

Narratives of Image: Views of Ceylon, Veins of Influence

Interdisciplinary Discovery for Curatorial Investigation

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The use of photography as a scientific and commercial tool was fairly well established in Ceylon by the end of the 19th century. The camera was used in archaeology, astronomy, anthropology, agriculture, engineering and industry between 1860 and 1880, as well as in commercial studio practice. Scholarship and recent exhibitions of colonial photographs from Ceylon to date (of which there is a dearth), however, have focussed on image classification, the relevant photographers and their individual practices. Departing from that didacticism, I outline the dynamics in collection and collecting, with a broader consideration of how the collection might have interacted with 'oscillating potentialities' beyond the collection materials themselves. Notably, most surviving collections and images are located outside Ceylon (e.g., UK, Europe and USA) and assuredly exist today as a result of being thus protected from the devastating effects of tropical weather on this medium. This essay covers the finding of an unstudied collection of colonial-era photographs and related materials on Ceylon in an album titled Views of Ceylon (the 'Collection') held by the Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford University. This collection, largely unstudied, serendipitously provides a case study for tracing narratives of influence that operate from image to person and person to image. I recreate networks of individuals and their relationship to the various images, providing an example of the ways in which imperial networks can be traced through university collections.

Keywords: Ceylon, Sri Lanka, colonial, photography, Joseph Lawton, Jermyn, Pitt Rivers Museum.

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I Introduction

During the course of research of early colonial photography of Ceylon (now Sri Lanka), discoveries relating to the photograph itself and extraneous factors not reflected in the image led to my development of the concept of '*veins of influence*.' This idea invites inter-disciplinary discourse to consider the dynamics of the photographic image, including those reflected in the image and through the image to viewers at any given time, varying with time. Though such interdisciplinary investigation is regularly practised by curators and researchers, this term, as coined during the course of this research, more poetically reflects the pulsating dynamics, whether they be imagined, possible, or proven.

In the context of early photographic images by colonial photographers of Ceylon, in particular, contemporaneous or operating influential writings on Ceylon, policy edits, political propaganda, commercial objectives and artistic endeavour are some examples of what might have operated on and through any given image or images.

Further to this research, I was invited to review, as a Visiting Fellow of the Pitt Rivers Museum ('PRM'), Oxford University, a previously unstudied collection of colonial-era photography on Ceylon, in an album, titled,

Views of Ceylon (the 'Collection'), now part of the PRM collection. Though, at the time, my image focus had been early portrait photography from Ceylon and its influence on national and native identity perspectives, this Collection has serendipitously provided a case study for tracing and activating the study of *veins of influence* in the context of these images. Considering collection dynamics, collection materials, collectors, owners and creators: a curatorial narrative has unfolded to reveal the surprising significance of these materials, inviting further study and inter-disciplinary engagement. These *veins of influence* develop a broader narrative with and around these collection materials, also revealing exciting possibilities for curatorial presentation whilst simultaneously identifying and elaborating on these dynamics.

In Ceylon, the use of photography as a scientific and commercial tool was fairly well established by the end of the 19th century. The camera was used by commercial studios to capture images of archaeology, anthropology, agriculture, engineering and industry between 1860 and 1880,¹ as well as in studio practice. However, photographs of colonial Ceylon were and remained much fewer than those documenting its much favoured colonial neighbour, the 'Jewel in the Crown', India. In India, photography had been officially and extensively employed (including important documentation of the varied races and castes of the country), occasionally supported with funding, since the early 1860s. In contrast, there is little evidence that such scientific and ethnographic application of the medium was widely employed in Ceylon.²

The rarity of photographs of Ceylon during the days of early photography would have given any such images an assumed status of value and often insight into the unfamiliar. Most viewers could not have known better than to see the few as a representational and authentic pictorial record of the contents shown.³

Most scholarship and exhibitions of colonial photographs from Ceylon to date have focussed on gathering images, indexing and categorising,⁴ with bio-data on photographers and their individual practices. Departing from this approach, this review emphasises the dynamics in the collection and of collecting through an organic analogy of life-giving veins.⁵ Guiding markers for review thus include: the dynamics of collecting, namely why and how the collection started, developed and travelled; what the images and their selection might offer; and implicit or stated perspectives of the creators, collectors and viewers; with the broader consideration of how the collection might have nurtured 'oscillating potentialities',⁶ namely the varied and changing possibilities of influence, operating outside, within and from the collection itself.

The Collection's route to the PRM in 2010 remains unconfirmed, though the materials refer to five names: *L.A.S. Jermyn*, 'C.F.G.C.' (shown to be Constance Francis Gordon Cumming), *C. Symons* and, in unclear script, *Revd Cliff Godwin* and *J Lawton*. The starting point for the provenance trail was *L.A.S. Jermyn* because of the album notation 'Presented by *L.A.S. Jermyn*.'

The collection under consideration consists of:

- 1 vignette print of vine/flower fixed on the inside of the first page, signed *C Symons 1873*;
- 44 albumen prints (each approx. 28cm x 21.5cm), 37 fixed on consecutive individual pages, followed by 7 fixed in different arrangement (front and back of each page);
- 2 photographs of coffee plantation scenery, fixed on the recto;

¹Ismeth Raheem and Percy Colin-Thomé, *Images of British Ceylon: Nineteenth Century Photography of Sri Lanka* (Times Editions, 2000).

²John Falconer, *Regeneration, A Reappraisal of Photography in Ceylon 1850-1900* (British Council, 2000) 17.

³H. D. Gower, *The Camera as Historian (1916)* (FA Stokes & Co., 1916) 3.

⁴There was a typical stock list of the 19th Century commercial photographer, which included: Middle-Class Mansions; The Working Class situation in Colombo; Clubs and other Institutions; Streets and Urban Landscape; Landscape; Urban Outposts; Portraiture; Ethnographic Studies; Agricultural and Plantation Views; Archaeological Views and Buried Cities; and Botanical Gardens and Tropical Plants.

⁵This review intentionally bypasses post-colonial theories, such as Orientalism, to bring a fresh focus to primary source materials, namely the images and contemporaneous sources that connect to inform on the collecting, creation and context of these images.

⁶Christopher Pinney, 'Foreword,' *Visual Histories of South Asia*, edited by Annamaria Motrescu-Mayes and Marcus Banks (Primus Books, 2018) xii.

- 4 photographs of artworks, affixed on the recto;
- Loose, handwritten ‘Liste of Photographs’—one page with notations on both sides in two different scripts;⁷
- Loose, 1 studio photograph of a turbaned man (‘Portrait’);
- Loose, sepia-toned drawing, handwritten title and the notation ‘C.F.G.C.’ (‘Drawing’);
- Leather bound album with gold embossed title *Views of Ceylon*, photographs pasted on pages, with numerous unused pages.

In what follows, these materials are collectively referred to as the ‘collection’ or ‘Jermyn Folio’. Materials pasted in the *Views of Ceylon* album are referred to as the ‘Album.’ All materials are unsigned except where otherwise indicated.

2 The Collection

2.1 Provenance, Owners and Collectors

L.A.S. Jermyn (1880–1962), Donor Lancelot Ambrose Scudamore Jermyn (‘L.A.S.’) was born in Lucknow, India, where his father served as a priest. After studying at Keble College, Oxford University, he became a teacher, spending time in Malaya⁸ in the late 1930s through to the 1940s, the relevance of which we see later. There is, however, to date, no record of any visit by him to Ceylon. L.A.S.’s only child and son predeceased him, being a war casualty in his early 20s, and this absence of descent may have prompted L.A.S.’s eventual gift of the Collection outside the family.

In Malaya, he taught and headed private English-medium schools, including serving as Head Master of the prestigious Malay College, Kuala Kangsar (1919–23) and Malacca Highschool (1934–1941).⁹ During the Japanese invasion of Malaya in 1941, L.A.S. was taken prisoner and spent the rest of the war in Changi Prison, Singapore, during which time he translated into English Virgil’s *Georgics*, furthering his personal interests in poetry and classical literature. His translation of the *Georgics* became part of his work *The Singing Farmer* that included notes on his personal experiences in South East Asia and, interestingly, applied Virgil’s guidelines on agriculture to his own observations of soils and plants in Malaya.¹⁰ L.A.S.’s indicated affinity for nature and agriculture offers another reason why this Collection might have appealed to him and stayed with him.

Despite the notation ‘Presented by L.A.S. Jermyn’, we still do not know the immediate recipient of that presentation. The PRM accession note states that the Album came from the School of Geography, but there is no record of when that School itself received the Album.¹¹ It is more probable that L.A.S. gifted the Collection to his Oxford College, Keble, before his death in 1962. Keble College—with strong ties to the School of Geography—could have passed the materials there, for greater access and appreciation.¹²

⁷An interesting linguistic point is the writing of ‘Liste’ a French word, rather than the English ‘List’, and what such notation indicates about the writer of this list.

⁸Throughout this article, the word ‘Malaya’ indicates the area of the Malay peninsula and of the island of Singapore, which were under the British colonial power.

⁹Ramli Hj. Khamis, *The First Hundred Years : Malay College Kuala Kangsar* (Word Wizards, 2005); Bok Chye Chua, *Our Story: Malacca High School, 1826–2006* (MHS Anniversary, 2006).

¹⁰Laura Sayre, “‘How / to make fields fertile’: Ecocritical Lessons from the History of Virgil’s *Georgics* in Translation,” *Ecocriticism, Ecology, and the Cultures of Antiquity*, edited by Christopher Schliephake (Lexington Books, 2017) 191; L.A.S. Jermyn, *The Singing Farmer. A Translation of Vergil’s ‘Georgics’* (Blackwell, 1947).

¹¹Discussion with Susan Squibb (a.k.a. Sue Bird), Retired Geography Subject Librarian, Bodleian Libraries, Oxford University, 23 March 2020.

¹²Discussion with Susan Squibb (a.k.a. Sue Bird).

Rt. Rev. Hugh Jermyn (1820-1903), Collector & Original Owner The intersection between L.A.S. Jermyn, the Collection and Ceylon is certainly his family inheritance and his paternal grandfather, Bishop Hugh Willoughby Jermyn, the Bishop of Colombo from 1871–1875. Bishop Jermyn’s stewardship of the Church of Ceylon was exemplary and garnered much praise, as noted in church records. He ‘crowded into less than four brief years an amount of work that would have done credit to twice that length of service,’¹³ and built up the Church reserves, increased chaplaincies, particularly in the coffee districts, and promoted missionary work through financial and physical support. Described vividly as ‘striking’ in stature, with ‘herculean mould’ and ‘flowing beard’ giving a ‘patriarchal appearance,’¹⁴ he actively toured outstation parishes, travelling the country and worked with ‘zeal and energy that boded no good for his health.’¹⁵ Sadly, he was forced into early resignation due to ill health.

Based on recorded dates of his residence in Ceylon and the noted dates for most of these collection materials, it is likely that Bishop Jermyn was the primary collector and original owner of the Views of Ceylon Album, though not necessarily of all materials in the Collection, as hinted by its different constructs of presentation. The Album’s image presentations vary: showing quality large format photographs, one per album page, at the start of the Collection; then clusters of faded photographs, similar and varied in subject matter, in other sections; and other images either pasted or in loose format, indicating that the Collection was completed over time and by different owners.

3 Veins of Influence – Collecting and Creation

3.1 The Albumen Prints

The majority of the albumen prints in the Album capture the picturesque, showing rolling hills, exotic rock formations and tall waterfalls. We also see a botanical focus, with lush greens, ferns and palms – landscapes of a tropical paradise. Included also are distinctive architectural images, most with religious connections: the Buddhist Temple of the Tooth (Kandy), the Hindu Temple (Colombo) and the Christian Christ Church Cathedral (Colombo). Notably missing is an image of a mosque, even though the Muslim faith was practised by a minority in Ceylon then (and continues to be so today).¹⁶ Though it is noted that it is very typical of travel albums of Ceylon of this period to not have included images of mosques, this exclusion remains curious as this collection is more than a mere travel album due to the extended and interactive residency of the Jermyns in Ceylon, which is later discussed in this article.

These first 44 albumen prints can confidently be credited to Joseph Lawton, a renowned British studio photographer active in Ceylon in the late 1860s and early 1870s. The dates of his commercial studio activity and stay in Ceylon overlap with Bishop Jermyn’s four years there.

These views (the ‘Lawton photographs’) bear a striking resemblance to photographs in The Princeton Art Museum Collection specifically titled *Lawton, Views of Ceylon* (1872–73), containing 25 albumen prints (titled the *Princeton Album*) and six matching images including the Mahavali Ganga (shown below).¹⁷ The photographs from both collections show similar photographic perspectives with centralised focus, a balance of dense and open spaces, and the absence of man.

Notwithstanding Lawton’s importance as a colonial photographer, there is frustratingly little biographical information on him, including no confirmed portraits, birth year, or death date. His memory is notably only preserved and celebrated through his imaging of Ceylon.

¹³F. Lorenz Beven and J. A. Martensz, *A History of the Diocese of Colombo: A Centenary Volume* (Times of Ceylon Co, 1946) 90.

¹⁴Beven and Martensz 91.

¹⁵Beven and Martensz 92.

¹⁶Survey of 1891 shows a 7.9% Muslim segment of the population.

¹⁷Joseph Lawton, ‘Lawton’s Views of Ceylon (1872-73),’ *Princeton University Art Museum Collection*,



Mahavali River 2010.75.43.4.



Kandy Lake 2010.75.43.4.

Lawton came to Ceylon working for the trading company H.C Byrde and Co, and around 1866, opened a photography studio in Kandy.¹⁸ He was famously commissioned by the Ceylon Archaeological Committee to photograph ruins at Anuradhapura, Sigiriya, Mihintale and Polonnaruwa. Those 227 highly skilled and valued photographs can be accessed through UK public collections, including in the National Archives, Kew (previously in the Colonial Office Collections) and the Victoria & Albert Museum Collection, London (V&A Collection).¹⁹ He stopped photographing in early 1872, and is believed to have returned to England due to his ill health and died by November 1872, as indicated in an announcement at the Ceylon Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society at that time.²⁰ His wife continued to manage the studio and sell his photographs in Ceylon until at least 1876.²¹

The Jermyn Folio has no visible markings or signings by Lawton, unlike the images in the Princeton Album and V&A Collection, which prints show the name 'Lawton'.²² Perhaps for the collector of these images, the photographer's identification was not material. Rather, his focus may have been on the images which reflected personal experience, aesthetic preference and memory.

The titling of this album *Views of Ceylon*, would have likely been done through Lawton's studio and indicates not only familiar association but also standard title classification, as studios often offered leather-bound albums that would then be printed on order with a selected title.²³

These images, as *Views of Ceylon*, would have been intended to introduce to the uninformed viewer impressions of Ceylon, though the extent to which they did, in fact, do so is pure conjecture.²⁴ The image content was in line with colonial photographic efforts to capture picturesque views much desired by British buyers,²⁵ and perhaps

¹⁸Raheem and Colin-Thomé 22-23.

¹⁹Falconer 22.

²⁰'Proceedings, 1872,' *The Journal of the Ceylon Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain & Ireland*, 1872, xix-xx.

²¹Joachim K. Bautze, 'The Photographic Studios in Landscapes of Sri Lanka – Early Photography in Ceylon / Die Foto-Ateliers in Landscapes of Sri Lanka – Frühe Fotografie in Ceylon,' *Landscapes of Sri Lanka. Early Photography in Ceylon / Frühe Fotografie in Ceylon*, edited by Raffael Dedo Gadebusch (Museum für Asiatische Kunst, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, 2013) 23.

²²Princeton Album has embossed in gold lettering on the cover, 'Lawton, Views of Ceylon.' Compare also V&A Lawton Collection, photographs from the special commission by the Ceylon Archeological Committee. Those photographs show 'LAWTON' scraped in the right corner of each image.

²³*Views of 'place'* was a common title.

²⁴Commercial Studio categories included Portraiture; Ethnographic Studies; Agricultural and Plantation Views; Railway Views; Royal Visits; Archaeological Views, and Buried Cities.

²⁵James R. Ryan, *Picturing Empire, Photography and the Visualization of the British Empire* (The U of Chicago P, 1997) 46.



Temple of the Tooth, Kandy 2010.75.43.35.



Hindu Temple 2010.75.43.26.

also to entice travel to, mission work, and stay in such an idyllic colony.²⁶ Such images, with their relative period novelty, would have been powerful influencers of the perception of this otherwise unfamiliar isle.²⁷ Furthermore, we can assume that Bishop Jermyn's likely status as an 'influencer' (derived from his social and religious positions, lineage and access to decision-makers) would have empowered these images further as definitive depictions of Ceylon, following the narratives that he may have shared to entice further missionary work, travel, investment and commitment to the Empire in Ceylon.

The selection—and if not by him, then the maintenance—of these particular images by Bishop Jermyn not only likely reflects his personal journey to and memory of the sites but arguably also a larger commitment to the Empire's power over land and religion.²⁸ Further still, the idealised images of lush landscapes with their Edenic sensibility²⁹ soothe and belie the challenges of climate and illness that many a colonial succumbed to, including, ironically, both collector Bishop Jermyn and creator Joseph Lawton.³⁰ Nowhere here do we find Lawton's iconic archaeological images, perhaps indicating this collector's preference for natural landscapes and living institutions rather than impressions of 'perpetual antiquity' often associated with the imaging of Victorian Ceylon.³¹

If this Collection started with the first 26 photographs as the *Liste* suggests, then it is plausible that additions were made in groupings and stages by Bishop Jermyn during his four-year sojourn in Ceylon (during which time Lawton's studio would have been in operation). As the photographs are not unique, they are likely from the studio's commercial inventory rather than by special commission. It is in the later group of images that we find the Christ Church Cathedral, the Bishop's headquarters in Ceylon. Notably, there are also four perspectives of the main Buddhist temple (the Kandyan Temple of the Tooth), as compared to the single image of the Hindu temple, and the absence of mosques altogether, arguably indicating a subtle emphasis on the Buddhist and Hindu populace as more amenable to Christian conversion and/or architectural admiration for these particular structures.

Captured with an upward angle, accentuating the height and stature of the cathedral tower with its thick

²⁶C. F. Gordon Cumming, *Two Happy Years in Ceylon* (Chatto & Windus, 1901) Foreword.

²⁷Pinney, 'Foreword' x.

²⁸Falconer II.

²⁹Vindhiya Bhuthpitiya, 'Paradise' in *Missing Pictures: A Brief and Incomplete History of Sri Lankan Photography*, *History Workshop*, 15 July 2019, 2.

³⁰Lawton around 1872, and Jermyn in 1875. *Beven and Martensz* 42.

³¹Annamaria Motrescu-Mayes, 'Perpetual Antiquity in Early Photographs of Ceylon,' *Visual Histories of South Asia*, edited by Annamaria Motrescu-Mayes and Marcus Banks (Primus Books, 2018) 93-123.



Christ Church Cathedral 2010.75.43.33.



Waterfalls 2010.75.43.30.

boundary walls and solid foundations, this image reflects stability, the desired message of Christianity that the Bishop might have wanted to share through this image inclusion. The cathedral, surrounded by tropical foliage, shows architectural resemblance to many a town church in England of that time (and now), hinting at anglicised civilisation and communion.

The last page of albumen photographs in the Jermyn Album tapers into mediocrity, both in image quality and presentation, showing in two images what appear to be coffee plantation clearings. Given this variance in quality, size, content and presentation, these prints are unlikely to be by Lawton, appearing in the Collection as a later addition, showing cleared and broken tree areas, notably at odds with the picturesque displayed earlier. The inclusion of these images makes sense, given the concentration of chaplaincies that Bishop Jermyn established in coffee districts.

A vignette of the tropical flower *Stephanotis floribunda*³² signed faintly in pencil, 'C. Symons 1873,' is pasted at the front of the photographic collection. The image loosely connects to a theme of tropical flora. Dated 1873, we might initially assume that C. Symons was a guest of the Jermyns in Ceylon, but records show that amateur photographer, Charles Edward Hood Symms, was a Royal Artillery Officer (as per the British Army List). He was stationed in Trincomalee in the 1860s.³³ Thus, though he may not have visited the Jermyns in Ceylon, he may well have been personally known to the Jermyns, as indicated through the inclusion of this image in such prominent placement.

3.2 The Drawing and Photographs of Illustrations

The Collection features a loose, original drawing signed 'C.F.G.C.' (Constance Frederica Gordon Cumming), which has been confirmed to be the original for one illustration from her publication, *Two Happy Years in Ceylon*. Also pasted on one album page are four poor-quality photographs, identified now as four illustrations from the same publication.³⁴ We can only speculate how the original came to be included, whether gifted by Gordon Cumming, selected by Jermyn or entering the Collection in another way.

Gordon Cumming was an unconventional period persona. An ardent traveller, recognised artist and writer, she visited Ceylon from 1872–1873 at the invitation of the Jermyns. This trip marked her first journey out of

³²Also known as Madagascar Jasmine, found in tropical climates of South Asia and South East Asia.

³³Discussion with John Falconer, 21 January 2022.

³⁴C. F. Gordon Cumming, *Two Happy Years in Ceylon*, vol. 1 (W. Blackwood / Sons, 1892); C. F. Gordon Cumming, *Two Happy Years in Ceylon*, vol. 2 (Charles Scribner's Sons, 1892); *Two Happy Years in Ceylon* [1901].



Avenue of Indian Rubber Trees, *Ficus Elastica* at Peradeniya, Ceylon.
C.F.G.C. 2010.75.43.53 (mounted)-O [loose painting].³⁹

Scotland and started with stays in India, then Malta, and then Ceylon.³⁵

She published *Two Happy Years in Ceylon* documenting her extensive travels with the Bishop and his daughter around Ceylon. Gordon Cumming aimed to share remote parts of the world for the benefit of people who were never likely to see such places for themselves. 'In this, she offered reassurance as well as instruction and diversion,' using the picturesque as propaganda to entice the reader to turn traveller.³⁶ The fact that three editions were published between 1892–1901 indicates a strong market for the publication, with rave reviews declaring it to be 'by far the most valuable account of Ceylon.'³⁷ The 1901 edition combines the contents of the earlier two volumes with additional data points on commerce.³⁸

This artwork exemplifies 'clear intentionality of purpose,'⁴⁰ through her painter's hand by which she emphasises the botanical significance and exotic appearance, recreating this 'magnificent avenue of the old india-rubber trees.'⁴¹ The image serves to show more than 'prized beauty,'⁴² but informs the reader, through her writing, of the commercial viability of the rubbery sap of the *Ficus elastica* and related genus, the Pará rubber tree, because the 'ever-increasing demand ... would certainly be satisfactory if their cultivation in a British colony can be made to pay.'⁴³

She omits an explanation of the relationship between the *Ficus elastica* and its grand relative *Ficus religiosa* (also known as the 'Bodhi tree'), which has seminal religious significance for Buddhists and Hindus as the tree of enlightenment, under the shelter of which the Buddha is believed to have attained enlightenment. In Gordon Cumming's publication and in the Collection, interest at first reading and glance is only in the aesthetics of the species. Extended cultural context or local meaning is offered only through implication through inclusion.

³⁵Hugh Laracy, *Watriama and Co: Further Pacific Islands Portraits* (ANU P, 2013) 69-91.

³⁶Laracy 85.

³⁷Gordon Cumming, *Two Happy Years in Ceylon [1901]*.

³⁸Gordon Cumming, *Two Happy Years in Ceylon [1901]*.

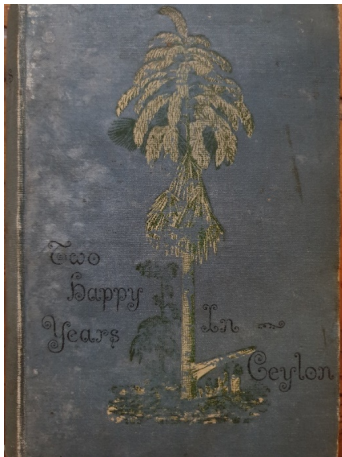
³⁹Gordon Cumming, *Two Happy Years in Ceylon [vol. 1, 1892]*.

⁴⁰Christopher Pinney, *The Coming of Photography in India* (The British Library, 2008) 2-3.

⁴¹Gordon Cumming, *Two Happy Years in Ceylon [1901]* 187.

⁴²Gordon Cumming, *Two Happy Years in Ceylon [1901]* 187.

⁴³Gordon Cumming, *Two Happy Years in Ceylon [1901]* 188.



Cover of *Two Happy Years in Ceylon*.
Talipot Palm in Blossom (Author's Collection).



Talipot Palm, 2010.75.43.37.

Interestingly, Gordon Cumming did not use photography to illustrate any of the editions, most likely because these publications served to promote her own artistry. The photographs of her illustrations in the Jermyn Folio are amateurish in capture and casual in presentation, but they serve as a record of shared memory of a favoured four from a total of 28 illustrations in that publication.

The initial anonymity of the illustration photographs, lacking reference to a source, indicates that their inclusion and relevance were for personal appreciation rather than for any official record. It would appear that these images were also meant to be explained through personal encounters, otherwise offering little guidance on their relevance. We can imagine Bishop Jermyn or his daughter leafing through the album during a quiet afternoon, reminiscing about their experiences in Ceylon, with such memories accessible to others through their retelling, and now with that source lost, with the helpful vein of Gordon Cumming's publication.

Given the placement of the illustrations in this collection, it is only natural to ask: what might the points of intersection have been between the Lawton photographs and Gordon Cumming's eye? What veins of influence from his images might have touched her views? How does her work intersect with his photographs? Could she have participated in their selection? Did she peruse the Album contents to find inspiration for her own painterly capture? Though these ideas are speculation, there certainly are visual similarities between her illustrations and Lawton's photographs, all being of nature or structures, and most notably of the towering gold embossed talipot palm that decorates the cover of *Two Happy Years in Ceylon*.

Lawton's photographs, too, like Gordon Cumming's illustrations, convey impressions of a fertile, lush colony, with extended horizons and tropical breezes, imagining glorious dawns and sunsets over the misted mountain ranges shown. These sensibilities are aptly reflected in the excerpt from the poem quoted in her publication, which is an excerpt from *The Voyage Of Maeldune* by Alfred Lord Tennyson, unapologetically appropriated by her and retitled *Ceylon*:

And we came to the isle of Flowers;
Their breath met us out in the seas,
For the Spring and the Middle Summer
Sat each on the lap of the breeze.⁴⁴

⁴⁴Gordon Cumming, *Two Happy Years in Ceylon* [vol. 1, 1892].



Portrait. Man wearing a turban, carte. Loose.

3.2.1 Views of Ceylon—The Anomaly

At first glance, reviewing the album pages, a viewer would be justified in concluding that Ceylon is a beautiful but abandoned isle devoid of human habitation, with religious sites left as trace evidence of civilization. Nowhere in the album do we meet living souls (save in nondescript miniature to indicate scale or by error).

Had the collector so wanted, he could have inserted local identities easily onto the album's empty pages, selecting from commercial studio stocks of '*Ethnographic Studies*' or '*Native Types*', or specific studio portraits.⁴⁵ The absence of personal images offers another perspective on this collecting exercise. Perhaps these images, free of people, simply showed the distance between man and environment and spoke more easily to God's land. Perhaps he just wanted to maintain the content within the literal classification of '*Views of Ceylon*'. The absence of people might also make it easier for viewers to imagine themselves in the image.

Hence the exaggerated and misleading single image of a man placed loosely between the Album pages—the anomaly. Who was this man dressed in foreign garb? Was he a friend from Ceylon? Was he a typical Ceylonese of that period? It turns out to be neither. This most 'human' image is, in fact, an impersonal commercial carte, printed in multiple, with the same carte in the collection of the Rijksmuseum, Netherlands. Museum records describe it as a 'studio portrait of a man wearing a turban, carte' from Singapore, circa late 19th/early 20th century.⁴⁶

The significance of this carte then lies in the fact that it is from Malaya (of which Singapore was a part prior to 1965). Through this object, we find the only trace of L.A.S. Jermyn's contribution to the Collection, his only imprint other than his signing. We can only speculate as to why this loose addition was made. Perhaps the image spoke to him of Malaya? Perhaps the portrait reminded him of a friend? Whatever the reason, this lone, well-preserved carte, provides a distinctive presence with a transfixed gaze of encounter and disrupts an otherwise faceless engagement with the Collection. Here for the first and only time, we see someone looking back at us—someone not from Ceylon.

⁴⁵Raheem and Colin-Thomé 44.

⁴⁶Unknown, 'August Sachtler Collection. Studio Portrait of a Man Wearing a Turban, Singapore circa 1870–1900. Carte de Visite. Object No: RP-F-00-5225 LL/76427,' Sachtler in fact operated in the 1860s and thus, it is unlikely that this image was from L.A.S. Jermyn's lifetime or that the subject was personally known to him.

4 Conclusion

The best exhibitions and collections tell strong human stories that we might not otherwise know. This Collection reveals numerous, magically interwoven human stories to reflect a variety of *veins of influence*. The Collection, when seen as a collection also of choices, reveals individual and overlapping influences, and demands to be shared and celebrated.

What can the photographs themselves tell us? As a superimposition of reality and of the past, it is true that the camera cannot censor what it captures.⁴⁷ In this sense, the photographs are an objective representation of what is shown within the frames. However, the collector's act of selection and editing introduces a critical and subjective curation of what appears as the '*Views of Ceylon*.' Furthermore, the images informed by the writings of Gordon Cummings provide fresh perspectives and narratives. The travel writing brings added information, in the absence of express guidance by the long-gone owners.

At the time of its development in the late 19th century, the Collection could have arguably been a quality 'influencer' primarily because of Bishop Hugh Jermyn's status, the relative novelty of images of Ceylon and unfamiliarity with the colony. Thus, the Collection could have provided a significant *vein of influence* for the imaging of Ceylon to a wider gaze.

Of key significance is that the collecting exercise can be confidently attributed to a collector who had personal engagement with the images shown. It is reasonable to say that the Collection was very personal, not only because it was passed through the family for generations (rather than being given earlier to the public domain, such as church archives) but also based on the addition and arrangement of newer content.

Nearly 150 years have passed since Bishop Hugh Jermyn's stay in Ceylon. The Lawton photographs would be at least that old and remain well preserved away from the harsh, tropical environments that their origins would have offered. With unfolding veins leading to important attributions to key church figure Bishop Hugh Jermyn, seminal photographer Joseph Lawton, and renowned Victorian artist and writer Constance Frederica Gordon Cumming, the Collection provides a rich resource for continued inter-disciplinary research. A collection that appears to have been private, kept in the family until its serendipitous giving to Oxford University, can now reveal and fully realise its own continuing *vein of influence*.

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5 Images

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