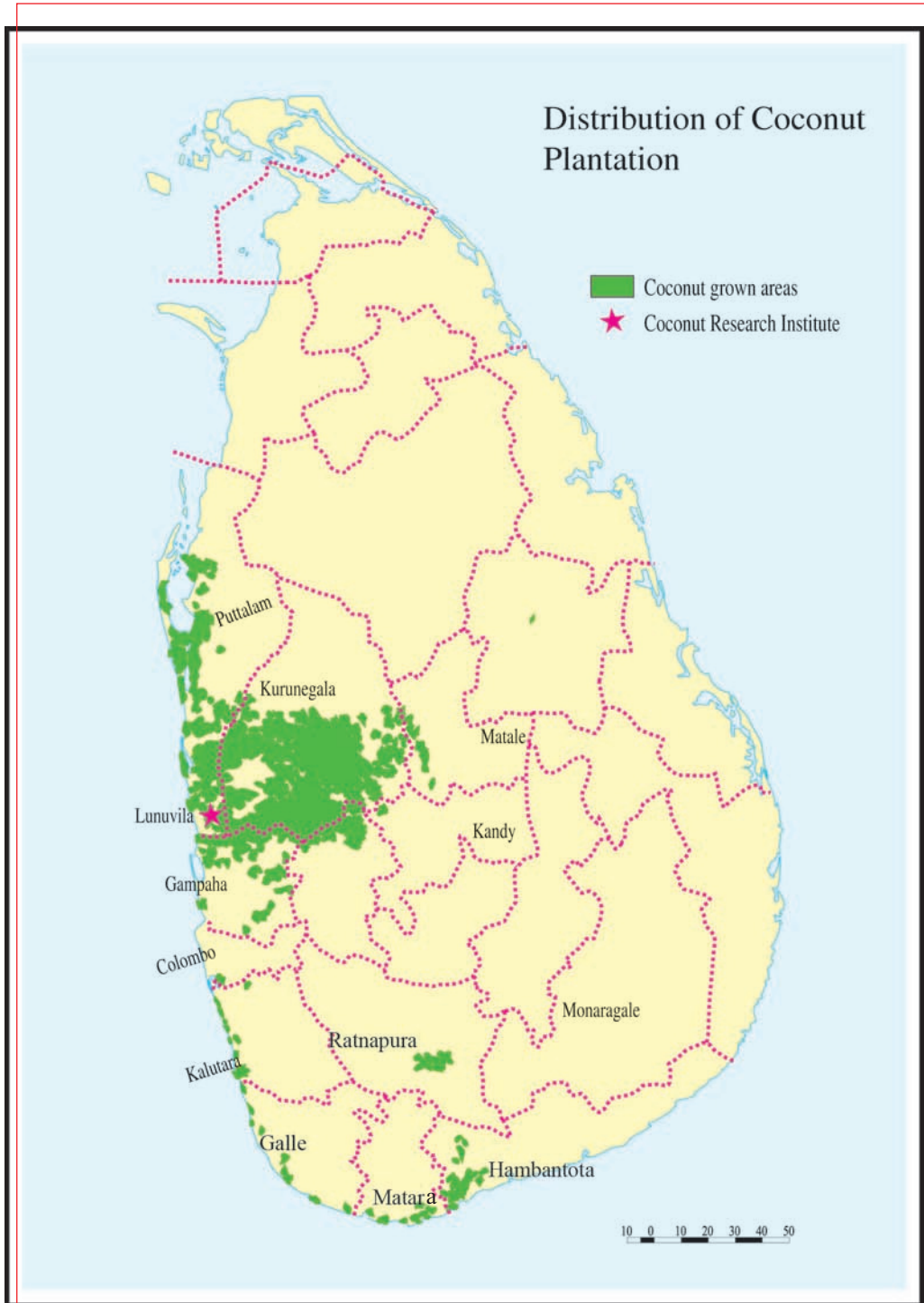


## Expansion of Coconut Plantation

Coconut was another plantation crop that developed under the British rule during 19<sup>th</sup> century. Cultivation of coconuts had been prevalent in Sri Lanka from olden times, and the Dutch seemed to have been interested in cultivating coconuts on a plantation scale during their time. Fresh coconuts, poonac, desiccated coconuts, copra, coconut fibre coir rope etc. comprised the main important export products during this period. The export of these products began from about the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.



**Figure 2.5 A Coconut Estate**



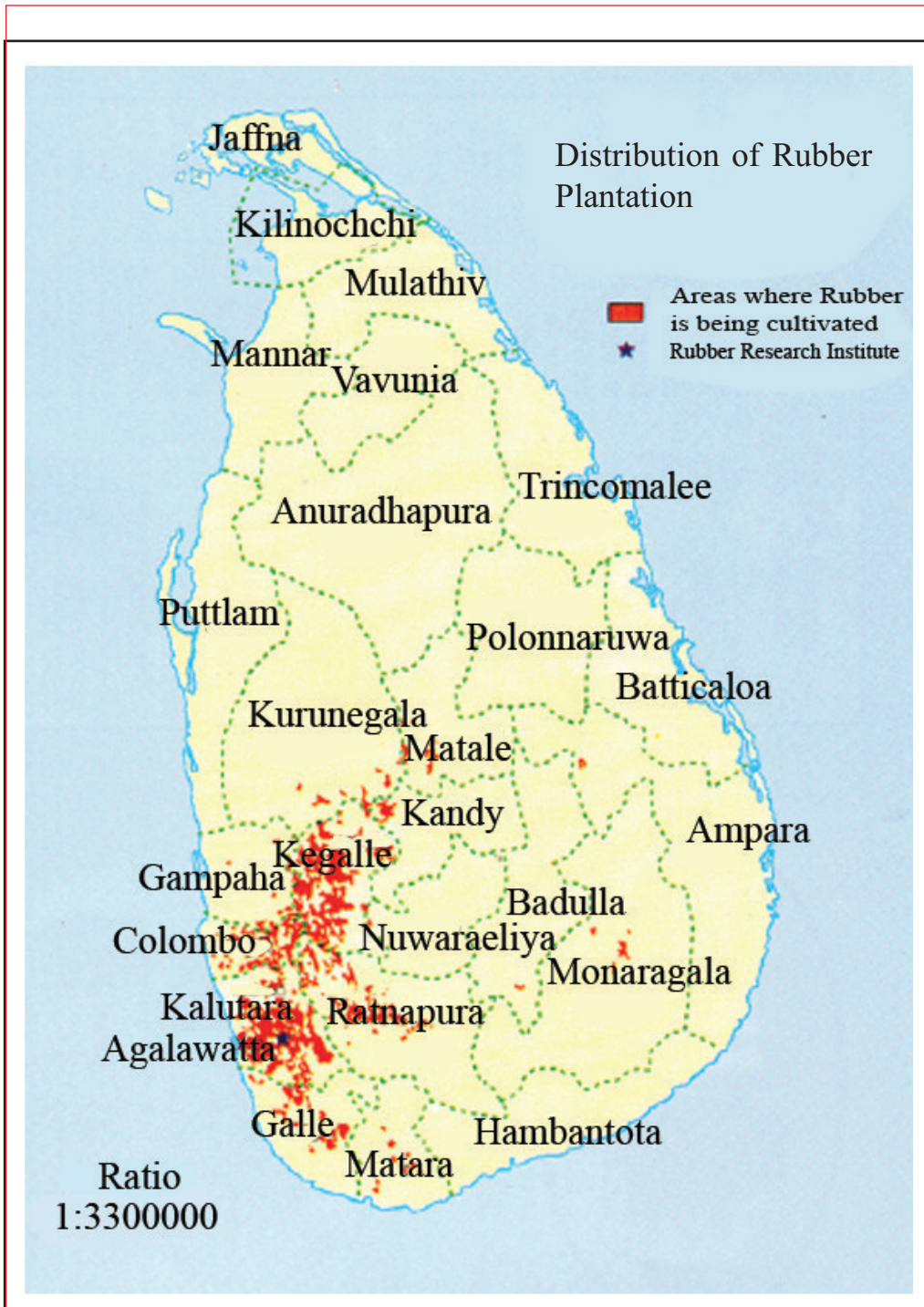
**Map 2.2**

Although the Europeans were interested in tea and rubber plantations, they did not display the same interest towards coconuts. Since they were reluctant to invest in coconuts, right from the start coconut plantations remained in the hands of the natives. Although coconut cultivation was essentially a native enterprise, export of coconut products was completely in the hands of European commercial companies. By 1910, coconut plantations covered an extent of about 850,000 acres. By 1920 about 27% of export earnings were accounted for by coconuts. About 50% of the coconuts produced were used for local consumption and the balance was exported. With the expansion of the coconut plantation industry, a research station was established at Lunuwila for the purpose of developing the coconut sector and conducting research into coconut based products.

### Expansion of the Rubber Plantation in Sri Lanka.

Rubber was another economic crop introduced by the British towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. After the decline of coffee, tea came to occupy its place in the central mountain areas while the cultivation of rubber was started in districts such as Kalutara, Kegalle, Ratnapura etc.

It was in the 1870's that the cultivation of rubber as a commercial crop was started. Use of rubber began to increase with the growth of the automobile industry. By 1913, there were about 220,000 acres under rubber in Sri Lanka.



Map 2.3

### **Causes that Led to the Expansion of Rubber Plantations.**

- \* Increase in the price of rubber during the first world war.
- \* Large scale purchase of rubber from this country by America.
- \* Expansion of the automobile industry in U.S.A. and U.K.

The world economic depression of 1929 affected Sri Lanka also, as a result of which rubber prices underwent a decline.

As seen above, by this time, an economy based on commercial plantations had come to be established in the country.

### **Student Activities**

- \* Mark the tea, rubber and coconut growing areas on a map of Sri Lanka.
- \* Prepare a table showing the causes that led to the opening of coffee, tea, coconut and rubber plantations.

### **Subsistent Agriculture**

From very early times, agriculture was the main livelihood of the people of Sri Lanka. By about the 13<sup>th</sup> century, with the breakdown of the hydraulic civilization of the dry zone, people had begun to drift to the wet zone of the south west. Because of the ample rainfall that prevails in this area, extensive irrigation schemes were not quite necessary for agricultural activities.

Export trade based on products such as pearls, gems, ivory and spices began to expand. Therefore, priority given to agriculture and irrigation in the earlier periods gradually underwent a decline. There were other products such as jak and various yams that could be substituted for rice. Accordingly, rice began to lose its position as the main source of income of the kings and the livelihood of the people. Paddy cultivation underwent a further decline during the Portuguese period.

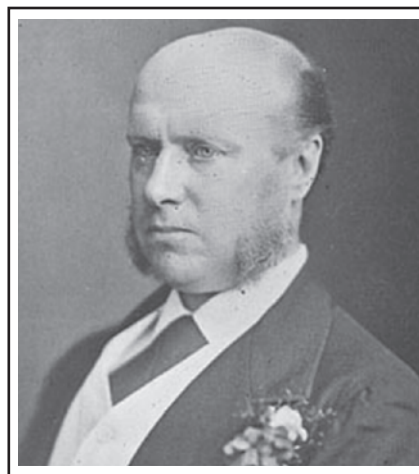
Attempts made by the Dutch to revive agriculture by the rehabilitation of irrigation systems and import of slave labour from India also ended in failure. Just like during the Dutch period, under the British control of the maritime provinces there was no significant improvement in agriculture.

Since the British government was mainly interested in the development of plantations, they had neither the time nor the inclination to improve subsistent agriculture. However, the early governors such as North and Maitland attempted to improve paddy cultivation by the restoration of irrigation schemes. These attempts were not very successful.

Abolition of the compulsory service Rajakariya system on the recommendations of Colebrooke dealt a serious blow to indigenous agriculture. Small irrigation schemes needed for the agricultural activities of the people were repaired and maintained through the Rajakariya system, the abolition of which virtually destroyed the very foundation of paddy cultivation.

After the implementation of Colebrooke recommendations, plantation industry witnessed an extremely rapid growth, and it received a massive support from the government. However, the government did not provide any assistance to the system of subsistent agriculture that provided the livelihood of the majority of the population. The support given to the planters in fact adversely affected the peasantry in an indirect way. The government promulgated the Waste Lands Ordinance, Act no. 12 of 1840. It made possible to confiscate all lands for which legally acceptable evidence could not be produced to confirm that a particular piece of land had been utilised by a person for a continuous period of at least 30 years. Virtually no one had any documentary evidence to prove that he had held a particular piece of land that long. Therefore, laws were passed to make it possible for the planters to buy these confiscated land at very low prices. Deprivation of these lands had disastrous effects on the livelihood of the peasantry.

Most of the plantations were opened in the mountain areas. Clearing of these lands resulted in the drying up of natural springs and the destruction of farms located at lower levels. Because of the neglect of subsistent agriculture by the British, rural population was impoverished. New economic and political changes that resulted from the development of plantations produced very serious adverse effects on the life of peasants. It is this oppressed peasantry that became the main driving force behind the second liberation movement.



**Figure 2.6 Hercules Robinson**

An investigation conducted after the uprising of 1848 established the fact that the policies followed by the British during the early part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century had led to a decline in peasant agriculture. Persons who inquired into the reasons for the popular uprising of 1848 had stated that to a large extent, it was caused by the oppression faced by the peasantry. The officer in charge of the Uva province, Baily, Colonial Secretary Sir Emerson Tenenet, Major Skinner and others like them pointed out that the government's lethargic attitude towards agriculture resulted in a situation leading to the destruction of the ancient irrigation system and the depopulation of the dry zone. Therefore, the governors who came to the country after 1850 began to take an interest in the development of peasant agriculture.



**Figure 2.7 Henry Ward**

The following British Governors took steps to repair irrigation schemes and improve agriculture.

- \* Henry Ward, British Governor of Sri Lanka 1855-1860 repaired Irakkamam and Amparai tanks in the Eastern province, Kirama and Urubokka tanks in the southern province and several small tanks and channels in Matale and Uva areas.
- \* Hercules Robinson in 1866 repaired the tank at Tissamaharama.
- \* William Gregory in 1872. repaired the Kantalai tank and a portion of the Yoda Ela constructed by king Dhatusena to carry water from the Kala Wewa to Anuradhapura.
- \* Governor Gordon 1883-1890 repaired Kala Wewa and he also carried out repairs to several small irrigation channels in Uva and Sabaragamuwa.
- \* In 1896, West Ridgeway repaired Yoda Wewa and the Nacchaduwa tank in the northern and north central provinces respectively.
- \* Henry Arthur Blake repaired the Nuwara Wewa while Mac Culum renovated the Minipe canal.

In 1900, Governor West Ridgeway established the Irrigation Department for the purpose of improving irrigation. He appointed persons with wide knowledge about irrigation and took steps to improve the existing systems and to start new schemes.

Due to the efforts made by these governors, the system of peasant agriculture that had undergone a decline since the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century could be improved to some extent. Governors such as Gregory took steps to improve the living conditions of the peasantry. Through the abolition of the grain tax, governor Arthur Havelock also provided relief to the rural population.



**Figure 2.8 William Gregory**

Co-operative Credit Societies were established in 1911 with the objective of providing credit facilities at low rates of interest to the peasantry. The establishment of 300 societies within 15 years shows the extent to which this movement was successful. These societies rendered a valuable service to the peasants of Sri Lanka. Since the welfare of the rural population was not a part of the accepted policy of the government, some governors were not concerned with these steps. Therefore, the services of these governors who looked into the welfare of the rural population must be highly appreciated.

### **Student Activities**

- \* Conduct a discussion about the service rendered by British governors for the upliftment of rural agriculture.
- \* In your view, in what adverse manner did the results of the establishment of plantations and the neglect of peasant agriculture affect the Sri Lankan society?



### **Modernisation and Westernisation**

- ❖ The culture of Sri Lanka that had developed for over 20 centuries on a national pattern underwent a complete change during the British rule.
- ❖ The objective of the British was to restructure the economic system of the country to meet the needs of the imperialists, and to earn profits through the production of goods demanded by European nations.
- ❖ While all spheres of the activities of the country were shaped in a way that enabled foreigners to acquire the resources of the country and to produce what they needed through the investment of their capital, the indigenous people had no option except to play the role of obedient servants.
- ❖ Nevertheless, on occasions such as 1818 and 1848, the patriots attempted to chase the rulers away through a fierce struggle. Yet they ended in failure.
- ❖ Therefore, Sri Lanka came to be rapidly westernised from about the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The English rulers hoped to establish a capitalistic type of economy in this country, and towards that end imported from abroad both a capitalistic class as well as a working class. This capitalistic economy began to expand gradually leading to the growth of private enterprise within its framework. A western oriented culture came to the forefront in this country subjugating political, social, economic, cultural and all other aspects that the nation had inherited from the past. This new system came to include within it two new outstanding major elements, namely, the middle class and the working class.

### **Growth of the Middle Class**

The middle class of Sri Lanka originated on the basis of two attributes:

- \* Wealth
- \* Education

It is the reforms based on Colebrooke's recommendations that created an atmosphere enabling the people of this country to acquire the above two qualifications.