



# The Rothschild Archive



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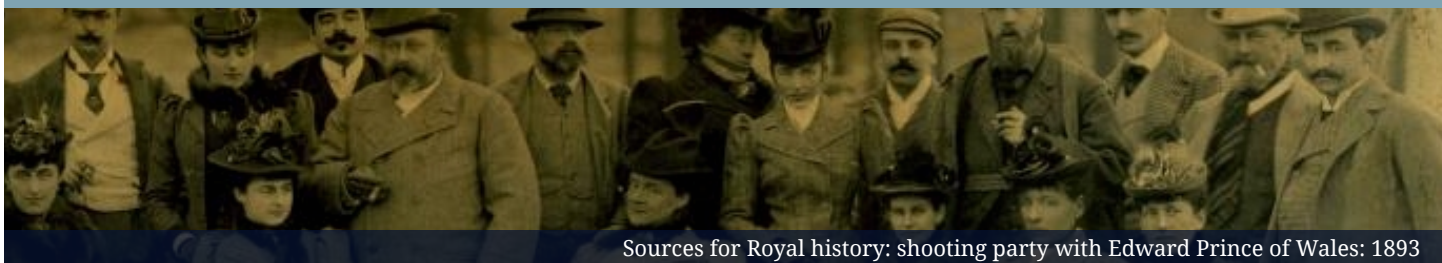
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## 'Rothschild' tea and coffee

The Rothschild wine businesses are well-known, but visitors to Sri Lanka may be intrigued to see signs to the Rothschild Tea Plantation. The business was established in the 1840s by the Worms brothers, Rothschild cousins.

The Worms brothers, Gabriel (1801-1888) and Moritz (1805-1867) were the sons of Jeanette Rothschild (1771-1859), the sister of Nathan Mayer Rothschild (1777-1836), founder of the London Rothschild bank. Jeanette married Benedict Moses Worms (1772-1824) in 1795, and the family lived in Frankfurt.

In his early twenties, Moritz (later anglicised to Maurice) Worms moved to London and rapidly became a successful member of the London Stock Exchange. His brother Gabriel (and a third brother, Solomon Benedict) were later to follow him. They were no doubt helped by their uncle, Nathan Mayer Rothschild, who, by the early 1820s, was already perhaps the most important figure on the London banking scene.

London life eventually became tiresome for Maurice and in 1841 he set off on a world tour, visiting India, China, Singapore, Manilla. During the course of his tour, he wrote a number of letters to his Rothschild cousins back in London, describing the countries and the business prospects he encountered along the way. Surviving letters in The Rothschild Archive from Madras (now Chennai), Colombo and Manila chart his route and provide vivid impressions of landscape and people.

### **The coffee and tea business**

In February 1841, Maurice settled in Ceylon, bought forest land in Pusselawa, and sent for his brother Gabriel. Maurice initially took up coffee planting as an occupation. He accordingly bought a considerable extent of forest-land in Pusellawa and other districts and gradually established the celebrated 'Rothschild' coffee estate. Maurice bought tea cuttings from China and formed a small garden at Condegalle, Pussellawa in September 1841. In 1842 The firm of G and M B Worms was established, with Gabriel managing the Grandpass Mills (coffee mills) and the shipping business and Maurice working with tea and coffee at Rothschild.

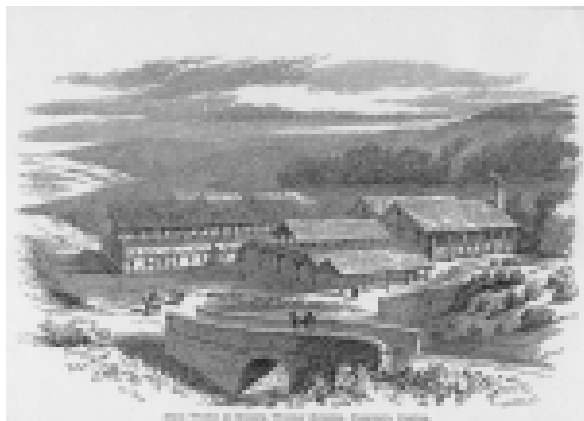
In 1863, having built up a successful business, the brothers, now in their 50s, decided to retire and return to England. By this time they owned twelve properties, the largest of them Hopewell-Hunugalla, over 2,000 acres in Dimbula. Worms-Badulla was 904 acres (later Keenakelle); Condegalla in Ramboda was another. In all there were 7318 acres. The brothers put the disposal of their assets in the hands of their financial adviser George Smyttan Duff of the Oriental Bank Corporation. The sale of parts of their estates realised £157,000 and the core assets were acquired by a new firm, the Ceylon Company, launched in April 1862 on the London Stock Exchange, with offices in Colombo.

Though successful as a coffee producer this company was held back by lossmaking estates in Mauritius and was finally brought down by the collapse of the Oriental Bank in 1892. Its assets were bought up by a new company, The Eastern Produce and Estates Co., the corporate descendant of which manufactures tea on the Rothschild Estate to this day under the 'Rothschild' name.

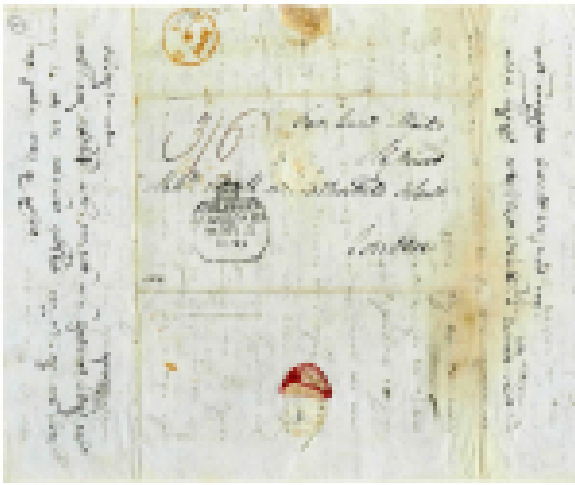
### Retirement in England

Maurice set up as a country gentleman in Warwickshire, where he died in 1867, Gabriel set up in Bond Street. He died in 1881, leaving a personal estate amounting too about £70,000. He left £2000 in Consols each to the Great Jewish Synagogue, Great Portland St., the dividends to be applied a week or ten days before Shebnouth among 12 poor Jews; £1000 Consols to the West London Synagogue, Margaret St, Cavendish Square, to be divided at the same time among six poor Jews and £500 to the Marylebone Charity School for Girls; £100 each to the Friend in Need Charity, Colombo and the fund for the relief of the decayed members of the Stock Exchange; and considerable legacies to the Rev A L Green, Prof Marks, his landlady Mrs Mary James, her two sisters and others.

A detailed description of the Worms estates can be found in *The coffee planter of Ceylon* by W. Sabonadiere, 2nd edn. 1870, a copy of which is in the Archive. See also '[Cousins in Ceylon](#)' in The Rothschild Archive Annual Review 2003-2004.



Main works at Messrs Worms Estates



*Letter from Worms brothers Colombo to NMR  
London*

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