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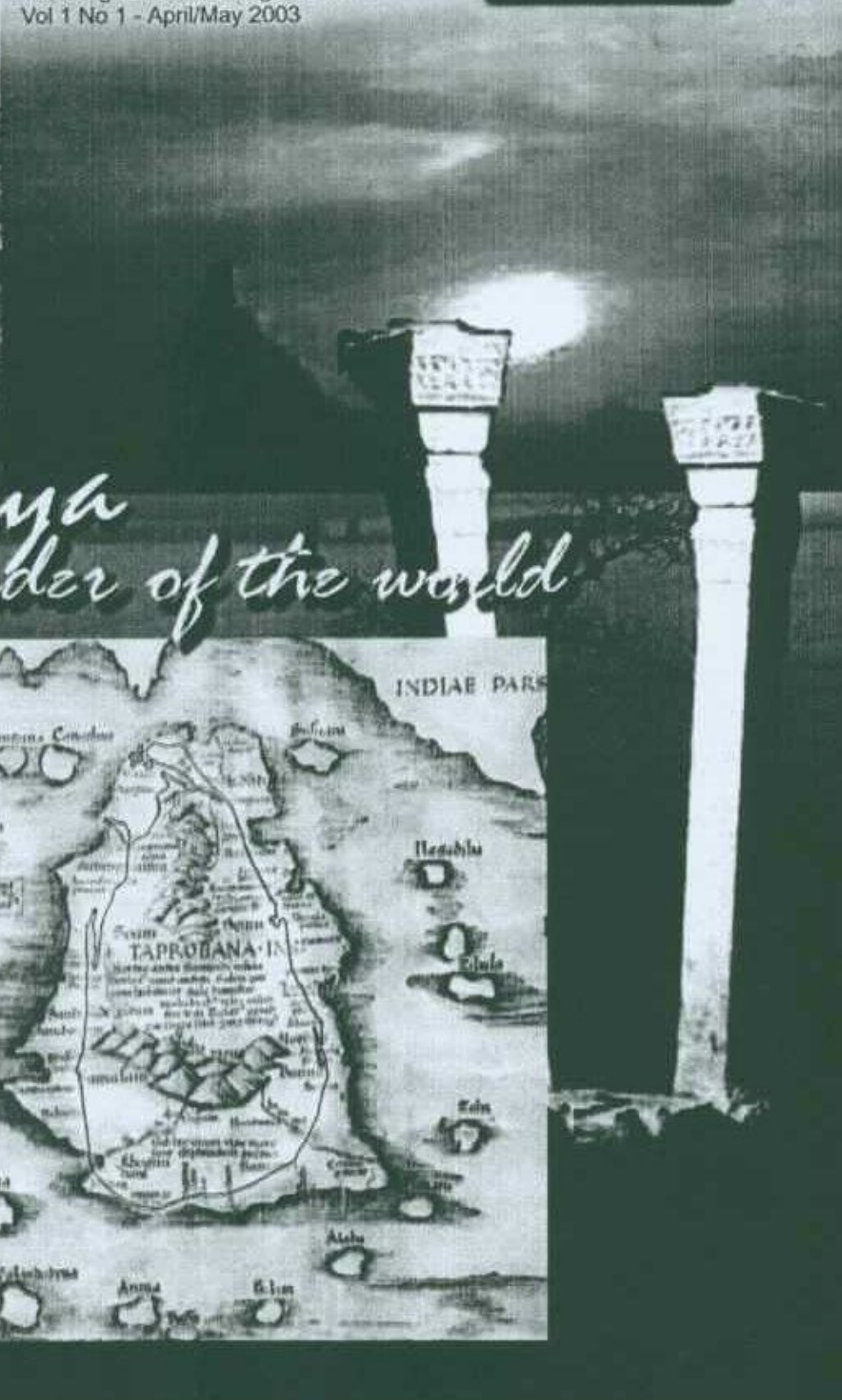
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Sigiriya
Eighth wonder of the world

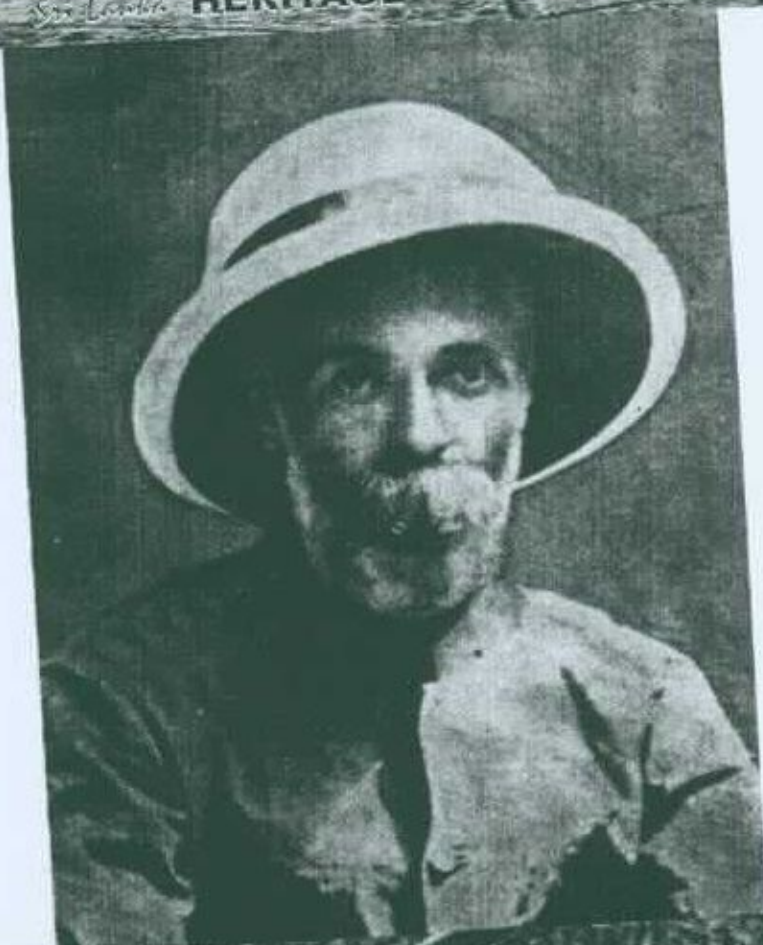


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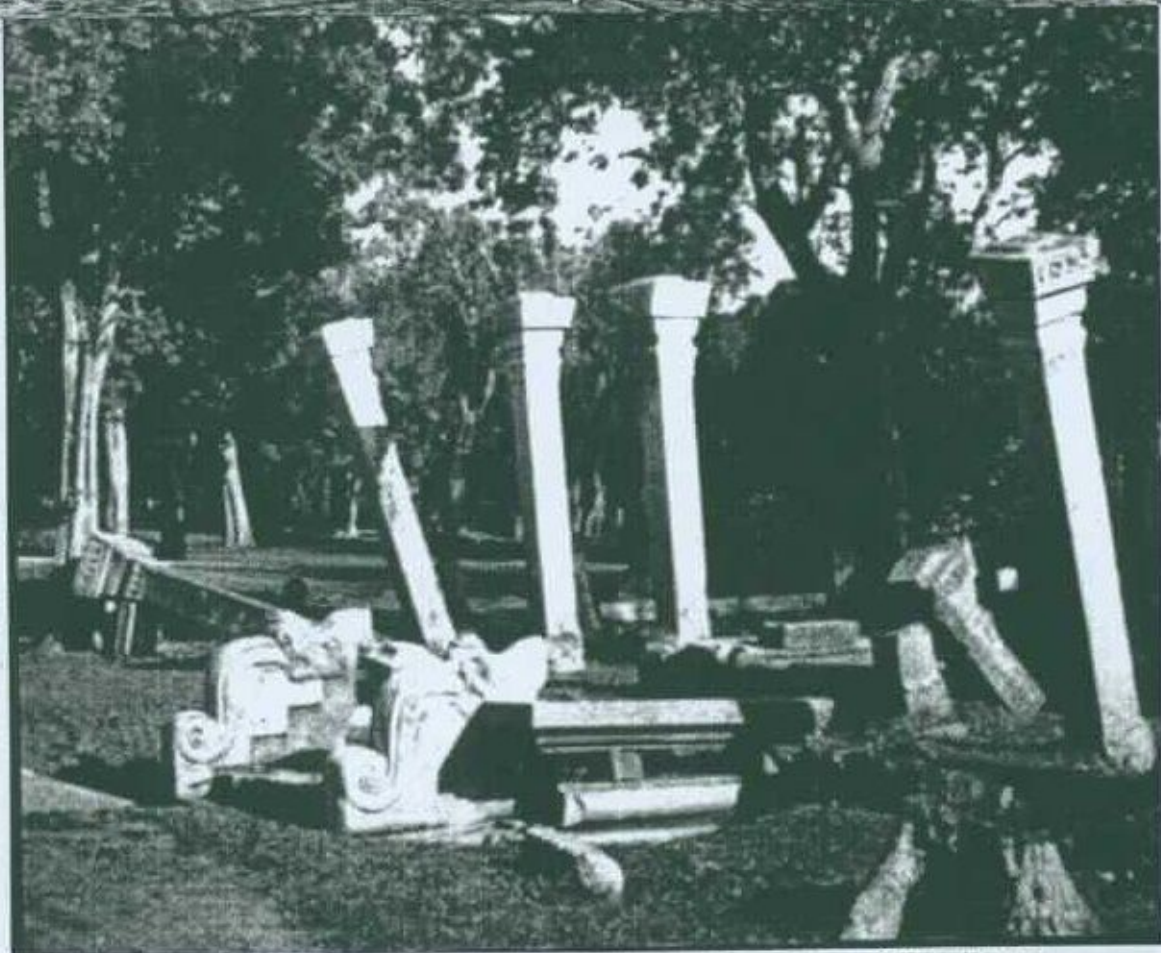
Ayubowan Sri Lanka



Anura Manatunga

H. C. P. Bell and his
**Archaeological
Research**
in Sri Lanka

Bell has rightly selected Anuradhapura to start his work and went there on 7th July 1890. This date, later on confirmed as the inaugural day of the Archaeological Survey Department and by now turned to be the 'National Archaeological Day' of Sri Lanka.



Mahaviharaya

H. C. P. Bell deserves a prominent place in the history of Archaeological studies in Sri Lanka. He was the first Commissioner of the Archaeological Survey Department, established in 1890 and held the position for twenty-two years till he retired in 1912. During his tenure, he conducted some large-scale excavations at Anuradhapura, Sigiriya and Polonnaruwa where he unearthed hundreds of monuments and collected thousands of antiquities. Moreover, he explored and recorded hundreds of other sites in North, North-Central and Eastern provinces, of

which most of the places are still lesser known to the public due to difficulties in access.

Bells came to Sri Lanka in 1871 as a young civil servant of 22 years old. He was assigned in various posts since then till he appointed as the Archaeological Commissioner in 1890. He was interested in history and culture of this Island, whatever job he had done, hence inclined to do research in antiquarian interest. In 1879, when he was a customs officer, he was happening to visit a shipwreck near Maldiv Islands, and this

unexpected visit motivated Bell to do in-depth surveys on those mysterious atolls and became one of the pioneer researchers on the Maldivian culture, history and language.

Bell enrolled as a member of the Ceylon Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society in 1880. In the same year he was elected as the editor of the society's journal and held the position for thirtyfour years till he relinquished it in 1914.

When Sir Aether William Gordon, then Governor of Ceylon, establishes the

Archaeological Survey Department in 1890, it was Bell who was selected to lead the new establishment. As he was the District judge in Kegalle at that time, his first assignment was to survey the antiquities of the same district. The report he submitted as the result of this survey was published later on and is still considered as authoritative work on the subject.

As the Archaeological Commissioner, Bell has been given two options to be selected after his initial survey work in the Kegalle district. That was to start his work either at

Bell started work at the Maha Vihara complex. Thuparama (1895-1898), Ruvanveliseya (1899-1902), Mirisaveitiya (1902-1903) Monasteries of the Maha Vihara complex were thus excavated. Among large number of ruined buildings unearthed in these monasteries only Ransimalakaya and Sela chetiya have been conserved.

When excavation was in progress at the Maha Vihara complex, some other places were also excavated. Those are The Ciradal (1897-1898), Kali Kovil (1898), 'Elarasohona' (1896-1900), Mullegala (1896), Puliyankulama (1896-1900) and Ran Masu Uyana (1901).

No evidence shows that new excavations were started in 1904 and 1905 at Anuradhapura. During that two years, Bell has engaged in writing reports on his former excavations. But again, since 1906 new excavations were started at Anuradhapura: Vessagiriva (1906-1908), Lankaramaya (1910-1911) and Abhayagiriya (1910-1912) was the excavated places at Anuradhapura after 1906.

In addition to these excavations at the Monasteries, Bell has taken permission to do some conservation work on the upper part of the Abhayagiriya Stupa. Abhayagiriya Stupa and

other important stupas such as Ruvanveliseya, Jetavana Stupa, Mirisaveitiya and Thuparamaya were not under the purview of Archaeological Survey Department at that time.

Thuparama Stupa had already reconstructed by Buddhist devotees.



Sigiriya Stair Ways

Work on Ruvanveliseya was on progress under the Buddhist organizations since 1873. Restoration work of Mirisaveitiya and Jetavana Stupas have been done by the Government with Public Works Department (PWD) as it was the usual practice at that time.

Apart from Anuradhapura, Bell started

excavations at Sigiriya and Polonnaruva in large scale. In 1895, he began clearing work at Sigiriya and a massive excavation and conservation programme was followed. He first unearthed the ruins on the summit of Sigiriya Rock. Then he paid his attention to the terraces at the foot of the rock. At last he

to cover the 'Painting Pocket' and the iron ladder to reach it was erected during this period.

The wall of the gallery (Katapat Paura) and the Lion's paw, were among the most important conservation work done by Bell at Sigiriya.

Bell started excavations at Polonnaruva in 1900. At Polonnaruva, Bell encountered massive brick buildings which were in danger of collapse after new exposures. Therefore he was forced to be launched an extensive conservation programme along with the excavations of monuments at Polonnaruva.

By starting at the promontory of Parakrama Samudra, he worked on almost all the major monuments at Polonnaruva. I.e. Nissanka Dana Vinoda Mandapa and nearby Hindu Devalaya (1902), Quadrangle (1903), Citadel (1905), Rankot Vehera (1905), Potgul Vehera (1906), Shiva Devalaya No: 2 (1906), Gal Viharaya (1907), Shiva Devalaya No: 1 (1907), Seven Hindu shrines (1908), Topaveva Stupa (1909), Pabalu Vehera (1909), Tivanka Image House (1909), Lankatilake (1910), Kiri Vehera (1910) and Kumata Pokuna (1911).

Bell excavated at

excavated a few sites' lies beyond the boundaries of the Rock fortress.

Bell deployed D.A.L. Perera, Chief Draftsman of the Department, to copy the Sigiriya paintings. Then he took measures to conserve the paintings and made some arrangements to preserve them from further deterioration. The wire net

This team was known to be as 'Bell Party' and it was became the popular name for the Archaeological Survey Department among rural folk of the country...



Ranmasu Uyana

Anuradhapura or at Tissamaharama. Bell has rightly selected Anuradhapura to start his work and went there on 7th July 1890. This date, later on was confirmed as the inaugural day of the Archaeological Survey Department and by now turned to be the 'National Archaeological Day' of Sri Lanka.

Bell's new appointment to the new post in 1890 was a temporary assignment at

the beginning. But eventually he was confirmed at the post and had too, held it till he retired from the Government service in 1912, except just for five months. In 1892, as he was struck in Malaria, he was transferred to Kautara as a district judge and worked for five months till he regains his physical fitness to work in the harsh climate at Anuradhapura.

Bell started work at Anuradhapura only

with twenty laborers and with one labourer supervisor. This team was known to be as 'Bell Party' and it was becoming the popular name for the Archaeological Survey Department among rural folk of the country. The first task for the 'Bell Party' was to clear jungles in Anuradhapura to access monuments which were covered by thick wood by 1890.

five years (1890-1895) at Anuradhapura, Bell could clear the jungle and explored monuments within five to six-mile radius from the center of the ruined city. With the help of the government surveyors he prepared a survey map of Anuradhapura showing ruins and made scale drawing of selected sites. As a trial, he first excavate a mound near the 'Y' road and then look to large scale excavations. His first extensive excavation was at the Jetavana Monastery where he unearthed about 40 buildings during 1890-1894. Among those buildings, the so-called 'Buddhist railings' was conserved as it was a classic example for ancient stone work of the Island.

while excavation work was going on at Jetavana area, Bell carried out excavations at various other sites in different parts of Anuradhapura. These sites were Vijayaramaya (1890-1891), Pankuliya (1891-1892), Kiribathvehera (1892-1893), Toluville (1893-1895), 'Tamil ruins' (1929-1893), Mayura Pirivena (1894), Sela Chetiya (1894), and Kapararamaya (1895).

After excavation During the first at Jetavana Monastery,

Mihintale and Yapahuva (1910-1911). A part of the restoration of the Stone stairway at Yapahuva was also a work of him.

All those places are in *Rajarata*. Except Barandi Kovila at Sitavaka which was excavated and conserved in 1894-1895. He has not undertaken a massive work beyond the boundaries of *Rajarata*. He did a small excavation at Beligala and Peradeni Nuvara (1893) in Beligal Korale, and Pelenda (1910-1911) in Kalutara district, but of not much interest or importance.

Moreover Bell engaged in extensive explorations which he termed as Annual Circuit Work and covered the areas of North, North-Central and Eastern provinces. He has recorded hundreds of Archaeological sites as a result of these explorations. Most of these sites are still lesser known to the public.

As a result of those excavations and explorations, Bell could discover a large number of Inscriptions. He started a journal called the *Epigraphia Zeylanica* with the help of Mr. D.M. de Z. Wickramasinghe, to publish those inscriptions. To house antiquities he discovered, he urged the Government to built an Archaeological museum at Anuradhapura. Moreover he took various steps to protect Archaeological Sites and Monuments from the treasure hunters.



Thivanka Pilimage - 5th century



Thivanka Pilimage - 5th century

Bell retired on 08 December 1912. His successor was Mr. E.R. Ayrton, a young Archaeologist who was specially trained for two years to do Archaeological work in Sri Lanka. Bell shifted his permanent residence from Anuradhapura to Kandy after his retirement and lived in Kandy till his death in 1937.

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