bank', as the name denotes, is the purchase and sale of bills of exchange. Had the merchant who ships his produce to Europe, Australia, America, or whatever country it may be, to wait until such shipments were realised and the proceeds remitted back to him, trade would be hampered to such an extent as to become well-nigh impossible, but here the exchange bank steps in and purchases the bills of exchange drawn against such shipments, so that the merchant has not to remain without his money. [472]

As exchange banks, they made possible the sale of commodities in foreign markets on an everyday basis.[473]

Finally, in addition to providing credit for the expansion of the economy, and facilitating currency exchange, banks also supplied the colony with its currency. Prior to 1856, the money supply consisted of Treasury notes, bank notes, Indian rupees, and its subsidiary coinage. In 1855, Governor Henry Ward announced the withdrawal of Treasury notes

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[471] Jayawardena, *Nobodies to Somebodies*, 136. It must be noted, too, that banks in Ceylon held deliberate policies of discrimination that did not extend credit on sensible terms to "native" entrepreneurs.[471] Even as late as 1930, Ceylonese planters required a middleman or agent to cosign the goods of his estate to a broker, thus increasing the total cost of the loan. Ceylonese, therefore, primarily continued to receive loans from the Chettiar money lenders.[471] On the other hand,

[472] According to Arnold Wright in Twentieth Century of Ceylon "The chief business of an 'exchange bank', as the name denotes, is the purchase and sale of bills of exchange. Had the merchant who ships his produce to Europe, Australia, America, or whatever country it may be, to wait until such shipments were realised and the proceeds remitted back to him, trade would be hampered to such an extent as to become well-nigh impossible, but here the exchange bank steps in and purchases the bills of exchange drawn against such shipments, so that the merchant has not to remain without his money." Arnold Wright, *Twentieth century impressions of Ceylon: its history, people, commerce, industries, and resources* (Asian Educational Services, 1999), 216.

[473] Andree, "The Progress of Banking in Ceylon," 87.

from circulation, leaving bank notes and rupees as the sole forms of monetary exchange in the island.[474]

The Events that Led to the Oriental Bank Corporation's Collapse

The events that led to the crash of the Oriental Bank Corporation on 3 May 1884 can be summarily described by the following narrative. Around the turn of the 1880s, a leaf fungus termed *Hemileia vastatrix* began to infect the island's coffee plants, causing unmitigated decay of the majority of them and the wholesale abandonment of coffee estates. As a result, the drop in the supply of coffee increased its price.[475] This would not have been so immediately serious, if there had not been a depression in the site of the industry's biggest market, the U.K., at the same time, which caused a sharp decline in the demand for the product simultaneous to the rise in prices. The decline of sales led to a large slump in Ceylon's government revenues, affecting every other branch of trade and industry connected to the coffee industry. Ceylon's banks suffered as a consequence, especially the Oriental Bank Corporation which showed a 50% decrease in its deposits between 1876 and 1883 and a fall in its holdings of bills of exchange from £5.6 to £1.7 million.[476]

Still, the Oriental Bank Corporation may have survived and improved once the colony had transitioned to tea production in the mid 1880s.[477] But there were other circumstances outside the colony that caused even more problems for the bank. Its Chilean bonds fell in value. Its South African business was transferred to the Bank of Africa. There was a sharp decline in the global price of silver and rupee paper.[478] And, a

[474] Gunasekera, *From Dependent Currency to Central Banking in Ceylon*, 37.
[475] Refer to Wenzlhuemer for a history of the failure of the coffee plantation Wenzlhuemer, *From coffee to tea cultivation in Ceylon, 1880-1900*, 53-90.
[476] The bank, compelled to take over the estates of the island's abandoned coffee industry, was possessed of land with little resale value, therefore incurring further losses. Gunasekera, *From Dependent Currency to Central Banking in Ceylon*, 61-62.

[477] Wenzlhuemer, *From Coffee to Tea Cultivation in Ceylon, 1880-1900*, 75-90.
[478] John McGuire, "The Rise and Fall of the Oriental Bank in the Nineteenth Century: A Product of the Transformations That Occurred in the World Economy or the Result of Its Own Mismanagement," in *Asia Examined: Proceedings of the 15th Biennial Conference of the ASAA, 2004, Canberra, Australia.* (Canberra:

number of natural calamities such as cyclones, droughts, and bad harvests in Mauritius afflicted its branches there.[479] The simultaneous occurrence of all of these factors led to the fall of its shares to less than £7 in 1883, from £43 a share in 1877. News of this drop caused a lack of confidence among its customers and there was a rush both in Ceylon and abroad to withdraw deposits.[480] Unable to return the deposits, the directors of the bank suspended payment on 3 May 1884,[481] signaling the immediate end of the bank's operations in all of its branches—[482] including other British possessions such as the Straits Settlements, Mauritius, and Hong Kong. Because the stability of the island's economy was tied to the stability of the bank, Ceylon's economy was immediately devastated.[483]

The Effects of the Collapse on the Colony

The effects of the bank's closure were felt immediately in Ceylon. On the day of the suspension, the colony lost the sum of its balances in the different branches of the Oriental Bank Corporation, valued at Rs. 626,369.68. [484] And, more significantly, the value of all Oriental Bank Corporation notes in circulation—valued at Rs. 3,200,000 at the time of the suspension—was rendered worthless.[485] As a result of the valueless notes, popular confidence was lost in all paper currency on the island. Even the notes of the Chartered Mercantile Bank (the only other bank of issue in the Colony) became as difficult to negotiate as those of the Oriental Bank Corporation. This entailed the entire cessation of trade throughout the island, and intense local pressure was put on the Chartered Mercantile Bank for the immediate conversion of its notes into silver.[486]

Asian Studies Association of Australia, 2004), 12, http://coombs.anu.edu.au/SpecialProj/ASAA/biennial-conference/2004/proceedings.html.

[479] For Gunasekera's summary of the Bank's collapse, please see Gunasekera, *From Dependent Currency to Central Banking in Ceylon*, 59-67.

[480] McGuire, "The Rise and Fall of the Oriental Bank in the Nineteenth Century: A Product of the Transformations that Occurred in the World Economy or the Result of its Own Mismanagement," 12.

[481] Gunasekera, *From Dependent Currency to Central Banking in Ceylon*, 64. The first despatch at the Colonial Office announcing the closure of the bank: CO 54/553, 5 May 1884

[482] On the day of the suspension, the colony lost the sum of its balances in the different branches of the Oriental Bank Corporation, valued at Rs. 626,369.68.

[483] CO 54/553 19 May 1884

[484] CO 54/553, 10 May 1884, "Enclosure of Despatch No. 173"

[485] CO 54/553, 9 May 1884, No. 9330, "Suspension of the Oriental bank." Details are found on p. 225

[486] Ibid.

Consequently, "supplies of rice for the maintenance of coolies on estates—or indeed for any purpose—were almost unattainable from native traders, specie being very scarce, and the dealers refusing to sell except for silver."[487] The amount of silver in the hands, or at the disposal of the government, was so little that even the Postmaster General had to issue orders to his branch offices to refuse to cash Post Office Orders, on account of the small amount of money at his disposal.[488] Gripped with an economy in crisis, Ceylon's colonial government quickly began to search for ways towards stabilization. The telegraph's function in this process is the focus of the following section.

How the Colonial Government Utilized Telegraphic Communication to Mediate and Regulate the Collapse

Unlike the previous two cases, telegraphic communication had a significant presence and played a vital role in Ceylon's recovery from the effects caused by the Oriental Bank Corporation's closure. This can be proven by two facts. Firstly, there is quantitative evidence that shows that the colonial government sent many telegrams directly related to the bank's collapse. Three of the seven despatches sent between the Governor of Ceylon and the Colonial Office within the first week of the bank's closure were telegraphic.[489] On 5 May, two days after the crash, the government sent numerous telegrams to determine its balances held in the different branches of the Oriental Bank Corporation and the value of the Oriental Bank Corporation notes held in the colony's district kachcheries.[490] In addition to communicating to London and within Ceylon, Ceylon's government extensively utilized the global capacity of its telegraph network to contact the governments of the Straits Settlements, Hong Kong, Melbourne, and Mauritius, which had all been former locations of the Oriental Bank Corporation.[491]

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[487] CO 54/553, 9 May 1884, No. 174, "Failure of Oriental Bank"
[488] Ibid.
[489] The telegrams were: CO 54/553, 5 May 1884; 9 May 1884; and, 14 May 1884.
[490] CO 54/553, 10 May 1884, no. 173
[491] CO 54/553, 5 May 1884; 9 May 1884. The minute sheets of these despatches make reference to despatch telegrams sent or intended to be sent to these locations.

A minute sheet addressed to the Crown Agents for the Colonies, dated 10 May 1884, included a list of the telegraphic correspondence that had passed between the Governors of these colonies. Notes on the minute sheet indicated that in the seven days between 3 and 10 May, there had been seventeen individual telegraphic messages sent between these governments.[492] The information contained in the telegrams included the value of the Oriental Bank Corporation's note issue in the Straits Settlement that had amounted to $345,000; the aggregate amount of the bank's notes in circulation in Hong Kong which was approximately $860,000; and enquiries into the legal proceedings that had been advised or commenced in the colonies—thus revealing the collective enumerative losses incurred by the colonies' governments, the interest in pursuing the cases legally, as well as indicating the global reach of the bank's failure.[493] Finally, between 3 and 16 May 1884, 30 telegrams were exchanged between the Treasury and the Governors of Ceylon, the Straits Settlement, and Hong Kong "to assess and limit the impact of the collapse to the Oriental Bank Corporation on their respective colonies."[494]

Secondly, telegraphy was used to circumvent the spread of panic in Mauritius, which was essential to protect Ceylon from incurring greater economic hardship. As a consequence of the Oriental Bank Corporation's failure, Mauritius' government had lost the total of its balances valued at Rs. 1,000,000.[495] Comparatively, this was less than one-third of the losses incurred by Ceylon's government in the crash. But, relatively, this loss was significant given that the colony's economy had just been wrecked by a series of natural calamities causing across-the-board damages to its plantations. To address this situation, Ceylon's government proposed to pay Mauritius' government Rs. 250,000 in silver coin.[496]

Aiding Mauritius served the interest of Ceylon's government. The Rs. 250,000 that Ceylon's government offered to Mauritius was not meant to replenish the colony's lost balances *per se*, but rather to provide the colony with a reserve of coin to protect the value of its own paper currency. There were two reasons for this. First, the Governor of

[492] CO 54/553, 10 May 1884, no. 7650, "Telegram from Governor and C.O. Drafts."
[493] Ibid.
[494] McGuire, "The Rise and Fall of the Oriental Bank in the Nineteenth Century: A Product of the Transformations that Occurred in the World Economy or the Result of its Own Mismanagement," 13.
[495] CO 54/553 10 May 1884, no. 7650, "Telegram from Governor and C.O. Drafts."
[496] Ibid.

Ceylon was fearful that people in Mauritius would make a run on the banks there, believing that the Chartered Mercantile Bank notes, the only remaining currency in Mauritius and Ceylon, had become valueless like Oriental Bank Corporation notes.[497] The Governor believed this would crash the banks in Mauritius and destroy the already waning confidence that people had in paper currency in Ceylon. Secondly, the Chartered Mercantile Bank notes would lose value without public confidence, a run would be made on the bank's branches in Ceylon, and the island's entire cash-based economy would collapse.[498] It was thus the perceived threat of an information panic that prompted Ceylon's government to intervene in Mauritius.

Paradoxically, though, it was the perceived spread of information panics by telegraph that required Ceylon's government to use the same technology in circumventing it—for news of a bank run in Mauritius, Ceylon's government believed, would have arrived to Ceylon by way of telegram to the local newspapers, just as telegraphy had spread the news about the sharp drop in the Oriental Bank Corporation shares.[499] And, the telegraph's speed was used to sidestep the spread of information panic.[500] On 5 May, Ceylon's Governor telegraphed the Colonial Office to order the Crown Agents for the Colonies to arrange by "telegraphic transfer" to Governor Hennessey "for the convergence of two and a half lakh of rupees in silver from Bombay to Mauritius, for the use of [his] government…"[501] Thus, because of telegraphy, the situation in Mauritius was handled within the first two days after the bank's failure, thereby skirting potential information panics and securing public confidence in paper currency.

However, I suggest though that as present and essential as telegraphy was in managing the aftermath of the bank's failure, it would not be correct to assume that the telegraph saved the colony from the bank's failure directly. While a great deal of communication was circulated via telegraph, there were far more significant matters handled without the technology. Indeed, the single most important decision that Ceylon's government

[497] CO 54/553, 5 May 1884, no. 734, "Failure of the Oriental Bank."
[498] Ibid.
[499] Ibid.
[500] McGuire, "The Rise and Fall of the Oriental Bank in the Nineteenth Century: A Product of the Transformations That Occurred in the World Economy or the Result of Its Own Mismanagement," 12.
[501] CO 54/553, 5 May 1884, no. 7341, "Colonial Office to The Crown Agents"

ordered was made intentionally without telegraphic communication. Following the Governor's immediate reactions to the bank's failure gives evidence of this.

The Governor's Tale[502]

On 3 May the Governor, who was in Newara Eliya, received a telegraphic message from the Acting Colonial Secretary, informing him that the Oriental bank Corporation had suspended payments. He left at once for Colombo and arrived early on 5 May. Upon arrival, he learned that shortly after the bank's failure the managers of both the Bank of Madras and the Chartered Mercantile Bank had proposed to the Acting Colonial Secretary a solution to the problem afflicting their banks. They suggested that the government of Ceylon should quarantine the Oriental Bank Corporation notes in circulation in Ceylon, amounting to Rs. 3,200,000.[503] They proceeded to insist that if Ceylon's government gave the desired quarantine, the Madras and Chartered Mercantile Banks would receive Oriental Bank Corporation notes at the full nominal value "they had hitherto borne," an example which it was hoped would be followed by the general restoration of public confidence in the notes. The essential idea was that the government would match the notes with an equal value of silver, thereby giving real value to the notes, which would in turn instill confidence in paper currency and restore the economy. The Governor, however, hesitated to agree with the managers and consulted the Colonial Secretary.

If he agreed to quarantine the notes, he thought, dangers of an immediate run on the banks would be avoided, public confidence would be restored, and trade could run its free course,[504] but the local government would most likely have to pay some "amount to supplement the dividend paid by the bank on its winding up, and a chance of its being called on to pay a large amount for that purpose."[505]If he refused it, the government

[502] The majority of this section is taken from the Governor's despatch to the Secretary of State: CO 54/553, 9 May 1884, no. 174, found in despatch CO 54/553 9 May 1884, no. 9330, "Suspension of the Oriental Bank"

[503] Quarantine meant that the government would meet the bills with an equal reserve of silver, thereby giving real value to the notes.

[504] CO 54/553, 10 May 1884, no. 7650

[505] Ibid.

would escape the danger of losing the difference between their nominal value and the rise in value if the Oriental bank Corporation were to return to business, but the government would have to protect itself from further entanglements in the affairs of the Oriental Bank Corporation, and he would run the risk of a continued lack of confidence in the island's currency, causing a subsequent run on the banks. After deliberating with the Colonial Secretary, he opted to approve of the quarantine since it included more perceived benefits than the course of refusing it. He sent an unofficial notification of his decision, and a letter from the Acting Secretary, declaring his order to the Chamber of Commerce and to the Banks. Confidence was restored in bank notes and trade resumed under nearly normal operations within five days of his decision.

Whether or not success was related to the Governor's judgment or merely coincidental, the Governor's decision to quarantine the bank notes was probably the most important action undertaken by the colonial government regarding the bank's failure. First of all, it signaled the government's interference in banking, thereby challenging the essential liberal concern of separating government from the world of free trade. Secondly, the Governor approached his decision seriously; as though it could result in only the success or the utter failure of the island's economy. Finally, it was the decision that inspired intervention in the affairs of Mauritius and private banking in general. Therefore, while the decisions involved in Mauritius and the communications with Hong Kong were significant, the governor's decision to quarantine the Oriental Bank Corporation bank notes was singularly more important given that it potentially saved the colony's economy and gave the government the right to help Mauritius and intervene in other areas of business if necessary—which culminated into the wholesale replacement of private bank notes with Ceylon government bank notes.[506]

Nevertheless, as serious as his decision was, the Governor did not inform the Secretary of State about it until 10 May, five days after he executed it. To justify his silence on the matter, the Governor declared in a letter that any extra delay in rendering a decision about the quarantine:

[506] CO 54/554, 18 September 1884; 20 September 1884; 26 September 1884

> would have practically been to refuse it, and on Tuesday morning the effects of that impression would have been felt from one end of the island to the other. Under other circumstance, I should have sought, (for I need hardly say I was desirous to obtain in a matter of such importance) the preliminary sanction of Her Majesty's Government to the course contemplated before adopting it, but (to say nothing of the difficulties of conveying by *telegraph* anything like a full or just idea of the nature or perils of the position), an immediate decision was absolutely requisite. A few hours delay would have involved consequences which no later effort, no amount of subsequent unavailing regret that the moment for action had been allowed to pass unheeded, would have sufficed in the least degree to repair.[507]

The Governor considered any delay, including telegraphing his ideas to the Secretary of State, an impediment to decision-making. Therefore, while the telegraph was extensively used as a tool of communication in the aftermath of the bank's failure in general, it was intentionally avoided in formulating and executing the most critical decision that the Governor made. Thus, the telegraph was perhaps not the tool which singularly "fixed" the economy since avoiding it may have been the reason that success occurred at all—if we take the Governor's words at face value.

However, the difference between the Governor's words and deeds were contentious. On the same day, 5 May, he had sent a telegraphic message to the Secretary of State informing him about the bank's failure and the government's lost balances. He could have, therefore, informed the Colonial Office about his decision to quarantine the bank notes in the same telegram. The Colonial Office also noticed and questioned this neglect. In the margin next to the Governor's message, the Colonial Office wrote: "Why did he conceal what he contemplated [to the] Men sending his [telegram] No. 7?" Although his intentions cannot be known with certainty, it is clear that the Governor did not confer with the Colonial Office on the matter telegraphically. The Governor avoided using telegraphy while addressing one of the most pressing issues that the colony faced in the aftermath of the bank's failure—the quarantine of the Oriental Bank Corporation notes circulating in the colony—on the basis that the technology could not be used to communicate efficiently the gravity of the circumstances to the Home government.

[507] CO 54/553, 10 May 1884. Italics added for emphasis.

CONCLUSION

These three cases all shared in the fact that they were extraordinary events that required immediate action by the colonial state to stop and/or mediate them. All three would have implicitly benefited from telegraphic technology to some extent. Telegraphy could have been implemented in mediating quarantine measures in cholera eradication; it could have been used to call in reinforcements at the time of the Kotahena Riot; and it could have been used to level the complications associated with the Oriental Bank Corporation's failure. As I showed, these implications were not equally shared or reflected in practice. Telegraphy was hardly used in any measure to deal with the cholera epidemic; nor was it a key form of communication in response to the Kotahena Riot. But, it played a significant role in dealing with the banking crisis. What, then, explains these differences and what do they mean for this thesis?

In part, these differences in use patterns had to do with practicality. This included structural limitations. Telegraphy was not part of the urban communication system, as telephony had become in later years. The network had been structured along commercial lines and was therefore limited to intra-urban and rural communications. The police and other urban state powers did not have access to it at the time of the revolt because it was simply not available in the city at the time. Yet, structural limitations do not explain the meager performance of the telegraph in the cholera epidemic. There were telegraph-hubs located in all major ports of entrance along the coast, which the powers in Colombo had access to. Telegraphy could have been used by the government in monitoring outbreaks as they arose and to communicate executive orders about quarantine, measures which necessarily required immediate responses that telegraphy could have facilitated. Structural limitations, thus, only partly explain why some cases were handled with telegraphic communication and others were not.

One way to gauge the differences of use patterns between these three cases is to examine the nature of communication involved in the cases themselves. For where telegrams were used least was in relation to communication on the island. Almost all telegrams examined above were related to international or long-range communication; this is highlighted by

the comparatively numerous telegrams deployed in regard to the banking crisis and the limited utility of telegrams sent in regard to the other two cases. Unlike the other cases, the banking crisis was of global proportion and required the mediation of multiple global actors and institutions; mediation that had to be handled decisively and quickly. While the Kotahena Riot and the cholera outbreak were insular events, the banking crisis in Ceylon was one part of a financial drama that performed throughout the Indian Ocean region. And, the telegraph was the ideal communication medium in maintaining a dialogue between the international banking institutions. This was a matter of practicality as well as circumstance, however. As I stated above, the need to telegraph arose because of the telegraph. The only way to counter the spreading news of the crisis and to curtail increased complications and prevent a further breakdown in confidence, was to communicate via telegraph—for, the news of the crisis that was deteriorating confidence was spreading via telegraphy and communication to restore confidence had to be made just as quickly. Thus telegraphy begot the need for more telegraphy. The single telegram used in respect to the Kotahena Riot was also international, being sent from Colombo to London. And, the telegrams used in reference to the cholera outbreak, minus the single local telegram which was sent by a local planter, were all international telegrams.

But why were the majority of telegrams international? Perhaps the telegraph may have been considered as only an international communication tool; that only long distance necessitated telegraphic mediation. But, this does not add up. As I have stated, the administration sent hundreds of telegrams locally. Alongside these crises the administration continued to implement telegraphy in its local correspondence activities. Far beyond intentionality, I think subjectivity and the dynamics of colonial administrative power and the meaning of communication itself had more to do with the neglect of sending telegrams locally than any preconceived notions. The purpose of telegrams in the Kotahena Riot and the cholera epidemic was not meant to address the crises themselves but to satisfy some subjective requirement of the colonial administration. When the telegram was used in the cholera epidemic and the Kotahena Riot, it was used to either persuade the home government to act in the local administration's favor or to instill a sense of authority. Thus telegrams served a purpose that had less to do with practically serving the crisis at hand than with strategy; that is, using communication to perform an

act of power, an act that did not directly impact on the severity of the event but that worked to achieve some other end. The telegram deployed in the Kotahena riot made the statement that the situation was under control. But it did not help stop the riot or work in any practical way. It was about performing colonial government power, showing the Home government that the administration was fast and responsive. The telegrams deployed in the cholera epidemic worked similarly. They did not refer to any practical concern regarding the disease. They did not request help or back up. Instead, they functioned on a representative level, to stress the danger of having excessive amounts of immigrants. The significance of cholera was downplayed to rationalize a continued allowance of labor. The speed and repetition of sending telegrams represented to the Home government that it was an escalating problem—that only the permission of railroad development seemed to quiet. All of this goes on to suggest that the colonial administration was highly aware of the significance and symbolic meaning of telegraphy. Sending telegrams symbolized speed, urgency; they were a coded way of saying that everything "in this moment" was relevant. The Governor sent a handful of telegrams to the Secretary of State to stress the importance of the situation of excess labor. Each new telegram reinforced the urgency of the one prior. Likewise the telegram sent after the Kotahena Riot was coded language stating that the moment of emergency was silenced and that all dangers were apprehended and handled. Telegraphy represented timeliness. Depending on what was written and how many were sent, they could stress danger or security. The reason that international telegrams were sent more often than local ones was, I believe, because telegrams functioned primarily along these lines, as a symbolic, rather than a practical, form of communication. This point is hammered in by the fact that a practical response by the Home Government's to the crises would have been minimal. What was the Secretary of State to do thousands of miles from the spot of trouble? It was furthermore the governor's duty to contain local problems. That local telegrams were not used also hammers in the idea that telegrams were more symbolic than practical. If they were practical, then they would have been deployed in the location where they would have served best, not 5,500 miles away.

The findings of this chapter are significant for thesis, particularly in relation to its concern with the relationship between telegraphy and power. This chapter gave evidence to the

fact that colonial authority is a rather hard to pin down concept; it was most elusive in the case of the Kotahena Riot. There was no telegraph network in Colombo, the largest city on the island, nor was it in any other city on the island. The police, which were fundamentally an urban form of colonial authority, therefore, had no access to it; the military did not either and was, in fact, called in to help the Kotahena police by way of horseback messenger. Thus, telegraphy was disconnected from the island's sources of main power. If the technology was not used by the military or the police, then what kind of authority did telegraphy possess? I showed that the single telegram that was used in reference to the Kotahena Riot was used to communicate to the metropolitan government that the situation was immediately under control. It was used to begin a story that was repeated in the subsequent letter and made official in the Commission report. This story, however, came back to hurt the island's government in the long run, when Buddhist nationalists came back to grieve for the state's incapacity to bring to justice those it blamed for the violence. Although the Catholics were identified as the sole enemies and instigators of the riot, no Catholic was ever tried or brought to justice—because the colonial government actually did not have evidence to prosecute them, evidence which would not also have incriminated a number of Buddhists. The Buddhists understood the colonial government's inability to bring the Catholics to justice as a deliberate neglect against their case. Consequently, the Buddhist Defense Committee, which was represented by General Henry Olcott in London, was started. The Buddhist flag found its origins after the riot. And, Buddhist nationalism, in its anti-British form, to a large extent grew out of the injustice incurred by the Buddhists during the riot. In such a situation, it is tough to locate any authority in telegraphic communication. The same perplexed relationship between the technology and authority is found in the Oriental Bank Corporation's collapse and the 1877 cholera outbreak. The former case was handled without telegraphic communication, except as a device of long range, global communication to collect data and information on the market and the bank's affairs in other colonies. But, again, the Governor made his decision without telegraphy. It seems as though the Governor did not use the technology purposefully to retain his autonomy and his right to independent decision-making. During the cholera outbreak the telegraph enabled the colonial authority to persuade the metropolitan government into sanctioning

the Matale railroad line; but it was useless in gathering information about cholera or for quarantining ships carrying cholera.

I would argue that given the above analyses, telegraphy was more important in serving the interests of the colonial government than it was in actually resolving emergencies. The telegraph was used by the Governor to make the colonial government appear that it had the Kotahena Riot under control; it was used to negotiate deals globally during the bank failure, but when it came time to make a concrete decision about the colony, the Governor deliberately excluded the Secretary of State from the situation by not telegraphing him. It would be interesting to know what the Secretary of State might have replied on the issue of quarantined bank notes and whose interest the Governor was actually protecting. Finally, the cholera case describes how telegrams were used to create a narrative of distress to serve the colony's interest of railroad production. Perhaps, we might want to rethink what an emergency meant in nineteenth century Ceylon if the interest of the government, not health, life, property or environment seemed to matter most.

I conclude with an example, highlighting the precarious relationship between the colonial government and its capacity to utilize the telegraph as a means of management and crisis suppression. Although the British had a highly sophisticated system of telegraphy, they were not the only ones to share its power; as I will show, the telegraph was a public tool that was not the sole possession of the colonial government. Indeed, it in many ways dissolved the critical fortress of communication power that had been built by letters between the natives and the Governor. While it enabled the colonial government to conduct its affairs with faster ease, it also provided itself as a divergent mechanism to be used by natives as a tool of resistance and negotiation.

Over the course of three days, from 2l until 23 March 1886, Ceylon's Post and Telegraph Department delivered several urgent telegrams to Governor Hamilton-Gordon at his repose in the Queen's Cottage in Newara Eliya.[508] The telegrams were sent from Trincomalee, about 250 kilometers away, by two individuals—a Muslim shop keeper

[508] The telegrams included: SLNA, 6/8127, 1886 Telegrams, 21 March 1886, 22 March 1886, 22 March 1886.

named Mohamed Husain and Akilasapillai, a local Tamil merchant.[509] The purpose of their messages was twofold. They wrote that they wanted the Governor to protect them and the town from the Government Agent of Trincomalee Mr. Reid's unnecessarily violent enforcement of a local municipal ordinance that forbade the use of *tats* (shop awnings). The transmitted telegrams reported Mr. Reid throwing shop produce into the streets and brutally assaulting people with horsewhips to enforce the ordinance. The two men also sent the telegrams to inform the Governor that "to escape further oppression," all the shop keepers had closed their doors and would not open them until the Governor ordered immediate relief. The Governor forwarded the messages with instructions to the Colonial Secretary in Colombo:

> *Col. Sec: The enclosed telegrams reached me yesterday and today- I am afraid Mr. Reid is not unlikely to exercise petty authority vexatiously: the tats, I presume, are the sort of awning which native ships usually put up as shelter from sun, but which are, I suppose, in contravention of some municipal direction. I think you might telegraph to him. "Complaints made by telegraph of some action in cutting down tats of boutiques. Shops said to be closed in consequence. What are the facts? Remember forcible action unless absolutely necessary—or something of that sort.*[510]

The messages, including the one represented here, are evidence that telegraphy provided a number of benefits to the Governor in administering his authority and power in the colony. Suppose the two men had sent letters instead of telegrams. The distance between the two locations, Trincomalee and Newara Eliya, would have made sending timely messages about the situation impossible. Perhaps a week would have passed before the Governor would become informed of what was happening. Because telegrams were used rather than letters, the Governor was able to handle the case in a timely fashion and perhaps prevent the situation from worsening. The messages show, then, that the Governor possessed a tool that allowed him to communicate his commands quickly, even from inside his Newara Eliya mansion; it indicated the implicit power of telegraphy as a means of quickly resolving situations and its ostensible utility as a method of control and discipline. The present case shows this only at first sight, however. If pursued further, the situation becomes more complex.

[509] Both men had transmitted two telegrams each, respectively on the 21st and 22nd and on the 21st and 23rd.
[510] Throughout the dissertation, I italicize all telegraphic messages to differentiate them visually from letters.

Firstly, let us return to the imagined scenario in which the two men had sent letters, not telegrams, to the Governor. To whom would they have addressed their problems? It would not have been possible for the two men to address the Governor, the highest ranking official on the island, directly by letter. Sending a letter to the Governor would have required hierarchical distinction, neither of which the two men had. At best, they would have been able to send a letter to the Colonial Secretary who would have forwarded the information to the Governor or settled the problem himself. As we have seen, though, the opposite occurred; the men telegraphed the Governor directly, who then messaged his Secretary, thereby subverting standard formalities of communication.[511]

Secondly, the messages were not just pleas for help. The merchants' closure of the shops posed a real threat to the welfare of Trincomalee's European community, whose access to provisions was potentially prevented. The two men were, therefore, not merely expressing their discontent but also announcing their and their constituents' resistance to the Government Agent's brutal mistreatment: either as a form of negotiation or, in its most radical interpretation, as blackmail. The stores would reopen when Reid was taken control of, they commanded. Thus telegraphy had the capacity to empower multiple actors, not only the colonial government administration.[512]

What this example shows us is that while telegraphy could support the colonial government in handling potential crises, it could also challenge traditional hierarchical practices and even be used by local populations against the colonial state. The relationship between telegraphy and colonial government administration was therefore

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511 This example was exceptional, however, and does not represent governmental telegraphic communications as a whole. It is probable too that the two men personally knew the Governor. Trincomalee was the site of very wealthy merchants and businessmen in the nineteenth century, and these men may have had ties to the government; their employment of English may also indicate a high social status.

512 As far as I can tell, this case does not appear in any other records. There are no indications of it in local or European newspapers, no mention of it by the Governor in official correspondence with the Secretary of State, and the SLNA does not include it in its index. Therefore, its resolution is unknown. The only indication of the Governor's intervention was Mr. Reid's subsequent promotion and relocation to the south coast. According to the *Ceylon Civil List of 1887*, in January 1887 Mr. Reid became Assistant at Hambantota to the Government Agent for the Southern Province, and Commissioner of Requests and Police Magistrate, Hambantota. [512] However, it cannot be proven that his move was linked to his behavior in Trincomalee. George J.A. Skeen, *The Ceylon Civil List, corrected to January 1, 1887: Showing the Names and Designations of the Civil, Military, and Other Servants of Government* (Colombo: Government Printer, 1887), 31–32.

ordered by a series of issues ranging from access to the medium to the practical and symbolic meanings and values of telegrams. Telegraphy helped and hindered; was used and avoided; and was a weapon of the state and the population. But it did not always follow this dichotomy. Telegraphy complicated power and it did not signal a completely faster approach to communication on the island, rendering the colonial government faster, stronger, and more likely to endure hardship. As this final example emphasizes, it also disempowered colonial government and empowered those under its command.

CONCLUSION TO DISSERTATION

In this dissertation, I analyzed the role of telegrams in Ceylon's nineteenth-century colonial government administration and assessed their impact on the relationship of power between and within the central government and the colony. In chapter two, I examined the material history of the telegraph in Ceylon to determine its intellectual and political roots, and in the following two chapters I assessed the role of telegraphy in administrative practices by comparing its function to that of letters and other postal materials. In chapter three, I looked at the function of telegrams as a medium of communication between the Governor and the Secretary of State. In chapter four, I evaluated the role of telegrams in three cases of crises that took place in Ceylon during the second half of the nineteenth century. The main question which I asked my sources as I worked through these chapters and cases was not only in what ways but also to which extent the introduction and adaptation of the telegraph in Ceylon's colonial government impacted on or changed established modes of communication. This question was founded on the fact that the telegraph could communicate between the colony and London in as little as four hours, while the letter took approximately one month to traverse the same distance; faster communication via telegraphy implied faster government administration, greater authoritative oversight given to the Secretary of State for the Colony, and less autonomous powers exercised by the rank of the Governor General and his subordinates. Hitherto mediated primarily by postal letters, the uncanny speed of telegraphy signaled a break from traditional communication practices which would bring deep changes within the structure of colonial government power.

This view, which has been the dominant one among historians of telegraphy, implied that revolutions in communication technology, rendered revolutions in cultural and institutional practices and realities. I wanted to determine if this was plausible in light of scientific evidence.

According to my work in chapters two, three, and four, I found that the telegraph indeed played a significant role in colonial government communication, offering the colonial government dynamic and unprecedented ways to communicate and share information. In

chapter three in particular, I outlined multiple examples of telegraphy's exceptional utility, including its capacity to embed the colonial government structure of power into a shared sense of time. In chapter four, I showed the ways in which telegrams were used to mediate and relieve the problems associated with crises.

But, the conclusions I reached in asking the abovementioned question were negative. Despite telegraphy's benefits and impressive speediness, the technology did not alter the practices of colonial government administration, as indicated by conventional thought among historians; nor did it transform government principles, at least not to the extent that had been expected. Changes in the structures of government power were nuanced, and the telegram's role was limited. Despite its faster speed and implicit benefits, telegraphic communication did not enact widespread changes and did not become the key form of correspondence in Ceylon's nineteenth-century colonial administration. Even in the case of crisis management, where one might expect that faster communication would be important to the imperial regime, the telegram was rarely incorporated except when the interests of the Governor or financial institutions were at risk.

As I showed in chapters two through four, there were several forces which limited the capacity of telegraphic communication. Firstly, telegrams could not provide the same level of informational quality as letters. Letters were broad and analytical compositions, written with in-depth information and insight. Telegrams gave a fraction of what a letter could in terms of words and roundness of argumentation. Secondly, the technology's language was not especially appropriate for official contexts. Telegrams were typically written without proper addresses and closings, and they tended to be short and grammatically incorrect. As such, telegrams insufficiently mediated the exchange between hierarchically distinct Agents of the Crown, of which official language and titles were crucial components. In contrast, letter writers went to great lengths to ensure a letter was grammatically error-free and formally addressed hierarchical ranks. Thirdly, telegrams were difficult to integrate into the Colonial Office's system of administration because of practical concerns. For instance, their material composition, telegram paper, was not suitable for the Office's particular practices of bureaucracy and documentation standards. One could argue that letters were, in fact, intrinsic to the Colonial Office system, a

bureaucracy that was based on elaborate referencing, commentary, and record keeping, which their sturdy and well-margined parchment enabled, leaving little room for the divergent materiality of telegrams.

Non-discursive factors also limited telegraphic communication in colonial government. Ceylon's nineteenth-century telegraph network was not located in cities, a factor which precluded its adoption by police and military forces in a rapidly urbanizing colony. Its connection to colonial power was thus limited by virtue of its limited connectivity to the colony's armed forces. This problem was clearly realized during the 1883 Kotahena Riot, where the police had no access to telegraphy and a horse messenger had to be deployed to call for backup. Furthermore, as revealed in chapter two, the network was installed for commercial purposes; its adaptation into colonial government administration was therefore a byproduct of capitalist expansion, not a predetermination to improve government communications; its use in colonial government was therefore determined by its primary role in commerce. The network was shaped to benefit commerce, not government. It was such functional differences between letters and telegrams as well as the socio-economic circumstances described that structured the colonial government's incorporation of the technology and ultimately defined its role in the British Empire.

However, underlying these limitations I believe there remains one more significant factor. Namely, the telegram *mediated* choices and practices, it did not *enforce* them. The option to use the telegram was determined by rational individuals making rational decisions. Thus, behind every choice to use or not to use the telegraph was a reason that ultimately began and ended with an individual. This was clearly shown in chapter four. Despite the urgency of the crises, the majority of communication was made via letter, except in the case of the banking crisis. As analyzed, there were specific strategic reasons for using telegraphy and letters that went beyond mere technological capacity, or even the situation itself, but were determined by the desires and rationale of the individual users and their personal objectives. The Governor's clearly intentional avoidance of telegraphy during the banking crisis of 1884 is a prime example.

So what does this all say about telegrams in Ceylon's colonial government administration? In the introduction, I postulated that we must assume that telegraphy's function was not only revolutionary; that we should test to see if it had other functions as well. I delineated three: that it had no effect, supplemented, or paralleled letters. My concluding response to this assumption is affirmative. It is definitely the case that in order to understand telegraphy in colonial government administration, one must realize that its consequences were not total, but more nuanced, that it did not merely replace current systems and revolutionize internal constructs of power. Rather, it became part of them. Its formations and utility was both predetermined and over-determined; it was affected by the system in which it was embedded, and once installed it interacted with letters and joined them to produce a novel system. Once integrated into the bureaucracy, the telegram operated in tandem with the letter, forming a collective enterprise within a web of technologies and practices. In other words, the telegram did not replace the letter but became one part of a network of forces, creating their own self-perpetuating dynamic. Furthermore, the very system which we are assuming telegraphy to have changed was itself not absolute. It included the Colonial Office, numerous technologies such as steam ships and canals, and a very complex governmental structures and hierarchy. So, when we ask whether the telegraph transformed the system, we must also ask "what system?" and examine carefully the many parts within it. Its impact on "the system" was thus inherently diffuse and varied accordingly. It had multiple consequences, but none of which were permanent or revolutionary.

All three possibilities I underlined had some critical bearing, but the second one—that the telegraph supplemented letters—was most plausible and apparent. There is evidence to suggest that the telegraph had no affect on colonial government administration.

Less than one eighth of official correspondence was mediated by telegrams, and if one takes into consideration the fact of telegram receipts, described in chapter three, the extent of telegraphy's impact and role becomes eclipsed almost totally by letters. There were also some but very few cases that showed the telegraph to parallel letters, that is, work in separate, non-corresponding domains. I assume that one area in particular had become a critical territory of the telegram, possibly its sole territory—and that was

requests for leave of absence. I have ascertained this observation based on contemporary and current evidence. The majority of the requests for leaves of absence were made by telegram, particularly toward the end of the century. And, the practice of requesting a leave of absence is still done mandatorily by telegram in Sri Lanka today. However, I have not been able to deduce any other field of correspondence that was totally communicated via telegram. The majority of telegrams, in fact, shared purposes and topics with letters, bringing me to my main idea: telegraphy primarily functioned as a supplement to letters. The majority of telegrams functioned on a meta-level, including organizing the relay of mail and pointing out errors located in lettered correspondence. They were also about remedying the shortcomings of letters. When information needed to be sent quickly; when time was of the essence; when a Governor had to highlight the symbolic significance of situations; where the possibilities and strengths of the letter ended—so began the telegram. At the same time, the letter supplemented the telegram. When speed was not enough, when hesitation and deliberation and hierarchy were the necessary steps, then the letter reigned. The telegram provided the colonial administration with a way to communicate that was not possible via letter, just as the letter provided a way to communicate that was not possible with telegrams. The telegram was thus a purposeful medium of correspondence whose chances of success in the colonial administration were buoyed by its partnership with the letter. It supplemented the letter, in a conjoined effort, as a powerful mutual enterprise.

Thus, to reiterate my hypothesis and what I have deduced in my assessment of the sources, the telegraph was not a revolutionary instrument, but its effects and roles were nuanced and diverse. The telegraph did not transform the system but become part of it, providing new and alternative measures to communication that supplemented and, to a lesser extent, paralleled the letter.

The notion shared by many historians that the telegraph revolutionized *posteriori* systems of control is, therefore, unjustifiable. It neither turned the Secretary of State into a panoptical power, nor did it transform the Governor into a state puppet. This is proven not only by the telegram's limited role in government, but also because the same relationship of power that had been exercised before the telegraph was in practice after it

was installed. Indeed, the Governor's legal rights to autonomous actions were not rebuked and nor were concessions made to tailor the system of power to the new medium. The Colonial Office List of both 1867 and 1878 grant the Governor the right to autonomous action and to report his actions after he had executed them. This is significant because it shows that the telegraph did not revolutionize the legal structures of power, instead setting in writing a blockade against the chance of that happening. While the Secretary of State expected the Governor to telegraph him if necessary, he was not meant to do so for every occasion; nor was he to ask for permission via telegraph; nor was the Secretary of State meant to dictate the Governor's actions by the technology. The telegraph did not install an *a priori* system of control, but rather instilled new forms of communication into the same structure. For the history of telegraphy, this is a significant finding as it challenges the hitherto idea that telegraphy equaled power and that faster prevailed over tradition in the realm of colonial power. It begs to question, therefore, what else could be learned about past technologies if, rather than assuming their dominance and technological determinism, we examined how they were used in cultural practice, in everyday use, and in the context of other technologies.

APPENDIX

(1) CO 54/546, 2 APRIL 1883.

"My Lord, With reference to my telegram of the 28th march reporting the riot of the 25th, I have the honour to state that legal proceedings are being taken against some of the rioters the results of which shall be reported when they are concluded…..

2—. I visited the Colombo Hospital last Wednesday and saw the men who had been admitted after the Riot, and I learnt from Dr. Kynsey that there had been no more deaths among them, but all were in a fair way to recovery.

3—. The proximate cause which led to the riot was the jealousy of the Roman Catholics, fanned into a flame by rumours spread (whether designedly or not ascertained) that the Buddhists were carrying in a procession images or pictures in ridicule of Christianity. The Buddhists of Colombo have just completed the building of a new temple which is said to have been begun fifty years ago. Like all Buddhist temples this contains a statue of the Buddha, and the closing ceremony of the construction was to be celebrated in the Buddhist manner of painting the eyes of the statue. This ceremony which may be compared in some respects to the consecration of a church in Europe is usually accompanied by Peraheras or processions from the country round varying according to the sanctity or otherwise of the new Temple. In the present case the new temple was widely known, and many Buddhists were prepared to go there in procession offering gifts. The ceremony of opening the eyes (as it is called) is usually performed on the day of the full moon, and the High Priests fixed on the full moon which, according to the Sinhalese reckoning, fell on the 23rd of march for their ceremony.

4—. To make clear what followed I must notice that the Roman Catholics commenced in 1870 to build a large and commodious stone cathedral dedicated to Saint Lucia, in the vicinity of the new Buddhist Temple. The cathedral is not yet finished, but the nave is far completed as to be opened for public worship. There has naturally been much jealousy between the adherents of the two

religions, thus brought into immediate contact with each other; but the Roman Catholic Bishop, Monsignor Paynani, has lived many years in Ceylon on friendly terms with the Buddhists and I had no reason to believe that he would, nor do I believe that he did, either encourage or allow the furious opposition to the Buddhists which led to the recent riot.

5.—The day of the full moon which the Buddhist priests selected for their ceremony happened to be in the Christian Calendar Good Friday, and the Inspector General of Police apprehended that the formation of the procession on that day (which must necessarily pass close to Saint Lucia's Cathedral) would be offensive to the Catholics, and lead to disturbances. It was therefore arranged by the Inspector General, after some difficulty, that the Buddhist ceremony should be postponed until after the Roman Catholic service on the morning of the 25th, i.e. Easter Sunday. Major Tranchell the acting Inspector General went himself to see the Roman Catholic Bishop and the Bishop said he had no objection to it in the afternoon provided that nothing insulting to the Christian religion was carried in the procession. Accordingly the procession was allowed to take place but when passing the cathedral it was violently assaulted by thousands of Roman Catholics with sticks, stones, and brick bats. The police some lightly in number being only armed with batons were overpowered and it was necessary to call for military aid, which the magistrate promptly did, before order could be restored.

6—.It was evident that in the excited state of the people any attempts to renew the processions would lead to a renewal of the fight, and therefore the permits which had been already given by the police for processions on the day following were recalled and the processions, which notwithstanding were formed, were stopped by the police from entering the town.

7—.For the present I have thought it necessary to forbid all processions in Colombo, but this is only temporary, and it will be necessary to allow the Buddhists to have their procession to make the accustomed offerings as soon as can safely be done.

8—. It is manifest from the reports I have received that the Roman Catholics were the aggressors in the riot. The Buddhists were conducting their

Perahera peacefully enough when they were furiously attacked by the Roman Catholics collected near their Cathedral, and though when attacked they retaliated the blame of the first commencement of the riot must be laid on the Catholics. On the other hand, it is first to the Catholics to say that stories were spread of insults to their religion by the Buddhists, and it is fair to believe that they were to some extent influenced by those stories. That the stories were false was ascertained by the Inspector General, who deputed a Roman Catholic Superintendent of Police to examine the various banners and shrines exhibited in the Perahera, and he passed them as unobjectionable.

9—. I have made this report from the letters chiefly of the Acting Inspector General of Police and with other information as I could avail myself of, but I intend to appoint today a Commission to enquire into the origin of the disturbances, as that will hardly be investigated in the legal proceedings with sufficient fullness.

10—. It is my duty to bring under your lordship's notice the valuable services rendered in this affair by the Garrison of Colombo under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Stickley R.E. in the temporary absence of Lieutenant Colonel Duncan of the (102nd) Royal Dublin Fusiliers, both on Sunday the 25th and Monday the 26th. My special thanks are due to the Brigade Major, Major Currie, and to Captain Mills of the Royal Dublin Fusiliers in command of the troops employed. To these officers and to the admirable discipline of the soldiers, their constancy and patience under the trying circumstances of the Riot, it is owing that the disturbances were suppressed without the use of firearms and with the result of only one death; and that one not at the hands of the military but in the Riot. In fact, no one was injured by the soldiers; all the injuries on those who were received into the hospital being from blows with sticks or by stones.

11—.The latest reports today appear to show that all is quiet.

I have the honor to be My Lord, Your Lordship's obedient humble servant, Arthur Gordon."

(2) SLNA 6/8127, 5 MAY 1886.

"May it please your majesty as executive president of the royal commission appointed by your majesty's royal warrant of the 8th of November, 1884, for the promotion of an exhibition of the "British, Colonial, and Indian Empire", subsequently incorporated by Her Majesty's Royal Charter of the 10th September, 1885. I humbly beg leave to lay before you a brief statement of our proceedings up to the present time.

The general interest manifested on the display made by Your Majesty's Colonial and Indian Empire at the Paris Exhibition of 1878 led me, as President of the British Commission, to express a hope that as opportunity might soon occur by which Your Majesty's subjects in England would be enabled to witness the marvelous development which, under your beneficent rule, their brethren and fellow subjects had attained throughout so many portions of the globe. It was, therefore, with the highest gratification that I accepted Your Majesty's gracious invitation to assume the Executive Presidency of this Commission, the appointment if which by Your Majesty has been the means of making this hope a reality.

The invitation which we were empowered by Your Majesty to issue to the Colonial Government and to the Government of India were forwarded towards the close of the year 1884 and from the answer received it at once became apparent that this undertaking had obtained warm and hearty sympathy throughout Your Majesty's dominions.

In Your Majesty's dominion of Canada, throughout you Australian, African, West Indian and Eastern colonies, in your Mediterranean possessions, and elsewhere, grants were voted, commissions formed, and Executive Commissioners appointed. That the work of preparation was undertaken with enthusiasm and attended with success is evident from the complete and varied collections which at present fill the buildings through which your Majesty has just passed.

The response received from the Government of India was also of the most cordial character. His Excellency the Viceroy caused, throughout the revenue and agricultural department, instructions to be issued to every district of Your Majesty's Indian Empire for the collection of objects illustrative of the arts, manufactures, and resources of the great realm.

These collections, which now adorn a large section of the exhibition, have been supplemented by generous contributions from Her Highness the Princess of India, by collection the formation of which we ourselves have authorized, and beg the construction of private native exhibitors.

We are desirous of bringing under Your Majesty's notice our deep appreciation of the hearty cooperation of the Colonial Governments in this exhibition, and of taking this exceptional opportunity of stating how greatly we are indebted to the commissioners appointed by these Government, and to the Executive Commissioners on whom the superintendence of the entire work of installation has devolved.

We further desire to record the valuable assistance which we have received from Your Majesty's Viceroy, from the Supreme Government of India, and from the various officials which have so ably carried out their instructions. Our grateful thanks are also due to the Colonial governments, to the Government of India, to the corporation of the City of London, to many City Companies, and to the firms and individuals who have contributed to the Quarantine Funds.

The fact that the list of subscribers not only includes those whose interests are likely to be specially affected by the Exhibition, but also comprehends every class of the community, supplies gratifying proof of the universal sympathy and interest which this undertaking has aroused.

We venture to avail ourselves of this opportunity to convey to Your Majesty our dutiful and loyal acknowledgment of the interest which Your Majesty has been pleased to take in our labors, provided as it is by Your Majesty's presence here today, nor can I resist a reference to a similar presided over by Your Majesty, but a few paces from this shot, thirty five years ago. On that memorable occasion, the first of its kind, the Prince Consort, my beloved and revered father, filled the position which I, following in his footsteps, at however great a distance, now have the honor and gratification of occupying. Your Majesty alone can fully realize with what deep interest my beloved father would, had he been spared, have watched, as their originators, the development of the exhibitions both in this country and abroad, and with what especial pleasure he would have welcomed one having for its object the prosperity of Your Majesty's Empire, the interests of which he had so much at heart. In the Great Exhibition of 1851Your Majesty's Colonial and Indian possessions were indeed represented1m but their

importance was then but little realized, and their present greatness was at that time unforeseen. During the years that have elapsed since 1851, few greater changes have been wrought than the marvelous development of the outlying portions of Your Majesty's Empire. It is our heartfelt prayer than an undertaking intended to illustrate and to record this development may give a stimulus to the commercial interests and intercourse of all parts of Your Majesty's domination, that it may be the means of augmenting that warm affection, and brotherly sympathy which is reciprocated by all Your Majesty's Subjects, and that it may still further deepen that steadfast loyalty which we, who dwell in the Mother Country share with you kindred who have elsewhere so nobly done honor to her name. I receive with the greatest satisfaction the address which you have presented to me on the opening of this Exhibition. I have observed with a warm and increasing interest the progress of your proceedings in the execution of the duties entrusted to you by the Royal Commission and it affords me sincere gratification to witness the successful result of your judicious and unremitting exertions of the magnificent Exhibition which has been gathered together here today. I am deeply moved by your reference to the circumstances in which the ceremony of 1851 took place, and I heartily concur in the belief you have expressed, that the Prince Consort, my beloved husband, had he been spared, would have witnessed with intense interest the development of his ideas, and would, I may add, have seen with pleasure our son taking the lead in the movement of which he was the originator. I cordially concur with you that this undertaking may be the means of imparting a stimulus to the commercial interest and intercourse of all parts of my Dominion, by encouraging the arts of peace and industry, and by strengthening the bonds of union which now exists in every portion of my Empire. Ode on the opening of the Colonial and Indian Exhibition by Lord Jennyson, Poet Laureate welcome with one voice! In your welfare we rejoice. Sons and brothers that have sent from Isle and Cape and Continent produce of your field and blood, mount and mine and primal wood, works of subtle brain and hand, spleandors of the morning land, gifts from every British zone, Britons hold your own! May we fin d as ages run the mother featured in the son, and may yours forever be that old strength and constancy which has made your father great in out ancient island state, and wherever her flag may fly, glorying between sea and sky, makes the might of Britain known Britons, hold your own! Britain fought her sons of yore, Britian coiled and never more, careless of our growing kin, shall we sin our

father's sin, men that in a narrower day unprophetic rulers they drove from out the mother's nest, that young eagle of the west, to forage for herself alone, Britons, hold your own! Sharers of our glorious past, brothers, must we part at last? Shall not we, through good and ill, cleave to one another still? Britain's myriad voices call Sons be welded, each and all, into one Imperial Whole, one with Britain heart and soul, one life, one flag, one fleet, one throne. Britons hold your own, and God guard all!"

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