THE CONSERVATION OF OLD COLOMBO

MANEL FONSEKA

"Architecture reflects man's needs in a way no other form of art does, and is thus the most complete and accurate witness to the material and spiritual conditions of an age. This in some ways is a privilege, but it also means that architecture is more exposed than other works of art to the danger of disfiguring alterations; for it must contine to satisfy man's changing demands.

– Piero Gazzola

Introductory note:

The original article was a longer essay written in November 1978 (*The Conservation of Old Colombo*), with 55 photographs, and several boxed quotations. An abbreviated version was published in the *Weekend* on 31/12/78 and 7/1/79 ("Conserve Colonial Colombo"). An updated and slightly revised version appeared in the *Ceylon Daily News* on 26/9/80, 27/9 & 30/9 ("Conservation of Old Colombo"). A further revision was published in *Monumentum*, Vol. 25 (2), June 1982, pp. 102-128. Figs. 1,7 and 13 of the present article are by Jukka Jokilehto and the rest are the author's.

A number of buildings photographed by the author in 1978/9 have been demolished or changed considerably. Among those mentioned in this article that have been demolished or altered beyond recognition are: Bogala Building, the Chatham Street Mosque, the Delft Gateway Guardhouse, the Bristol Buildings, the Sea Street corner house (Fig. 8), St. Mary's Church, Sri Kathiresan Street (Fig. 10), the Gintupitiya Street Madam (gaudily revamped, though not, perhaps, beyond retrieval), and the whole terrace of lawyers offices in Hulftsdorp Street (Fig. 12).

The ever-increasing need got houses ..." "In countries of the tropical regions of the world the danger to cultural traditions is even greater. Instead of a gradual development, there industrialization brings abrupt and frequently overwhelming change so that the need is urgent to collect and preserve before all that is meaningful disappears. Moreover, as so many of the changes are due to external influences rather than to self-contained evolution, the break between the recent past and the present is a much more radical one than in countries where industrialization is an old phenomenon." Hiroshi Daifuka, Head, section for the Development of the Cultural Heritage, UNESCO.

And later in this section (originally called "The Threat to Historic Environments") Which was deleted from the *Monumentum* version as it discussed aspects familiar to the international conservation movement: "We will probably be judged not by the monuments we build but by those we have destroyed."

Fig. 1. The demolition of the fire-damaged Grindlays Bank, York Street.

Colombo's urban heritage:

"A city without old buildings is like a man without a memory."

The Pettah and its discoveries:

"The Pettah is the only part of the city where the visitor can get even a faint idea of what life in Colombo night have been like before the Twentieth Century's gangrene set in."

– Paul Bowles.

Towards the end:
"When an architectural monument no longer serves the purpose for which it was built, its conservation ceases to be a practical necessity and becomes a purely cultural task, the importance attributed to which will depend on the cultural maturity of succeeding generations and their sense of the urgency of preserving their cultural heritage."

– Piero Gazzola

The historical origin of the city of Colombo goes back to a port settlement whose existence is documented from about the tenth century. By the fourteenth, it was a fairly important trading centre, and Ibn Battuta, the Arab traveller, described it as 'one of the largest and most beautiful cities in the island of Serendib'. Kelaniya, today a suburb of Colombo, was then 'surrounded by a rampart containing rows of palatial, multi-storeyed buildings, with walls, pillars and flights of steps decorated with frescoes, with a network of broad streets and two main arteries filled with throngs of men of various climes and with wealth of all sorts', according to a contemporary Sinhalese text. The importance of Muslim traders in the port is confirmed, partly by remains such as tombstones, and partly by the accounts of Portuguese writers of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.[1]

During the colonial conquest of maritime Sri Lanka from the sixteenth century onwards, Colombo developed considerably as a commercial and military centre. The Portuguese, Dutch and British, in turn, made major contributions to the architectural fabric of the city, as did the indigenous population fo traders, clerks and artisans. The Portuguese town was in ruins in 1656 after prolonged siege and bombardment by the Dutch, who then reduced the existing fortification to what is roughly the present Fort. By the beginning of the nineteenth century the British were in occupation and the Fort had mainly British residents. The Pettah was then a fine residential district occupied by the Dutch and Portuguese, while the Sinhalese, Tamil and Muslim population dwelt in the suburbs, where some of the *walawwas*[2] of the Sinhalese gentry are still to be found.

In 1869 the British blew up most of the Dutch fortifications and commenced building new military barracks. The Fort developed into the seat of government for the whole country, as well as the banking and commercial centre. The law courts moved to Hulftsdorp. The Pettah has declined from being a residential district into a trading/commercial area with the character of a bazaar, and the areas beyond are now both residential and commercial. In 1948 the Fort of Colombo passed back into Sri Lankan control after 450 years of foreign occupation.

Colombo still has a distinctive architectural personality, its own Sri Lankan mix, which draws on both local and foreign sources – Sri Lankan, Arab, South Indian, Portuguese, Dutch and British. Though much has been written in an evocative or historical way about the city, and the history of a few of its more famous buildings has been documented, there has been no real appraisal of its architectural quality and character, the conservation of which is now critical. The domestic and commercial buildings of Kochchikade, St. Sebastian, Hulftsdorp, etc.,[3] and the grander public and commercial architecture of the Fort, are now threatened by the insistent forces of modernization. Yet these form a rich and varied repository of our urban architectural traditions, such as exists nowhere else in Sri Lanka. Sometimes scattered, sometimes concentrated in long terraces, many of the individual types are such as will not be seen again if they fall now before the impatient, undiscriminating bulldozer.

The ever-increasing need for houses, shops and offices, rocketing land values, property speculation and the toll of the motor-car all these are familiar major factors threatening the survival of our historic urban environments. Quite suddenly, almost before we realize what is happening, we wake up to find that a vital, diverse and exciting urban landscape has been obliterated. Its associations and cultural patterns, its lively roof lines, varying heights and multifarious architectural features are replaced by a banal and depersonalized architecture of steel and concrete towers. When one human-scale building has been removed and replaced by such a substitute, the econimic, spatial and stylistic logic results in the development of the surrounding area in a similar manner. We are robbed of a past shaped by many generations, and often we are given in return imported designs and concepts evolved for other climes and totally unsutied to our own. Narrow streets become unbearably claustrophobic as buildings of several storeys replace the older, smaller structures. Even our relatively broader thoroughfares, which hitherto admitted sea breezes and views of trees and gardens, are being increasingly hemmed in by walls of glass windows which seem to reflect extra heat into the street, while boasting air-conditioned interiors. The multi-storeyed, glass-fronted designs are unsuited to a hot country which has few streets wide enough to take them comfortably.

In the industrialized countries, such architectural solutions have been developed over a considerable period of time, and although they have ousted older architectural forms and transformed parts of the old cities, the pace of change has been such that the alert members of society have had time at least to develop an awareness of the value of what was being lost. Sometimes that consciousness came very late and much damage had already been done; nevertheless, in the West an internally generated industrialization has been spread over a long enough period for its destructive elements to be recognized, and for certain processes to be modified, reversed or halted. In countries like Sri Lanka, however, which are subject to violent and rapid change and the demands, often, of externally imposed solutions, there is little time for a conservation consciousness to develop and have an impact. There is, however, some legislation which leans in this direction. According to the First Schedule of the 1956 Town and Country Planning Ordinance, provision may be made in planning schemes for the prohibition or restriction of the use or development of land for the purpose of the preservation of places and structures of religious, historical, architectural, archaeological or artistic interest.[4]

The Antiquities Ordinance is also pertinent:

The Minister may by Order in writing declare that any specified monument

which dates or is believed to date from a period prior to the 1st day of January 1850, shall ... be deemed to be an ancient monument for the purposes of this Ordinance.[5]

The Ordinance then goes on to spell out the legal conditions of the protection of a building once it has been declared an ancient monument.[6]

However, it would now seem that a more dynamic application of these laws and an updated definition of what an ancient monument is are required. Most would agree that building activity of any interest, worth preserving for posterity, did not cease in 1850. As a result of pressures for a conservation policy, in October 1979 an official of the Ministry of Housing and Construction announced that the Government would soon introduce legislation to conserve all historic buildings. In February 1980 the Committee for the Preservation of Old Buildings of Historical and Architectural Value was set up, consisting primarily of government officials, to advise the powerful Urban Development Authority (UDA) on questions of conservation. It was to be a purely advisory body, without any powers of implementation, and was entrusted with the tasks of drafting legislation to protect buildings not already covered by existing ordinances and the preparation of a list of scheduled buildings. So far, however, neither laws nor list has appeared.

Because of Sri Lanka's rich and ancient civilization, as represented in such famous complexes as Anuradhapura, Sigiriya and Polonnaruwa, we tend to lose sight of and to undervalue the more recent achievements of our people under national or colonial rule. This is where there is a need to take a fresh look at the old streets of Colombo, where wealth of material awaits documentation and appraisal. This process is to some extent under way, but it is hampered by time factors, lack of coordination, insufficient commitment and an absence of public awareness and support. There are many who value the quality of these old streets (and not only those who live and work in them) but they cannot always articulate their feelings or make their voices heared.

Colombo's urban heritage

There are at least a dozen areas which are crying out for an active conservation policy as an integral element of a development plan. These include the Fort, Pettah, Kochchikade, Masangasweediya, St. Sebastian, Hulftsdorp, Grandpass, Kotahena and Mutuwal. In this brief survey we propose to touch upon only some of these areas which are most likely to undergo rapid development and change.

The Fort, with its ornate building styles, long arcades and broad avenues, is largely late nineteenth/early twentieth century in character. Large and impressive public buildings, banks, business houses and hotels dominate its main streets, and there are several splendid architectural sequences. Medium-sized shops and offices occupy the narrower cross roads, and the only residential sections are two groups of apartment blocks erected in the 1930s. Tucked away, here and there, are several relics of the Dutch occupation. The Pettah is a more intensively built-up area, with a much older configuration of buildings and more vital and 'local' qualities. It is now primarily commercial and highly congested, though it once contained many fine houses and shady walks. Its old seventeenth-century grid plan is still preserved. The extensions of the Pettah to the north and north-east (now deliminated as Kochchikade and Masangasweediya) are lined with dwelling-houses, shops and ware-houses, sometimes cheek-by-jowl but more generally in separate concentrations. Like Hulftsdorp and St. Sebastian (or Aluthkade, Kehelwatte and Masangasweediya), they are spread out over several undulating hills with long avenues and vistas worthy of a great city. It is true that narrow, overcrowded lanes also exist here: but while much of the area is congested, even largest sections are still predominantly residential and provide acceptable standards of housing.

Fort

The Fort of Colombo, apart from its grand public buildings (Figs 2 and 3), still contains a number of interesting old structures. One such is the long building bestriding Hospital Street and Canal Row – the old Dutch hospital-perhaps a unique survival of this period in this part of the world. Facing it are a number of old shops dating from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, with lofty wooden pillars, and large, heavy doors with enormous hinges, surmounted by characteristic fanlights. In Queen Street, the expansive 400-foot long frontage of Bogola Building (originally H. W. Cave & Co., publishers and booksellers) has lost its former grandeur under a plethora of shopfronts and signboards, and its internal courtyard had become a rubbish dump; but it would be easy to restore its integrity and dignity. However, it appears that the public body which has acquired it plans to erect a 30-storey building on the site. Opposite, there used to be the sizeable remains of a fine late nineteenth

Fig. 2. Ministry of Information, Prince Street.

Fig. 3. The Office of the President, at the corner of Queen Street and Prince Street. This was the seat of the colonial government until 1929, and was completely renovated in 1948.

century terrace where George Steuarts still has its offices; this was part of a large sequence which began to be demolished some years ago. In March 1980 the office of the Cargo Boat Despatch Company was torn out of the centre of the terrace and replaced by a banal structure with a concrete hood cantilevered over the street about fifteen feet beyond the rest of the terrace.

Halfway down Chatham Street is a lonely survival of the eighteenth century-a masonry columned building now used as a mosque. Though only part of the original facade remains, something of the earlier character of the building survives and more could be retrieved. Opposite is the shop, Lalchands, a well-preserved early nineteenth-century building with wooden pillars and antique windows elevated above the street on a high plinth. It was to have been replaced by a five-storeyed building, but conservationist pressures may have affected this decision. The handsome building in Prince Street, with its columned upper storey and raised internal courtyard, which now houses Air Lanka (Fig. 4), seems to have preserved much of its original form – a quirk of fate in a street which was substantially rebuilt in the early part of the present century.[7] In Bristol Street we see one of the few survivals of the Dutch fortification, the Delft Gateway Guardhouse (1702), with part of the old fort wall.[8] Now used as a police officers[9] mess, this building should have been listed long ago under the existing Ordinance. The land is now required for a high-rise block and pressure has been exerted to prevent its being made a protected monument. However, plans to demolish it have been temporarily shelved for financial reasons.

There are also two important green spaces in the Fort. The small but delightful Gordon Gardens used to be open to the public, but it is now enclosed by a high wall and can be entered only from the grounds of the President's Office. The 6.5 hectare site known as Echelon Square was, until 1980, a large playing field surrounded by a number of nineteenth-century military barracks, described as 'the finest ... in the East' at the time they were built. They are now being demolished to clear the ground for a 'glittering urban complex, complete with banks, supermarkets and a vast underground carport'. Colombo's tallest building (52 storeys) will be erected here by an overseas bank, and similar developments by private enterprise will gradually cover the rest of the site. Apart from the loss of this important open space and the handsome barracks, the last three or four years have seen the disappearance of several other notable buildings in the area. In October 1978 the Employment Exchange in Lotus Road was demolished, but the site has not been developed. 9 Only two groups of vaulted warehouses, (*pakhuizen*) from the Dutch occupation remained after others were demolished in the 1950s. In 1979, despite energetic efforts to save it, half of one group was dynamited to provide an apparently urgently needed sure (as yet undeveloped). The remaining warehouses should be preserved and

Fig. 4. Air Lanka office, Prince Street. A late eighteenth or early nineteenth-century building in which the arcade and colonnade were probably open originally.

Fig. 5. The Post Office, First Cross Street. This was a draper's, F. X. Pereira's, from 1905 until about ten years ago. The building probably dates from the late nineteenth century.

rehabilitated. In 1980 the long, two-storeyed Registrar-General's Office in York Street[10] was demolished and a ten-storey bank is expected to go up on the site. What was the old Bristol Hotel, nearby, is also to be removed although operations seem to have been temporarily suspended; and in October 1980 fire gutted the adjacent century-old Grindlays Bank (Fig. 1). The demolition squad moved in hastily to take down the facade while conservationists were trying to procure a preservation order on it. This last example illustrates the importance of a building which, while not being remarkable in isolation, is valuable because of its integration into the overall arcaded architecture of the street.

The Pettah and its environs

But for real discoveries, or rediscoveries, not just of single buildings but of whole streetscapes where a unique character is preserved, we must go to the Pettah and the areas lying to its north and east. Walking through these streets on a Sunday, we can study the architecture at our ease, undistracted by trade and traffic. In the main grid, we find a variety of styles and features, ranging from large, highly ornate buildings with rows of windows and arches and elaborate parapets concealing low-pitched roofs, to more 'local' forms with wooden columns and enclosed balconies. Occasionally we find tiny unpretentious structures peering out from under low, sloping roofs, crushed between lofty buildings; and we may also chance upon unexpectedly well-preserved and attractive houses tucked away in dingy lanes, like Kapirimudukku Mawatha. A number of old 'Dutch' and early 'British' shops and houses can still be found here, some in fair condition and little altered. In many, the wooden or masonry-columned verandah has been enclosed in a shopfront, but often the pillars are still visible in the masonry wall.[11] Variations of these typical street houses of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, which combine Sri Lankan, Portuguese and Dutch elements, can also be found in north and north-east Colombo, where colonnaded verandahs have been similarly enclosed in masonry or lattice walls. A careful conservaton effort could recover sizeable groups of this kind.

There are also a number of fine old 'monuments' here, like the Post Office (formerly F. X. Pereira's) in First Cross Street (Fig. 5), the church of St. Philip Neri in Olcottt Mawatha, and the handsome eighteenth or early nineteenth-century building housing the City Dispensary and Bastian & Co.[12] Another impressive survival is the former Post Office in Prince Street, a seminary or orphanage during the Dutch occupation and the first building in Colombo to be restored as an official act of conservation (Fig. 6).[13] It has just been opened as a Dutch period museum; but even as we admit it, we regret its isolation and are made acutely aware of the need to conserve not simply single monuments but sequences, groups and areas which should be integrated into modern

Fig. 6. The Dutch Museum, Prince Street. Originally the weeskamer, a Dutch seminary or orphanage, dating from the early eighteenth century and renovated in 1780. In recent years it was a post office until its restoration by the Archaeological Department.

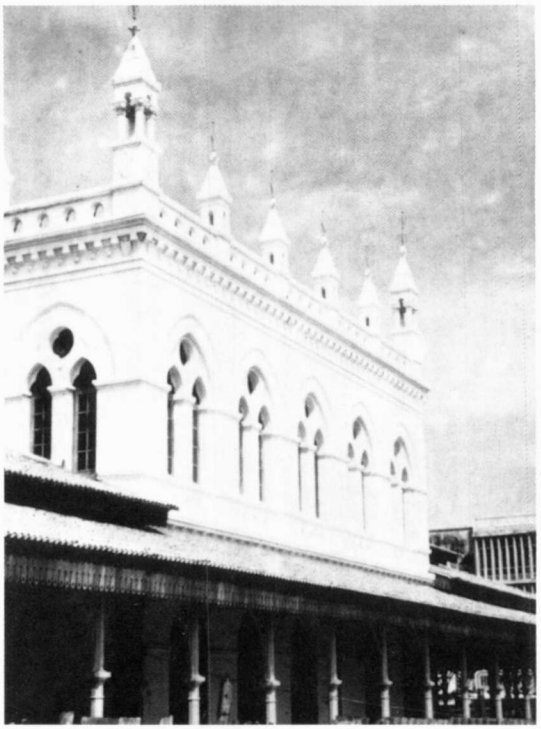

Fig. 7. The old Town Hall and the Edinburgh Market, Main Street.

planning. Several good examples of houses dating from the turn of the eighteenth century, which contribute to the entity of this area, are worth conserving in this street. At the east end of Main Street, the old Town Hall (1873) and the Edinburgh Market (a large, iron-colonnaded enclosure of the same period) (Fig.7) have just been restored and there are plans for the rehabilitation of the surrounding area.

However, recent events in Sea Street (part of the old Indian Chetties' quarter) underline the need for knowledgeable rehabilitation. Until 1980 the buildings at the south end were obliterated by a forest of signboards peculiar to this street; but in a well-meant 'improvement' the signboards have been drastically reduced and relegaed to demure positions above the shopfronts, and the external walls of all the shops have been faced with hideous shiny brickwork. This simply vulgarizes and detracts from the vital character of the area, the once exuberant street of goldsmiths. The north end of Sea Street is very different in character (Fig. 8), and the old temples (*kovils*), warehouses and dwelling-houses provide an exciting architectural experience. The eye moves from pillared upper storeys, embellished with wrought iron, to intricate roof balustrades, down to handsome panelled doors at street level. Smaller, plainer buildings (frequently warehouses) set off these elaborate maroon and blue fantasies.

Suddenly, one comes upon a little pale blue house, with cream detailing and bright blue window shades and shutters, an apparently old and traditional use of colour going back many centuries. By the side of this house one can turn up into the upper part of Chekku Street across a barren piece of ground, which could so easily be turned into a green and shady space connecting these two fine streets.

Chekku Street (now Sri Kathiresan Street) is perhaps the most extraordinary in this area, though its quality may not be immediately appreciated (Fig. 9). To a large degree it has preserved its ancient character, with some exceptions such as a hideous cinema and a sadly revamped church. The architecture of the upper end of this street, with its pavements and raised platforms, sheltered by the extending overhang of roofs (like open verandahs) from one end of the block to the other, is rarely to be met with anywhere else in Sri Lanka.[14] It is extraordinary that in a commercial area such as this the street has remained almost entirely residential and kept its remarkable character. For anyone who has lived in Europe, walking along Chekku Street is like coming upon a medieval lane in the middle of a twentieth-century town.[15] It should be preserved at all costs; there is a wealth of material for study here, historical, social and economic, as well as architectural.

At the end of Chekku Street is St. Mary's, a rare and beautiful church which provides a link with Portuguese history and architecture. It was built at the instance of Catholics in Goa to replace a Portuguese church destroyed in the Dutch bombardment of 1655-56. The ruins of this were still visible in 1814 when an English Protestant church was built over them. Stylistically, St. Mary's probably recalls many features of its predecessor and is the only known example of its kind in Sri Lanka (Fig. 10). It is one building that has been saved by dissuading the

Fig. 8. Sea Street, a corner house

Fig. 9. Houses in Chekku Street, dating probably from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

Church authorities from demolishing and rebuilding as they had planned. Equally urgent action is needed in Gintupitiya Street to rescue the crumbling arched, masonry entrance of the Dharmachatram Madam, flanked by a fine pair of stucco lions and decorated niches. Though of quite recent date (1891), it is the only structure of its kind in Colombo; yet it lacks and kind of protection.

St. Sebastian, Hulftsdorp and their environs

Moving out of the Pettah area, we start to walk up Mihindu Mawatha, past a large new supermarket erected on the site of the old Police Station demolished in 1978.[16] Just beyond is another decaying building with a fine facade, worthy of restoration but probably destined to suffer the same fate. (Fig. 11) We pass Marties Lane, where scores of families are crowded together in narrow passages (euphemistically called 'garden') admitting little light and less air. We cannot romanticize these dwellings which are not fit for human habitation, but further up, at the corner of Mihindu Mawatha and St. Sebastian Street, stands a substantial late nineteenth century dwelling colonnaded along one side and guarded by three stone lions. In 1978 it was to be demolished, but it still survives. From this point all the way to the Law Courts are attractive old buildings, including a number of single-storeyed, wooden pillared, late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century types (Fig. 12). A have been scheduled for demolition, but with a little imagination the whole sequence could be preserved and improved. New uses could be found for those not in residential use, and the special caharacter of the area could be retained.

Fig. 10. St. Mary's Church, Chekku Street. Built to replace a Portuguese church destroyed in 1655-56, it probably echoes the original in style. Inside there are frescoes and lofty wooden columns.

Other interesting old buildings can be seen at the corner of Mihindu Mawatha and St. Sebastian Hill (Fig. 13), but already haphazard development has permitted many jarring interruptions in this fine townscape, like the 'modern' dwelling built at the side of an exquisite lattice-fronted house which is part of a group of old buildings in the curve of the road facing St. Sebastian Hill. Other interruptions include the Bank of Ceylon and a three-storeyed building which breaks up the colonnaded sequence further along. Beyond the neoclassical facade of the messenger Street, also retains a number of attractive old buildings; and even houses built at the turn of the century with decorative masonry and concrete screens instead of wood, have acquired a patina which softens the impact of the modern materials. In this busy thoroughfare most of the buildings are long and narrow in plan with courtyards at the rear, offering ideal solutions to the problems of noise and privacy. Many have lightwells, surrounded by wooden pillars, and in messenger Street doors inside each house can be thrown open to enable the occupants to pass from one end of the terrace to the other without stepping out on to the street. Parallel to Messenger Street is the more congested and commercialized Old Moor Street, where the handsome frontages,

Fig. 11. A decaying building in Mihindy Mawatha, dating from the late nineteenth century.

wooden doors and window shutters, fanlights and deep interiors are usually obscured by throngs of carts and lorries.

Turning north again we come to New Chetty Street where, despite the modernization or rebuilding of a number of houses, several courtyard houses still remain.[18] In Vivekananda Hill and Jampettah Street are two large, impressive street houses of the *walawwa* type dating from about the middle of the eighteenth century (Fig. 16). One was astonishingly scheduled for demolition, and it is clear the owners are unable to maintain it. Development plans were subsequently altered so that the house could be retained, but the slight deviation will result in the demolition of an attractive old house opposite. Here is an urgently obvious case for legal protection of these two long masonry colonnaded buildings.

Fig. 12. Lawyer's offices in Hulftsdorp Street.

All the streets discussed in this last section are historically and aesthetically important, and should be seriously considered for protection as conservation areas. Their architectural quality is one that offers many lessons for our time. The spatial organization of this street architecture is very different from that of the big houses or mansions, standing in large gradens, elsewhere in Colombo. It differs too from the shanties and old tenements, which house most of Colombo's population, the modern and not-so-modern blocks of flats, and the typical middle-class residential pattern of small houses nestling along the more secluded sideroads among profuse vegetation. Most of the houses we have been discussing are placed closely together or form long terraces, abutting directly on to the street, with small courtyards or lightwells behind. They form a truly urban architecture, achieving a high density as well as a sense of community or neighbourliness. They possess a dignity which seems to emerge form what is an economic, national and aesthetic use of space.

Therefore, having established the reality of this architectural and human quality that still survives in old Colombo, what is the present situation? Despite the announcement in 1979 that legislation would shortly be introduced to preserve historic buildings of more recent periods, much of beauty and value has disappeared, so much so that we hesitate to draw attention to what survives lest developers hasten to bulldoze it. Negative though it is, one present factor on the side of conservation is financial constraint. For example, in March 1979 the President was reported as announcing 'The whole of Fort would be redone. Old buildings were being pulled down and would be replaced by new structures'.[19] In June, the same year, the Prime Minister's amendment to the Housing and Town Improvement Ordinance was passed, providing for the construction of high-rise buildings in the city development area. These were but confirmations of processes already under way. Two years later, however, the Prime Minister announced a moratorium on planning permission for

Fig. 13. Buildings at the corner of Mihindu Mawatha and St. Sebastian Hill.

high-rise buildings in the city because of the inadequacy of supporting infrastructure. Lack of funds is also a factor; in several instances of sites already cleared, planning permission has been withheld although there are still a number of high-rise buildings in prospect which are not affected by the moratorium.

But such accidents and chances, quickly reversible as they are, are no substitute for a rational policy of conservation based on accepted methods of qualitative assessment and evaluation. It is of this and of a recognition that the future of old Colombo is also a matter for public concern, that there is a desperate need if anything worthwhile is to be salvaged for another generation.

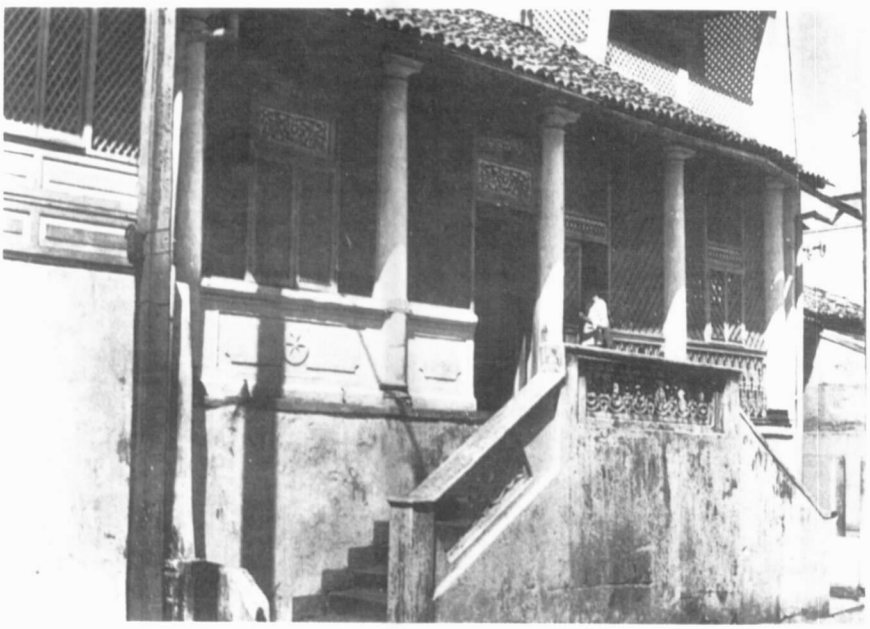

Fig. 14. An early nineteenth-century house in Messenger Street, with coloured lattices incorporating white **mal lalis**.

Acknowledgements

Figs. 1,7 and 13 are by Jukka Jokilehto and the remainder are the author's.

[1] The location of Sri Lanka's fifteenth-century capital at Kotte (a few miles east of the port) may well have been influenced by its contiguity to the port settlement, while in turn Colombo's development as a port must have been greatly enhanced by its proximity to the country's capital.

[2] Mansion type houses of the landowner and official class of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

[3] In this article, older and more familiar designations of areas have been used, as well as modern ward divisions, but not in such a way as to cause confusion.

[4] Section 38, 1-5.

[5] Section 16-1.

[6] An example of a scheduled or protected area is the fort at Galle, an extensive conglomeration of private houses, government and commercial establishments. Theoretically, no structural alterations to these buildings or charge to their facades can take place without the permission of the Archaeological Commissioner. The real effectiveness of this scheme is difficult to gauge as we do not know how far it has checked 'modernization'. Despite the vigilance and care of the Archaeological Department, and even legal action against offenders, there have been flagrant violations of these rules, by both private individuals and government departments. It is clear that legislation alone will not suffice to ensure the protection of these areas.

[7] A property on this site is referred to in a deed of 1786, and a transaction in 1805 conveyed the premises from Dutch to British ownership. The present building probably dates from the latter event.

[8] The left face of the guard house has been spoilt by the recent addition of another building, which conceals some of the old windows and

Fig. 15. Another early nineteenth-century house in Messenger Street.

Fig. 16. A mid eighteenth-century house in Vivekananda Hill.

detracts generally from its proportions; but its removal, and the restoration of the building, would be quite straightforward.

[9] This building was the original Fort railway station, and it was only during demolition that the archtectural quality was revealed; many of its windows had been boarded up, and rooms had been crudely partitioned as the building had been put to different purposes. This kind of treatment has been meted out to many fine old buildings which came from a time when space and decoration were unstinted, and it results in an intrinsically sound and often fine building being condemned because of a supercially shabby appearance.

[10] This was another military barracks of the 1870s.

[11] Several examples are similar to those in Hospital Street in the Fort, with immense doors, bisected halfway up or having three or four divisions, crowned by a shuttered fanlight.

[12] This dignified monument, with its four arched doorways and two rows of tall rectangular windows flanked by masonry pilasters, was probably originally an open colonnaded building.

[13] Known as the *Weeskamer*, this building with eight lofty pillars rising through two storeys along its street verandah, appears on a map of 1732. It seems to have been renovated in 1780.

[14] We are tempted to wonder whether much of what we see today is a late seventeenth or early eighteenth-century rebuilding of what was devastated in the Dutch bombardment of 1656.

[15] The poverty of our architectural knowledge is such that we cannot easily date these buildings, but perhaps, as we have suggested, they may recall styles prevalent when the Portuguese were here (as is often the case, we suspect, when we talk of 'Dutch' architecture).

[16] This handsome building, which added quality to this junction where the road begins to climb the hill to Hulftsdorp, was originally the tuberculosis ward, built about the end of the last century.

[17] Wooden fanlights carved in floral, creeper or leaf patterns.

[18] One very pretty and excellently maintained example has masonry columns and delicate, carved wooden screens enclosing its small verandah, which is charmingly painted in blue and white. Farther along, rising high above the street, stands another courtyard house in somewhat grander style, with a long, wooden pillared verandah, also in a good state of preservation.

[19] *Ceylon Daily News*, 2 March 1979.