

THE CEYLON PERFIN WITH A 'NATIVE' SCRIPT

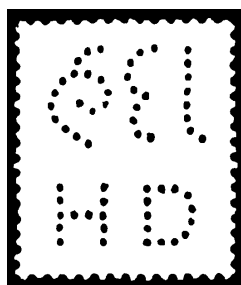
Roy Gault

Two collectors, *Jeff Turnbull* and *William Hall*, responded to the 'Harrisons & Crosfield' article in B445 (August 2023), in essence providing the 'Proof' that it was indeed 'Harrisons & Crosfield Ltd' who had used the "H&C/L^d" Perfin (Ellis H3, and Turnbull H5). This is one of William's 'Tea Sample Labels', all dating to 1909, clearly showing that the new company was using up old stationery.



In a follow-up e-Mail, William volunteered the information that '*the native script/HD has puzzled me for 40 years. I haven't matched the local script to any languages from India or Ceylon that I've found on the internet*'. I have to say that I've also tried and failed as well!

William went on to say that *looking at the 1921 (Ferguson) trade directory, I can give you a name to look into - Hassenally Davoodbhoy - see attached. I've also included scans of the 13 copies of this Perfin in my collection which are all KGV except one KEVII 2c from the 1910-11 issue. One stamp has a Pettah postmark, which is the market/trading suburb of Colombo, so we can assume the user was a trader of some sort.*



William also quoted from Albert Ellis's lists for the "Script/HD" die (Ellis H4, Turnbull H7) that '*it has just one example, a 1904-05 3c stamp. Ellis did say that this Perfin has 3 native characters for the first line. Thought to be the Hindi equivalent of HD, unique as such to Ceylon Perfins*'.

I accepted William's challenge, and set about following his *Hassenally Davoodbhoy* line of enquiry ...

First stop was the 1920-21 Ferguson Ceylon Directory on the Internet, all 1,256 pages of it! Fortunately, the list of Merchants etc., starts at page 821, and *Hassenally Davoodbhoy*, General Merchant and Commission Agent, N^o. 44 4th Cross St, Pettah (P.O. Box 201), Colombo is listed on page 920 under the H's. I can confirm that this was the *only fit* to the initials "HD" in the 'Merchants' section which ends on page 1053 with a Storekeeper called A S Zoysa. Applying the same technique to other Ferguson Ceylon directories the following chronology was readily established. Note that the earlier form of the name had become concatenated, in part at least, after c1910.

- 1893 No mention under 'Bombay Merchants' or indeed anywhere, of Hassen Ally Davood Bhoy.
- 1898-99 'Hassen Ally Davood Bhoy', Bombay Merchant, 44 4th Cross St, Pettah.
- 1905-06 'Hassen Ally Davood Bhoy', Bombay Merchant, 44 4th Cross St, Pettah.
- 1909-10 'Hassen Ally Davood Bhoy', Bombay Merchant, 44 4th Cross St, Pettah.
- 1916 Litigation: Rahim v Davoodbhoy - regarding a shipment of slate pencils.
- 1917 Hassenally Davoodbhoy, 44 4th Cross Street, Pettah. Also Gollam Hassen Hassenally, 44 4th Cross Street, Pettah.
- 1925 Hassenally Davoodbhoy, General Merchants & Commission Agent, 44 4th Cross Street, Pettah. Mrs Hassenally Davoodbhoy at same address.
- 1937 Hassenally Davoodbhoy, Citronella Oil Dealer, 44 4th Cross Street, Pettah.
{'Citronella Oil is the essence of Lemon Grass used in the Soap, Candle, and Perfume industries}.
- 1953 Hassenally Davoodbhoy, Citronella Oil Dealer, 44 4th Cross Street, Pettah.
- 1955 No mention anywhere of Hassenally Davoodbhoy.

So we can see that the company was in business in Ceylon for almost sixty years, 1895-1954, and always at the same address ...

N^o. 44 4th Cross St, Pettah, Colombo.

Turning our attention to the ‘Script’ itself, I tried a simple ‘Google’ translation of “**HD**” and came up with this ...



Ellis had suggested it was ‘Hindi’, but there are no horizontal lines in the script, so it’s not likely to be ‘Hindi’, and probably not ‘Punjabi’ either for the same reason, but ‘*Gujarati*’ looks more promising.

The Internet is all powerful, and depending on the specific search string used, all sorts of goodies can be thrown up, one of which pointed to a tome called ‘*Twentieth Century Impression of Ceylon*’, by Arnold Wright, 1907, with a number of later editions. In it are chronicled, amongst other things, ‘notable’ figures. This is an extract from a 1999 edition, showing a potted history of the man himself and his offices, which we know were at *N^o. 44 4th Cross Street, Pettah*.



HASSENALLY DAWOODBHOY AND OFFICE.

Rather than show the ‘potted history’ as printed, which is difficult to read, I’ve transcribed it here.

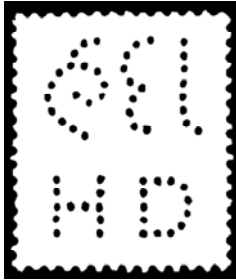
HASSENALLY DAWOODBHOY (note the ‘W’ instead of ‘V’).

*Mr Hassenally Dawoodbhoy, whose head office is at N^o. 44 4th Cross Street, Pettah, Colombo - with a branch in Bombay - is a wholesale merchant and commission agent, dealing in various classes of English and foreign commodities, such as piece-goods, stationery, cutlery, haberdashery, jewellery, perfumery, hosiery, glassware, hardware, clocks, watches, umbrellas, soaps, playing-cards, musical instruments, oilmen’s stores, iron safes, toys, carriage bells and lamps, harness, and Japanese goods. He is a native of Morvi, a first-class State in **Kathiawar, India**. Like all other Indian merchants in Colombo, he first started business in Ceylon on a small scale. Owing to his ability, insight, and perseverance in his line of business during the **twenty years** it has been established in Colombo, he has succeeded in converting a small business into a large and flourishing one. He has agencies in London and Paris, Milan, and Solingen; also in Japan. Mr Dawoodbhoy accepts agencies for the sale of manufactured goods, and invites correspondence in connection with that line of business.*

There’s a lot to take in here - first off he’s been in business for twenty years, so the entry (and photographs) probably date to c1915. And secondly, and more importantly, is where he came from - the Kathiawar peninsular, which is in the state of Gujarat, India.



And so we now have a direct link between the merchant who may well have used the Perfin “**Script/HD**” in Ceylon, and the language the ‘Script’ was probably written in - ‘Gujarati’. All that’s left to do is translate it! Again, using the power of the Internet, it would seem to be a phonetic version in ‘Gujarati’ whereby the script probably symbolises Ha(senally) Da(voodbhoy), i.e. “**HD**”, Albert Ellis’s original suggestion, but in ‘Gujarati’ not ‘Hindi’.



By way of an ‘independent’ reference, we see here the first script letter in this Gujarati edition of a Book called ‘Highway’.



In passing, the ‘Telegraphic Address’ of the company was “**Hassenjee**” which translates as ‘Have a laugh’!

We can’t finish without showing a selection of stamps from *William Hall’s* Ceylon Perfin collection, so feast your eyes on these!

1904-1905 KEVII Issues Wmk *Multiple Crown CA*, issued from 13th September 1904.
3c green (issued 17th November 1904), listed by Albert Ellis but *not confirmed*.

1910-1911 New denominations, design and colour changes, issued from 1st August 1910.



2c brown-orange (issued 20th May 1911).

1912-1925 KGV Issues Wmk *Multiple Crown CA*, issued from 1912. These have not been split into ‘single’ plates, and ‘key and duty’ plates.



Issued 1919

MY 7/17

(P)ETTAH

1c (issued 1919), 2c, 3c (two shades), and 6c.
The 10c and 12c denominations have also been reported

1918-1919 KGV ‘WAR STAMP’ Issue Wmk *Multiple Crown CA*, from 18th Nov 1918.



1921-1932 KGV stamps with *Multiple Script CA* watermark (issued from 3rd August 1921).



JA 22/24

DE 24/25

6c (bright violet issued 1922), 10c, and 12c.

In conclusion, the user of “Script/HD”, in use **1911-1925**, is highly likely to have been ‘*Hassenally Davoodbhoy*’, General Merchant and Commission Agent, operating 1895-1954 from N^o. 44 4th Cross Street, Pettah, Colombo. **William’s 40 year wait wasn’t in vain!**