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Shaw Wallace

January 1 2010

We have to thank Terry Morris for taking the time and trouble to give us the story of Shaw Wallace: Shaw Wallace 1884 and beyond

A detailed history of the Shaw Wallace Company is concisely portrayed in a book by Sir Harry Townend published in 1965. Being fortunate enough to have a copy of the book and having been a former employee I am able to set out some interesting facts and a few personal recollections.

The Shaw Wallace Company had many interests throughout the world including India , Pakistan , Ceylon and strong links with Malaysia through Sime Darby relating to many commodities and services up to the point of its merger with United Spirits in 2007. The groups' principal activities now are to manufacture and distribute alcoholic beverages. Its products include Antiquity, Royal Challenge, Director's Special, Old Tavern, Hayward 's Fine Whisky, John Exshaw, Old Adventurer Rum and White Mischief Vodka. The group exports its products to the United States , Europe, Korea , Mongolia and Singapore . The groups' plants are located in Hyderabad and Andhra Pradesh. However I will focus on Shaw Wallace's interest in Tea prior to the merger.

In 1886 Shaw Wallace took responsibility for the estates belonging to Mr. R. Gordon Shaw which included Talap, Dangri, Hiliika, Hokonguri and Dholla, which at the time were known as the "R.G.S." tea estates. In 1889 The Assam Frontier Tea Company Ltd was formed in London to acquire the 5 R.G.S. properties.

Gordon Shaw's interest in tea in the Doom Dooma areas of Assam and the birth of the Assam Frontier Tea Co.Ltd., came about through his friendship with the Warren family. It is understood James Warren bought Chubwa in 1850. It was the original Tea plantation put out in Assam in the 1830's by the East India Company, as an experiment to determine if tea could be grown in India from seed brought in from China .

1893 saw the formation of the Silloah tea company in the Surmah Valley (now Bangladash) and in 1894 The Budla Beta Tea Co was incorporated. In Upper Assam , the Assam Frontier and Budla Beta, Tea companies were still expanding. In 1905 the latter began planting out from its Budla Beta division on land nearby a new estate which took the name of Bokpara, and two years later Kharjan tea garden at Panitola was purchased. Assam Frontier and Budla Beta each planted out completely new estates at some distance from their other properties - the last operation of this kind to be undertaken by any of the companies in the group. Budla Beta's new estate Pengaree was carved out of dense jungle in the forests beyond the Assam oil town of Digboi and in the early days elephants were the only means of getting to and from the estates.

1950 was marked by a major natural catastrophe when the Assam earthquake struck on the 15th August. The centre of the earthquake was in the North East of the Himalayan range and many estates suffered considerable damage. In late April 1951 a severe hailstorm resulted in a loss of crop which was estimated at over 1 million lbs of made tea-equivalent to one year's production.

All of the above has a deep relevance to my years in Assam. In 1957 I joined R.G.Shaw in London and soon became engulfed in the tea industry with a fascination and desire to work in India . After a number of years, with the help of Sir Charles Miles and Si Harry Townsend, both directors of R.G.Shaw, I was sent out to Shaw Wallace in Calcutta . My dream had materialised. I spent a short time in Bombay before being transferred to Assam to become an assistant on the Kharjan estate. On my arrival I was introduced to Duncan Cummings the superintendent at Kanjikoah who's opening gambit was "how's your game of golf?" After a reply of "not too good", I was summoned to be on the Kanjikoah golf course at 0800 the next morning for a lesson! An interesting fact relating to the bungalow we were sitting in, was that during the 1939-45 war years it had become virtually an hotel for high ranking American Air Force officers and for V.I.P's en route to and from China . Lord Mountbatten and General Chiang Kai Shek were amongst those who stayed there.

Three of my years were on Pengaree where daily life consisted of amongst other things, the checking for elephant damage in the newly planted out areas! There was a choice of roads from Digboi to Pengaree, the shortest route being through the B.O.C oil fields but that came at a price. Large herds of elephants had reclaimed this area and on many occasions I put my life in their hands as I manoeuvred through the herd on returning from the club with my driver hidden down behind my seat screaming obscenities. It was still those irreplaceable times when you could also meet Tigers, leopards and Sambar on the oil fields road.

1962 was also an eventful time with the invasion into north India by the Chinese. This was a time of uncertainty with the woman and children being evacuated to Singapore , the labour force asking questions you could not answer, the movement of equipment and troops along the Digboi roads and drinking alongside high ranking officers of the Indian army in Digboi club. Many questions were asked of them and some very strange answers emerged! "What will become of us if the Chinese continued across the Brahmaputra river? Were there any escape routes"? The answers to these questions resulted in copious amounts of whisky being consumed with long standing consequences. Apparently the oil fields and the refinery were to be destroyed but more alarmingly, we were asked to assist with this task.

Once the fields were blown we would be cutting off the only escape route. The alternative was to trek thousands of miles through the jungle to Burmafascinating idea? I believe the Chinese had intelligence officers in the club that night as the retreat started the following morning. The only disaster to occur was some weeks later on receipt of my mess bill from the Digboi club

It was sad to see so many colleagues leaving in 1966 to move on to other parts of the world, encouraged by the Indian government. I still follow the activities in Assam with interest and very fond memories.

Terence Morris

January 2010

August 23 2009

Terry Morris wrote:

I thought the following may be of interest to anyone who has knowledge of Shaw Wallace & Co and Kanjikoah. As a 70th birthday present my son sent me a copy of the book "a history of Shaw Wallace" by Sir Harry Townend published in 1965. This has a two fold interest for me as I worked in London with R.G.Shaw & Co the London office prior to going to Assam. I knew Sir Harry Townend as one of the Directors who was one of the prime instigators in my being sent to Assam as was Sir Charles Miles another director.

The second part, is that he describes in the book;

"The superintendent's bungalow at Kanjikoah became virtually an hotel for high ranking American Air Force officers and for VIP's en route to and from China .Lord Mountbatten and General Chiang Kai Shek were amongst those who stayed there during this period."

for my part I recall sitting on the veranda of this auspicious bungalow sipping a glass of Johnny Walker with Duncan Cummings the then Superintendent. He introduced me when I first arrived to life in Assam with a golf lesson!!

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Dilsher Sen tells us that the latest issue of the WM's in house magazine has been uploaded and can be read at <http://www.mcleodrussel.com/>

Dilsher's e-mail address is dsen@mcleodrussel.com, in case you need to contact him-He is based in Kent UK
