

The Story of the Belfry

William Wilson Mitchell was born in 1840 in Edinburgh, Scotland to Grierson Mitchell and Margaret Wilson. He came to Ceylon in 1862 to become the partner of Darley Butler & Co., Ltd. He was the first elected chairman of the Ceylon Chamber of Commerce where he served thirty five years in the committee from 1869. He represented the mercantile community at the legislative council for twenty years as an unofficial member. During the period of Sir Arthur Havelock the governor of Ceylon he was created a C M G in recognition of his public service to the colony. He was the chairman of the Wharf and Warehouse Co. for many years and officially connected to several other companies such as Colombo Hotels Co. Ltd., The Colombo Apothecaries Co. Ltd., The New Colombo Ice Co., Ltd., Spinning and Weaving Mills, and many other concerns. He was a member of the Colombo Harbour Board and involved in developing the Colombo Sea Port from its inception. He also took a prominent and leading part in establishing the Port Trust. He represented the Diamond Jubilee of Queen Victoria in 1897 and presented the address of the chamber to Her Majesty in person. He also represented the tea industry at the Paris International Exhibition in 1900 and the same year received the Knighthood for his distinguished career as recognition of his service. Kt. CMG Wilson William Mitchell lived in the Island for fifty two years until his death in 1915 at his 75th year.

The bell weighing one ton of the of the Christ Church Galle Face belfry was donated by his wife Mary Hume Craven Smedley who was the daughter of the Colombo Judge E. H. Smedley, in memory of her late husband Kt.C.M.G.William Wilson Mitchell, the name being inscribed on it. The building of the belfry began in 1918 and it was dedicated on Monday the 30th June 1919.

The belfry was poorly maintained specially the inside of the tower was decaying without any maintenance for the last ninety two years. Therefore one of the members of the Tamil congregation and a prominent businessman Mr. S. Robinson incurred the expenses of repairing the belfry. The renovation work began with the supervision of the choir master Mr. Wesley Rajamony and was declared open by Mr. Robinson on 13th February 2011 after the Sunday service. The Reverend Jayaraj Chelliah christened the occasion and rededicated the belfry after a prayer was offered.