

WE CARE FOR MADRAS THAT IS CHENNAI

MADRAS MUSINGS

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"With all the rains and the traffic and queues and all that, let's just read the review of the play we are supposed to go to this evening in the paper tomorrow!"

Recent random thoughts of some theatre-loving Chennai-ites

Okay... the play begins at 7.30 pm, so get there by 7.15.

ETD from home is therefore 6.30 pm...no, make that 6-ish, because of that bane of earnest audiences - free seating.

Over the last three shows, Ms Mer-First and her passive-aggressive friends have been hogging the best seats, plus 'keeping place' for hordes of their buddies.

As for yesterday - empty seats galore... so, of course, Mr. Eight-Footer-with-the-Poosnikai-Head has to choose the one before us.

And - Heaven preserve us from foot-tappers, cough-ers and fidget-ers.

Time to leave.

Tickets?

Check.

God, the traffic ... thankfully, no dignitary movement, no sudden mass protests, no breakdowns...

MOVE, can't you see the lights have ... what are you honking at?

Inching, inching ... Yay!

Arrived.

Hey - ever heard of a queue?

Now - choosing seats. Too much in front looks presumptuous; too much to the back seems overly humble ...

They're starting.

What the ...?! I swear I put the damn thing on 'silent'.

Everyone's glaring.

(Why is my left arm hurting?)

(Later)...

Leave minutes before the end. No intense-discussion-obscure-analysis-and-how-did-you-like-the-play-ing.

(Much Later) ...

(Note to self: Stay home; watch TV ... and sing: *This particular world was never meant for one as worrywart as you ... starry, starry evenings...*)

Ranjitha Ashok



Chepauk Palace

Is it on its last legs?

(By A Special Correspondent)

It has been touted the world over as the first example of the Indo-Saracenic style of architecture, a style for which Madras became famous. And yet, in the absence of any form of legislation to protect buildings of its kind, historic Chepauk Palace is rapidly going to seed and, unless something fairly urgent is done about it, this historic precinct is unlikely to survive long. That at least was the impression I was left with during a recent visit to the premises.

Chepauk Palace was built as the city residence of the Nawabs of Arcot. Probably designed by Paul Benfield, a Company engineer turned building contractor, it was the first instance anywhere in the world of the Indo-Saracenic style. It also, more famously, marked the beginning of the takeover of the Carnatic by the British and, when it was nearing completion, it was evident to most that the days of the Nawabs' rule were numbered. Sure enough, the Carnatic was annexed in



Tree growth has a field day at Chepauk Palace with its broken windows and what fills in for them when they have vanished.

(More pictures on page 5)

Signing for Heritage Act

A Heritage Act was the joint request by the coordinators of the Madras Week on behalf of the people of Chennai on the day of the Madras Week press conference, August 19, 2011.

If passed, the Act will ensure that not just the heritage of Madras is protected, but that of the whole of the State as well.

No sooner the banner with a request to pass the Heritage Act was unfurled, more than 40 signatures filled the campaign sheets on the spot.

1801 though the ruling family was permitted to use the palace till 1855 when, on the pretext of liquidating the debts of the Nawabs, the palace was acquired by the Government in a sham auction. Since then, it has been used by Government departments, of which the best-known are the Revenue and Public Works Departments. The latter also has its own independent wing fronting Chepauk Palace, built by Robert Fellowes Chisholm.

(Continued on page 5)

Will Metro hide our heritage buildings?

(By A Staff Reporter)

Work on the Metro Railway is progressing without pause and in its relentless wake it appears that several heritage buildings are likely to be affected. Some will have to bear the brunt of digging, drilling and construction activity in their vicinity and, later, suffer the vibrations bound to be caused by the continuous movement of rolling stock. Now, the latest is that many of the buildings are likely to be completely obscured by the construction of stations that will mask their facades. What is worse, such a construction will

be in direct contravention of the recommendations of the Padmanabhan Committee on hoardings which stated that nothing ought to come up in front of heritage structures.

The Heritage Conservation Committee constituted by the Government following a judgement of the High Court of Madras is already looking into the matter. It is learnt that a sub-committee constituted to look into the designs of the stations has found that some of the vents and entrance porches to

(Continued on page 2)

51 things to do

St. Mary's Co-Cathedral on Armenian Street, which is today more popular for the devotion to Saint Anthony by Catholics and non-Catholics alike, and the Cathedral in San Thomé have long been on my 'must visit' list and I strongly recommend them to visitors.

Greater than the history, the heritage and the uniqueness of places is the experience they offer. So, in connection with the Madras Day celebrations (www.themadrasday.in), a group of us have launched the '51 THINGS TO DO IN CHENNAI' blog.

We are hoping that this '51 Things To Do' list will try and suggest places, people, things and events that are truly Madras/Chennai and offer the 'experience'. So, instead of suggesting a visit to the church atop St. Thomas' Mount, we would recommend enjoying your visit by taking the one hundred plus steps to the top, the views you should not miss, and the other little places around the church.

To ensure that this '51 Things To Do' listing has a local flavour, it is best enriched by people like you who know the city well. Lots of people, especially young people, highly recommend visiting the Broken Bridge behind the Theosophical Society, a bridge which once linked Uroor *kuppam* in Besant Nagar with Srinivasapuram in Pattinapakkam. The bridge collapsed many years ago. They say the view and the experience at sunrise or at sunset is amazing.

A walk on the Marina, well-stocked with *sundal*, *bajji* and raw mango slices dipped in salt and red chilli powder, is a must-do. I am sure you too can make a recommendation like that. Go to www.51thingstodoinchennai.blogspot.com – and don't stop with a line. Give us at least two paras! Tips and all. – (Courtesy: *Mylapore Times*.)

Vincent D'Souza

Will the Metro hide heritage buildings?

(Continued from page 1)

the stations would not only be visually intrusive but also be dangerously close to the heritage structures in the vicinity. For instance, vents of the proposed station near the Law College will be just two metres away from the College building. Its height will also be around five metres and, thus, it will mask a part of the building. Similar concerns have been highlighted with respect to the proposed station near the *Ripon Building* and *Victoria Public Hall*. Another structure that is likely to be affected is the Tamil Wesley Church in Mannady. It is learnt that the concerns of the sub-committee have been passed on to the Metro Railway authorities who are studying ways and means of overcoming the problem.

While it is good that the matter is being debated and discussed without allowing the Metro Railway to bulldoze its way through, what is of concern is that all this may end in a spirit of compromise with more give than take on the part of the Heritage Conservation Committee, composed as it is almost entirely of Government servants or those from institutions linked with government. This could have been avoided had

there been a Heritage Act in place with clear guidelines on what can be done and what is not permitted in the vicinity of heritage structures. In the absence of such legislations, it is all open to interpretation and, going by past experience, it is unlikely that the results would be in favour of the heritage structures.

Bangalore, which is also a city that has no law for protecting its heritage, has progressed a great deal on its Metro. There, the heritage buildings have had to bear the brunt of the constructions and those that have survived are completely hidden behind monstrous stations and elevated rail tracks. In many places, sewer and stormwater drains have been put up very close to architecturally significant buildings, marring their beauty forever. This must not be allowed to happen in the case of our city.

It is to be hoped that the Conservation Committee will prove firm in its dealings with the Metro. The Committee should also be pressing the Government for legislation to protect heritage. This was, in fact, one of the mandates of the Committee that has rather conveniently been given the go-by. Can we hope for some positive action before it is too late?

MAD-rush for food!

Another Mad-rush, oops Madras Week is drawing to a close. The celebrations are now confined to the son et lumiere programmes that the Chief had conceptualised at the Freemasons' Hall, but when the Week (or is it Month) was in progress, you could scarcely make up your mind as to where to go and what to see. *The Man from Madras Musings* hurried along from sport to sport as he believes the expression is, though what with his loyalties being to this publication, he confined his attendance largely to the talks and walks organised by it. The Chief, on the other hand, MMM was glad to see, was all over the place, now enthusing the cadres, here shaking a hand, there cocking a quizzical eye and somewhere else being the life and soul of the party.

the Chief, who is rather prone to look on such goings-on with a benevolent eye, was moved to reprimand one or two of the more notorious ones. Each evening this was repeated, with the scene making MMM realise what it would have been like in locations such as the Kanji Thotti in the great famine years of the 18th and 19th Centuries in Madras.

But there is always a higher force that watches over us and came a day when the venue was an establishment that was facing labour troubles. It was too late for a change of venue and it was decided to go ahead. And no food was served. Not even a drop of water. The free-loaders came, saw and could scarcely believe their eyes. Their jaws dropped, their eyes almost popped out and they looked at each other with a wild surmise. The talk went on

The long arm of the law, MMM understands, is wary of any gatherings that exceed four in number. The process, MMM is told, is not at all difficult and the staff is courteous in the extreme. But those who watch over law and order of our beloved city are unable to comprehend the concept of a heritage walk. Consequently, such events are classified under Fasts/Protests/Processions. And the law looks askance at events of that variety.

MMM is fairly certain that most of the rules and regulations that govern public gatherings were created in the era when Gandhiji made bold to challenge an alien regime. And poring over the letter that gives permission to conduct heritage walk, he finds it couched in the same language that belonged to that era as

SHORT 'N' SNAPPY

Watching the Chief, MMM realised, was to get an idea of Churchill during the war years and, heaven knows, we are on a war too, on the heritage front that is.

Elsewhere battles are being won by men going on fasts unto death, but at the Madras Week events it would appear to be a feast unto the same end. MMM alludes to the talks organised by *Madras Musings* at various locations with each of them being preceded by tea/coffee and 'light' refreshments. Only the way some of the attendees swooped down on the food and piled it on their plates, you could scarcely call it a 'light' refreshment. If there were cakes, each of these free-loaders took twenty of them and if there were cups of coffee, they took five or, sometimes six. Ditto with sandwiches, cutlets, puffs, etc. The hotel staff was at its wit's end at several locations, for scarcely did they bring in replenishments when it all vanished, rather like the way it did in the classic film *Maya Bazaar*.

Watching them, MMM was convinced that they were all members of a secret sect that believed in charging ahead at food counters and each individual's rise in the cult depended on how much he or she could snatch, pile on his or her plate and how quickly he or she could eat it. And considering that the same faces (or should MMM say mouths) were repeating these acts, MMM's theory of a cult or secret society could not be too far wrong. Anorexics could be sent to them for counselling. Even

as scheduled, though you could hardly hear the speaker, the alimentary growls of the free-loaders' innards almost drowning what he was saying. But to MMM it was the best evening of the week. Just watching the disappointment on their faces and the silent enquiries they were making to each other entirely through the language of the eyebrows was entertainment enough.

But, of course, the next day they were all back in action, at a different venue, and making up for the privations they had suffered the previous day. All this made one of the organisers sidle up to the Chief and enquire if the next year all light refreshments ought to be restricted to just coffee and biscuits. The Chief replied that in that case each man/woman (and here the female was deadlier than the male) could take 50 biscuits or more.

The Man from Madras Musings is now at an age when even a glass of water is sometimes a little difficult to digest. Watching these characters in action and marvelling at their capacity to ingest like ostriches, MMM feels that each of these should be induced to donate his/her digestive tracts for medical research, after they have eaten their last meal and called it a day.

MAD-rush Week, MMM tends to feel, now seems more to imbibe food than knowledge.

Policing Heritage Walks

The Man from Madras Musings learns from an organiser of heritage walks that it is now more or less mandatory to obtain police permission before conducting such events.

well. Permission was granted with several conditions attached and one of these was that "Toms Toms" would not be beaten during the procession. It also categorically denied any right to the organiser to play any musical instruments. There had to be free flow of traffic, it stipulated, and the participants could not gather on the main thoroughfares.

While the tours went off peacefully with all these rules adhered to, what MMM could not help think about was that practically every other procession, be it a funeral, wedding or political, breaks every one of these rules. And so how is permission granted? And if it is granted under the same conditions, how is it that the representatives of the law stand silently and watch all these violations without taking any action?

The Black Box

Boxwallahs of Madras was one of the subjects slated for the Madras Week and it was one of the best talks with the Chief in conversation with two senior executives of British companies of the past. These covenanted officers were always known as boxwallahs.

The title, however, piqued the curiosity of several. *The Man from Madras Musings* received a call from a television channel enquiring if it was about the television. MMM could not understand the connection till the caller explained that it was after all known as the idiot box!

– MMM



Missing bulwark

Senior citizen morning walkers at Besant Nagar Beach have a fund of information waiting to be tapped. One of them, N. Chandrasekaran, Superintendent Engineer, Madras Port Trust (Rtd.), supplied the following:

The bulwark was built to protect Fort St. George and Black Town. The top stones used were of 2 to 3 ton weight, laid over smaller rubble stones. The smaller bed stones would prevent under-scouring and sinking of the top stones. It extended up to Clive Battery.

Before the harbour was constructed, cargo was handled using *masula* boats which went out to the ships anchored in the deep. Due to high waves, there used to be considerable loss of cargo.

While dredging for Jawahar Dock in the 1980s, a Dutch firm salvaged about a dozen copper plates measuring 3-foot square and 1/2" thick. They bore witness to the sea being so near the Fort St. George. The plates were handed over to the Museum.

The Coromandel coast has a natural phenomenon called littoral drift. This causes accretion of moving sand on the south side of any project or structure and erosion on the north side. Perhaps, Marina Beach, due to this phenomenon, consequent to the Harbour breakwaters, is projecting into the sea and causing accretion on the south side. To prevent erosion on the north, the then Madras Government maintained the shore by dumping stones (similar to the bulwark) for a length of 1 3/4 miles. This was made obligatory under the Madras Port Trust Act of 1905.

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Snakes & the Bible

Dr. B. Vijayaraghavan's notes (MM, August 16th) on snakes make interesting reading. It has been rightly pointed out that no such snake, like the cockatrice or basilisk, is known to science. The reference to a Biblical text (Isaiah 11:8) prompts me to say the following. The mention of 'cockatrice' in the Bible is exactly 400 years old. What was then launched as the Authorised Version (King James Bible, 1611) is not authoritative any more in English. The Hebrew word translated as "cockatrice" in the text actually means "a creature thrusting out the tongue" and, hence, "cockatrice" has been rejected in all critical and subsequent translations of the Bible.

Sights and sound of Madras in the 1950s

For a young man in his late teens who came to Madras in the early fifties, the sights and sounds were frightening and embarrassing. The closely built streets, long stretches of busy roads and the multitudes of crowds chattering in several languages were contrast to me, haling as I did from a village in the deep south. Most of the scenes in the streets and by-lanes were unusual and conversations – though in Tamil – were unintelligible. It was much later that it dawned on me these were corruptions caused by the confluence of migrants from various states into the city.

A clerical job in one of the trading establishments in a narrow street of George Town and living accommodation in a back-lane of Triplicane were both unnerving to the novice. Dirty streets, pavements filled with whole families living there and desecrating the area, and sewage overflowing added to the scene of filth, making it difficult for one to reach his workplace. Buffaloes in large numbers sullied the residential lanes as the owners of the animals did not bother to clean them. Restaurants were heavily crowded at lunch time. It was a common sight as scores of hungry customers fixing lunch tokens on the tables even before the earlier lunchers had finished eating and waiting till the tables were cleaned (half-heartedly). The hawkers of various trinkets jostled with the pedestrians in China Bazaar. The ubiquitous trams with their perennial clang-clang all the way and black and yellow taxis speeding through the crowds presented a picture of chaos and impending danger.

The most intriguing sight of those days was the numerous lepers begging everywhere who threatened passers-by as if to touch them with their sore-ridden finger stumps. Occasionally one came across a sad scene of someone covered like a corpse and laid on the pavement, while several men and women wailed and demanded money for the cremations. Someone later explained to me that it was all make-believe. Later, I found it true, for when they had collected sufficient funds for meals and drinks, the scene wound up with the erstwhile corpse sprinted along with the others.

All the massive buildings along the first and second line beach roads looked like ghosts as they were covered with thick layers of black soot emanating from the ships and coal wharfs. Streams of navy men and sailors of various nationalities could be seen wandering aimlessly. They used to sell fancy goods and fragrances for a small profit. Emaciated rickshaw-pullers were everywhere, bargaining with heavily-built northerners before accepting custom. "Paathu pottu kudu sir!" was the oft-repeated refrain. But the frugal passenger would neither get down from the hackney nor pay a paisa more. It was common knowledge that law enforces often hauled the rickshaw-pullers in under the Immoral Traffic Act as they acted as brokers of call girls and lured the lemmings to shady lodges.

The hardware merchants of Mannady who hailed mostly from Kayalpatnam spoke a peculiar lingo (not their Thirunelveli Tamil) sounding Arabic or Swahili though they swore it was Urdu.

Though several kinds of snakes find mention in the Bible, only two have been scientifically attested so far – *Cerastes Hasselquistii* and *Vipera palaestinae*. Some English versions of the Bible have rendered a portion of a different text (Isaiah 14:29) to mean cockatrice as well as basilisk. But they remain mythical, though containing some cultic significance.

It appears that a Mesopotamian seal impression dated to about 2000 BCE resembles what William Crooke and Dr. Vijayaraghavan refer to as a "cock-headed snake". Marija Gimbutas, an authority on the pantheon of Old Europe, has archaeologically traced the presence of a snake as a goddess to 5000 BCE. She has also postulated the ambivalence of this representation. This is strikingly similar to what Dr. Vijayaraghavan notes as "born of the egg of a cock (and ... not a hen)."

The common name for snake in Hebrew is *naahaas* (phonetically simplified). Its link to the Indo-Aryan counterpart 'naga' is obvious. With the addition of

the sibilant (so fittingly articulated!), it is converted into 'snake' in English. These philological items betray cosmic association with "primordial waters" too (Amos 9:3). A synonymous Hebrew word *saaraap*, meaning flame-coloured serpent, is perhaps related to *sarbha* of the pan-Indian realm. The terms *paab* (Toda), *paambu* (Tamil) and its variant *haavu* (Kannada) seem to indicate a different cultural genesis for the Dravidian etyma. The same is applicable to the archaic Tamil *aravu*.

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A's and O's

MM's *madam/mutt* dilemma (MM, August 1st) seems a tough one to resolve! And what do we make of *Sevalia*? Now, we've all learnt to dot our i's and cross our t's, but not to chop our a's and change our o's! Unfortunately, this is what seems to

have happened with the new name boards for Patullo's Road and Conran Smith Road. The road named for Archibald Patullo has become Patullas Road, while the one named to honour Commissioner Smith has become Conran Smith Road! The Chennai Corporation certainly has its a's and o's messed up.

Another familiar character in the beach on Sundays was a street artist known as tape Thangavelu. Tapping two pieces of wooden plates similar to *chipla kattai*, he used to sell strange potions and cures for scorpion bites, simultaneously singling political songs, changing sides at every venue depending on the area's political leanings. If one was in praise of Thevar Muthuramalingam on any day, it was on Periyar the next day.

The city's sounds nay noises were also beyond one's comprehension. It was discomfoting to hear people of all ages addressing everyone else in singular. In the districts this was considered offensive. It took me a long time to understand shouts of *sappadapayya*, *kuruvikal* and *mughumaavu* as equivalents of *sapota* fruit, red oxide ball and powdered calcium used for decorating house fronts. The product "Payoria tooth powder" made one to wonder if it would clean the teeth or cause "Pyorrhoea" a funny sound "ooooyi" denoted curd.

Rahman a blind hawker of *agarbathis* solicited custom with his call, "nooru bathi aaru anna" in China Bazaar, while a toothless beggar woman played a noisy harmonium and sang raucously all through the day in the Evening Bazaar bus stop. Bouts of fights and arguments brought forth nasty expletives bordering on vulgarity. The only decent words often heard were "kayalath" (*kaiyaal ahaathathu* - useless) and "kasmalaam" (derived from the Sanskrit word "Kasmalam - filthy). These are now seldom heard as other variants have come into use. Comedian Chandra Babu expertly used these words in his dialogue and "Cho" had a rich repertoire for his portrayals.

These were the days when English was spoken and understood with relative ease and all other Southern languages, particularly Telugu were predominant. The one instance coming to mind is that of a Police announcement outside the General Hospital advising jay walkers to keep off the road. An earnest policeman translated such warning into chaste Tamil. Making fun of it, a senior citizen quipped "Here is a fit candidate for a Tamil Reader in the University". And we the listeners had a hearty laugh.

S. Krishna

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Correct answer

In the issue dated August 16th, the correct answer for question No. 20 in the Ramanan's quiz is *Raja Raja Cholan* starring Sivaji Ganesan and a host of other leading stars. The film was produced by G. Umapathy of M/s Anand Theatre and not Maaveeran.

T.S. Sivakumar

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MADRAS MUSINGS ON THE WEB

To reach out to as many readers as possible who share our keen interest in Madras that is Chennai, and in response to requests from many well-wishers – especially from outside Chennai and abroad who receive their postal copies very late – for an online edition. *Madras Musings* is now on the web at www.madrasmusings.com

THE EDITOR

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* * *

While the new signboards indicating road names is a welcome development, I am appalled at the way road names have been spelt. Maloney Road is spelt as Melloni Road (Editor's note: It really is Molony's Road), and Pernpet (near the YMCA) I presume is meant to be Burnpet? How many more names does our Corporation/Municipality want to distort? As it is, taking out so-called caste indicators on road names has brought its own distortions. It is distressing, to say the least, to see such ridiculous spellings of road names.

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Where stood de Havilland's twin castlets?

During the years that the Madras Bulwark was being constructed (MM, August 1st) the English had begun moving out of the Fort and the need arose for a church close to the Great Choultry Plain. Bishop Middleton, Bishop of India, Burma and Ceylon, had thundered from Calcutta about the ugliness of buildings being erected as churches and so there was pressure to create something classical. Designed by Chief Engineer Col. James Caldwell and supervised by Major de Havilland, St George's Cathedral was completed in 1816, the consecration being done by a much-pleased Middleton. de Havilland's reputation was made. No doubt, in order to be close to this great project, he purchased land in Poodoopauk (present day Pudupet abutting Mount Road) and built his residence. This was an unusual construction for it comprised what was later described by Love as two castellated circular towers, standing on the opposite ends of a vast garden. These became the *Eastern* and *Western Castlets*. The intervening garden would be put to good use by de Havilland when he was entrusted with his next project – the building of St Andrew's Kirk in 1816. de Havilland decided that the new structure would be circular in plan and topped with a dome.

In order to closely study the native technique of dome building, he had a team build a dome in the garden of his house, just as the arch had been built in Mysore. Having observed them closely, he gained confidence and went ahead with the construction of the kirk. The story of the foundations of the kirk needing terracotta wells to support them (again a native technique that de Havilland borrowed) is too well-known to

merit repetition. The kirk when completed was (and is) magnificent but the dome resulted in poor acoustics. When questioned about this de Havilland blamed it all on the "voice of the reverend!" He went on to write *An Account of St Andrew's Church* in 1821, which later was included in a more detailed paper by him – *Delineations and Descriptions of Public Edifices in and near Madras* (1826).

According to the Rev A. Westcott (*Our Oldest Indian Mission, A Brief History of the Vepery (Madras) Mission*, Madras Diocesan Press, 1897), de Havilland was asked to take a look at the possibility of restoring St. Mathias' Church in Vepery. He reported it to be beyond repair and bids were invited for a new building. The quote of John Law, a graduate of the Male Orphan Asylum, was the lowest. Work began and de Havilland, greatly offended at losing the bid, waited

Lost Landmarks of Madras An occasional series by SRIRAM V.

till the church was completed in 1825, complete with a magnificent steeple. Then, in his capacity as Chief Engineer of the Presidency, he inspected the building and declared that the steeple was a security risk, for guns could be trained on the Fort from its pinnacle! Fully aware that the kirk's steeple was just as high he declared that, unlike the St. Mathias steeple, the former "yielded no facility for the mounting of mortars and howitzers." His word was taken and the St. Mathias steeple was demolished at great expense and replaced with a diminutive tower which, according to Westcott, was a lasting testimony to de Havilland's spite.

A big 'Thank You' to 25 of you

We publish below the list of donors who have, between 16.07.11 and 15.08.11, added to the support Chennai Heritage and its voice, *Madras Musings*, have already received. We thank all of them for their support for the causes Chennai Heritage espouses. – Chennai Heritage

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View of the magnificent interior of St. Andrew's Church, Madras, built by de Havilland. (Colour lithograph by J.B. Maxwell after Gantz, 1825.)

This colourful character appears to have retired to his native Guernsey in 1825. His father had died in 1821 and it was necessary for him to return and manage the estates. Among his last acts was to compile a comprehensive report on what he felt was wrong with the Madras Corps of Engineers. Dated November 23, 1821, it also had suggestions for improving the quality of engineers and what en-

castlet was subsequently demolished when Addison's got into the retailing of cars and built their handsome showroom on Mount Road. Today, that showroom is one of the offices of Amalgamations Limited, which acquired Addison's in the 1940s.

Western Castlet appears to have survived much longer, though its exact location is even more difficult to identify. Considering that most accounts say it was off Mount Road, it is very likely that *Eastern Castlet* was on Mount Road itself and *Western Castlet* to its rear. After they were divided, it is probable, *Western Castlet* was accessed by a service lane from Mount Road.

Western Castlet became *Western Castle* in the 1920s. At around this time, Lady Willingdon (then First Lady of Madras) founded the South Indian Nursing Association whose members were trained Anglo-Indian and European nurses, almost all of them working at the Lady Willingdon Nursing Home. The nursing home functioned from 1931 at *Western Castle* and remained there till it shifted in 1951 to Pycroft's Garden Road. In the 1990s, this facility became a branch of the Sankara Nethralaya. The Nursing Association merged with the Lady Amphilill Nurses Institute (founded in 1904) in 1998 and formed the nucleus of the Chennai Willingdon Corporate Foundation, focussing on public service programmes.

But what happened to *Western Castlet/Castle* is a mystery. Was it demolished? What is even more intriguing is that not a single photograph of either castlet has survived. There is, however, an early aquatint in the British Library that shows how the two structures looked in de Havilland's time. Love was clearly not entirely accurate when he described them as two circular towers. Each comprised

a central tower with three or four smaller circular towers surrounding the central tower and sharing common walls with it. By the time of the British Library aquatint, a compound wall had come up between the two castlets, thereby indicating that the property had been divided into two. Another garden house can be seen in the distance, but without knowing the coordinates from which the painting has been executed it is difficult to identify as to which building is that. And so the exact location of the two castlets remains a mystery.

But if the space that answers to the description of where *Eastern Castlet* stood is indeed the present Addison showroom, then certain possibilities emerge. As you walk to the rear, down the lane running beside Addison, and which is rather grandiosely referred to as TNEB Avenue, you come to a vast compound that now houses the Electricity Board offices. Old-timers recall an old bungalow with a pedimented portico supported by columns standing here, which was demolished to make way for the TNEB's ghastly creations. Was this where the Lady Willingdon Nursing Home was housed? If so, this garden house must have been a successor to *Western Castlet*, for its description in no way matches what is shown in the British Library picture. The name of the older building must have been carried forward and applied to the later structure as well.

What is interesting is that this lane still houses a couple of heritage buildings. There is the TNEB Club, which must clearly be at least 100 years old. And adjacent to this, in a separate compound, stands an old bungalow now occupied by a senior army officer. But were they also once part of de Havilland's property? If only stones could speak.

This was the splendour that was Chepauk Palace...



Chepauk Palace as seen c. 1900. (Courtesy: Vintage Vignettes.)

... Is it now on its last legs?

(Continued from page 1)

Chepauk Palace's long decline began in the 1950s when the Government decided to build *Ezhilagam* to house many more of its departments. The new edifice completely cut off the Palace from public view, at least from Beach Road, a view that many early writers on the city claimed was the one which showed the buildings at their best. But a worse blow was to follow in the 1980s when the Agriculture Department offices were built, despite protests, on the Wallajah Road side of the Palace. This meant that the Palace could only be seen and accessed from the rear. And to add to the damage, an aerial corridor was built connecting the old Palace to the new building, for which a gaping hole had to be made in the historic walls. But all this fades into insignificance in the face of the wanton neglect of the palace, which has caused untold damage to it.

As offices proliferated inside the Palace, toilets have been built any-which-way-you-please. There are water tanks on the roof, which seep and add to the damage. Maintenance is shoddy and posters are pasted all along the walls of the buildings, at least up to the height that human hands can reach. Trees are now growing on the walls and several chunks of ornamental plaster-

work have come off. There are unsightly grilles, ostensibly to provide security to what is ironically used as a free thoroughfare connecting Wallajah and Kamaraj Roads! A family appears to have made the rear portico its home and when I walked by, an old man among the squatters came up and demanded that the building be soon demolished and rebuilt with modern amenities! A yard on the side is filled with discarded furniture, all of it awaiting an uncertain fate. There are also vast rubbish tips in the courtyards.

Inside, it would be no exaggeration to state that the various department files are holding on the roof. There are towers made of office files and there are steel cupboards which serve as walls and which are dragged about the old flooring – leaving permanent scratch marks. Parts of the roof collapsed a few years ago owing to prolonged neglect of the wooden beams that held the roof on. The offices in these sections have been shifted but nothing has been done to repair the damage and these portions remain as they are, adding to the wear and tear.

It is quite evident that the Palace is crying for restoration and if this is denied or even delayed, we may not have the buildings with us for long. A few years ago, a restoration project was announced but it is not clear as to what became of it. The

Palace, however, did get a fresh coat of paint. But that can hardly hide the obvious signs of stress. And, so, Chepauk Palace joins the rather long line of heritage buildings in the city that are in urgent need of some loving care. Given its importance, it will hopefully charge ahead of others in the queue.

But, in the absence of a Heritage Act, are we likely to see any action? Or, is the Government waiting for the buildings to weaken? Then it will be very easy to get a certificate from one of its own departments to the effect that the building is "unfit for habitation" and the rest of the procedure will follow – another new Government-built monstrosity with more offices and piles of files, built over another graveyard of history.



New buildings that have come up to completely shut out the palace. Note the tangle of wires.

... And this is what it is today...



A garbage dump lying unintended beside deteriorating walls.



Temporary storage facilities built along the palace walls



A permanent toilet block.



Temporary van shelters and corrugated iron shades for windows. Note the state of the walls.

Quizzin'
with
Ram'nan

(Current Affairs questions are from the period August 1st to 15th. Questions 11 to 20 pertain to Chennai and Tamil Nadu.)

1. Which country's engineers did Pakistan allow, according to US officials, to photograph the remains of a hi-tech helicopter used in the Osama bin Laden raid.

2. Name the popular star of Hindi films known for his Yahoo! Cry, who passed away recently. (Hint: His first name was once Shamsher.)

3. Which agency's recent downgrading of the credit rating of the U.S. led to panic in the global markets?

4. Astronomers discovered 'TrES-2b' recently. What is its claim to fame?

5. What was the 'single' paying tribute to India released by A.R. Rahman and his group 'SuperHeavy' recently?

6. Which cyber-giant bought Motorola's Mobility business for a \$12.5 billion recently?

7. Which high-profile Arsenal player recently moved to Barcelona FC?

8. Name the solar-powered NASA spacecraft launched recently on a five-year journey to Jupiter.

9. What was the fall-out of the killing of 29-year-old Mark Duggan by the British police in early August?

10. Which in-the-news temple recently saw a *Devaprasnam*, an astrological process to 'discern the will of the god or a deity'?

* * *

11. Which garden house in Chennai, owned by Gilbert Ricketts, was taken over by Government in the 19th Century by settling a Rs. 35,000 mortgage?

12. The statue of Subburathinam is on the Marina. How is he better known?

13. In the context of the present civic administration in Chennai, who is J.K. Tripathy?

14. Which road in Chennai was named either for the father John or son Henry, both Chief Secretaries of Madras?

15. Which eight-lettered, one-word description could be used for 43 acres in Egmore granted on August 21, 1778 to Hall Plummer (civil servant and contractor)?

16. What was the erstwhile name of the Sriramulu Park in Chennai?

17. What first can be attributed to the HQ of Grundfors in Chennai?

18. What does the frieze at the bottom of the massive Cornwallis statue in the Fort Museum depict?

19. Name the church in Vepery, once known as the New Mission Church, deemed to be an example of 'humphy-dumphy' Gothoid architecture.

20. In Chennai, what will you find where the Nawab's Octagon/*Marine Villa* stood?

(Answers on page 8)

FROM THE MADRAS WEEK BLOGS

Walking children through history

"We South Indians don't know how to blow our trumpet," declares Kavita Rau, adding, "We are very passive. We are sitting on a goldmine of heritage, yet do nothing about it." Four other women in the room nod vehemently; they know what she is talking about and they are all doing something about it – not by blowing trumpets but by talking about Madras's rich history to school students.

The five women – apart from Kavita, there are Nandini Arun, Shama Prasanna, Lakshmi Kishore and Sundari Sidhartha – are now leading heritage walks in certain pockets of the city, bringing to life for children ageing buildings that Chennaiites whiz past every morning and evening without sparing much thought for their historical value.

They were roped in by Sushu Natraj of Chennai Heritage who, recognising the increasing demand for heritage walks during Madras Week celebrations, and who hopes these women would soon be able to help with heritage education through regular walks, got Sriram V. to tutor them on leading heritage walks and did dry runs with them on the two routes they have chosen.

While Nandini and Shama lead the Marina walk, briefing the students about the history of the buildings on the stretch

from the lighthouse to the War Memorial, Kavita, Lakshmi and Sundari do the Park Town walk from St. Andrew's Kirk to *Ripon Buildings*, with a trip to My Ladye's Garden thrown in. They have been doing the walks the whole of July and August.

"They are doing it only for the love of it. There is nothing in it for them; even the weather has not been of much help," says Sushu, adding, "The idea is to have 25-30 people like them and make these walks a permanent feature so that both citizens and visitors get to know about Chennai."



PATHFINDERS (left to right) Shama Prasanna, Nandini Arun, Sundari Sidhartha, Lakshmi Kishore and Kavita Rau with Sushu Natraj (second from right) of Chennai Heritage. (Photograph: R. Ravindran.)

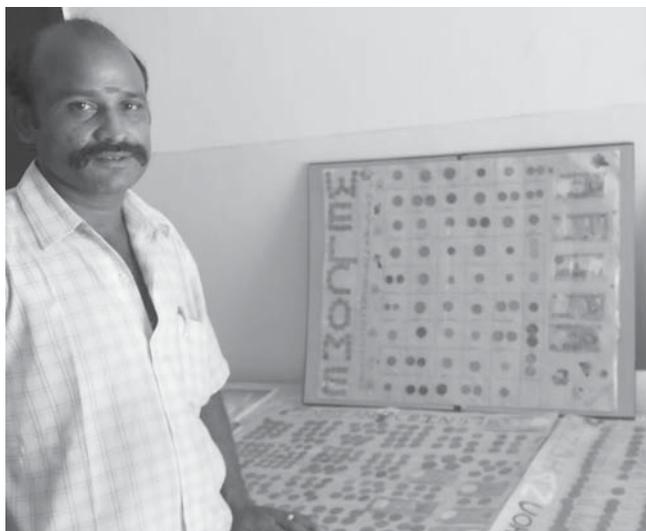
Sriram, the women say, opened their eyes to their city during the dry runs. "Imagine, we had been living here all our lives but didn't even know about the existence of the Chepauk Palace (the oldest Indo-Saracenic buildings in the country) or the history of *Ice House*," says Shama. Sundari Sidhartha, a Sanskrit scholar associated with the Theosophical Society Library and who, being in her seventies, is the oldest in the group, says, "*The Victoria Public Hall* is another place we were not aware of. At least I was not aware of it, though I've lived all my life in

Chennai. The walks gave us a chance to learn about our own heritage."

"We read a lot before we started the walks. When Sriram took us on trial runs, we recorded everything he had to say and kept listening to it over and over again. We also read S. Muthiah's *Madras Rediscovered*," says Lakshmi. Adds Kavita, "And since the students are invariably accompanied by their history teachers, the teachers also get a chance to brush up their knowledge of Chennai's heritage. Without

(Continued on page 7)

The passionate collectors



Venkatesh, one of the passionate collectors (see text).

The Madras Heritage Lovers' Forum put up a fascinating exhibition at the Padma Seshadri School in KK Nagar. Most of the members are past 50, with consultant architect D.H. Rao, who organised and 'choreographed' the entire show, being well past 70. More than anything, it was rare commitment on display, a passion for a city and its heritage.

The forum is made up of Rao, V. Prabhakar, Winston Henry, S.A. Govindaraju, John Moses, Lazer, Roland Nelson and Hemant Chopra. Some of them were there throughout at the three-day event, standing for the most part in a hall without the airconditioning system turned on.

Govindaraju is 80 years old, but his passion for old books and magazines hasn't diminished a bit. He has been collecting them

for more than four decades and has over 5000 books and 10,000 magazines, paper clippings and advertisements. A retired labour law consultant, he runs a small garage (Rare Books, R.A. Puram, 2nd Main Road) where he sells these books. What is remarkable is that he is able to identify each of the books just by the look of it – including its author and publisher's name, even the date of publication.

According to John Moses, who had a striking display of lamps, kerosene was first imported to Madras by Best & Company in 1879. It was sold in tins by the brand names Chester and Monkey. With the import of kerosene from abroad, import of lamps from England, Germany, Hungary, France, Japan and the United States followed.

Moses and Winston Henry (who helps put up aquariums and aviaries) have a passion for collecting anything old. Moses said his collection of old lamps, watches, pens and cycles was so large that there was hardly enough space at his home in Kilpauk to keep them. "My family just manages to tolerate me," he said.

Winston said just about the same thing. The passageways in his house are lined with large containers filled with old books. He had brought along the 1870 edition of Francis Buchanan's *Journey from Madras through the countries of Mysore, Canara and Malabar*, published by Higginbotham and Company, Madras (187?). The pages were almost falling apart and the years had taken its toll – but you were taken to another world just by grasping the book.

Another participant who merits special mention was Venkatesh, an attendee at the Padma Seshadri School. He has been an avid collector of coins and has always sought an outlet to exhibit them. Two years ago, he came up with a similar display (see picture). School duties have not blunted his enthusiasm for his hobby. His is an example many should follow.

These are the people who make Madras Week what it is. They toil hard all day long, expect little publicity, prefer to keep a low profile, are happy with even the smallest word of appreciation, and treat every person with dignity.

How old is Tamil Cinema?

To say that Tamil cinema is 75 years old is not only a gross mistake but it disowns a precious heritage of the industry – the silent era.

An automobile spare parts dealer, Nataraja Mudaliar, was fascinated by moving pictures and decided to make films himself. He travelled to Pune, sought and met Steward Smith, a cinematographer of the British Government, and learnt film-making. As the primitive camera was operated by hand cranking, it took only a few days of learning. Returning to Madras, he set up a studio, India Film Company, in Miller's Road, Kilpauk, and made *Keechakavatham*, the first Tamil film in 1916.

The characters spoke Tamil. However, sound system in film had not been invented yet; so what they spoke was written on cards (called 'title cards') that appeared on the screen between shots. If you have seen Charlie Chaplin films like *Gold Rush*, you will know what I am referring to. The viewers, instead of hearing, read the dialogue. For the benefit of those who could not read, a man stood near the screen and read the dialogue aloud. Soon a few other studios were set up in Madras. In the next 18 years, nearly 110 Tamil silent films were produced. The first talkie picture, *Kalidas*, was released in 1931. Silent films continued to be made till 1934.

In Madras, there were at least three studios regularly producing films. The leading company was General Pictures Corporation, known as GPC,

Walking children through history

(Continued from page 6)

the anecdotes we narrate, the buildings are nothing but relics."

As of now, students from seven schools across the city, from Classes 8 to 10, have participated in their walks, which commenced at 6.30 in the morning. The women, most of them homemakers, say their new-found passion has not interfered with their schedules at home. "It is life as usual. Our families have been very supportive," says Nandini. Everyone nods. "As long as they get breakfast on time," laughs Lakshmi

founded by A. Naryanan. It was here that many of the later directors and actors of the talkie era had their initial training. It was a school for film-makers. Many films were based on

• by
Theodore Baskaran

Puranic stories like *Machavatham* (1927). Some were from the epics, like the film *Kovalan* (1929). A few socials also came out: the film version of Vai. Mu. Kothainayaki Ammal's novel *Anadhai Penn*

(1931) was directed by the legendary Raja Sandow. These films were reviewed in contemporary Tamil magazines.

So how old is Tamil cinema? 95 years old. No cinema in the world disowns its silent era. That is where the roots of any cinema lie. Every cinema in the world glorifies its silent films and counts its own history from the silent era. Look at British cinema. Many of Charlie Chaplin's films, including the classic *Gold Rush*, a silent film, are part of British film heritage. Russian film-maker Eisenstein's unforgettable silent film *Battle-*



R. Nataraja Mudaliar.

ship Potemkin is almost a symbol of Russian cinema. Our own Hindi cinema celebrates Dada Saheb Phalke and his *Harishchandra* (1913). The rules of film grammar were formed during the silent era. The silent era is to cinema, what childhood is to a human being.

There were some pioneers in Tamil Nadu who had made

short films in the silent era, even before Nataraja Mudaliar. A landlord from Thanjavur, Marudamuthu Moopanan, filmed the coronation of George V in 1911 in London and screened it in Madras. When the first airplane landed on the Island grounds, he filmed it. From 1905, Swamikannu Vincent travelled all over India screening short films in tents. He travelled up to Peshawar. Later he built a cinema house called Variety Hall in Coimbatore. He also made a few films. Though all these films were lost, the details have been documented.

It was the pioneers of the silent era, like Nataraja Mudaliar, A. Narayanan and S. Vincent, who laid the foundation for Tamil cinema. Hopefully, when we celebrate the centenary of Tamil cinema in 2016, we will remember these pioneers.

In the Saraswati Mahal Library with PRADEEP CHAKRAVARTHY

Mouthwatering 19th Century Thanjavur fare

If India is well known for her hospitality, Thanjavur must certainly rank as amongst the best areas in the country. An eclectic combination of Telugu, Kannada, Tamil and Marathi cuisines makes Thanjavur a foodie's paradise, albeit the really best food is served at homes and not in the 'hotels'.

The Thanjavur Saraswati Mahal has a fascinating book called the *Raghunatha-Adbhutamam*. Written in the 16th Century, it recounts one day in the life of Vijayaraghava Nayaka and includes a mouthwatering array of 38 dishes that formed part of the royal feast. From the Maratha collections are two manuscripts and some recipes from them have been published in a book called *Sarabendra Paka Shastram*. Another publication of the library is the *Bhojana Kuthukala* that deals with food that is more medicinal in nature.

The manuscripts from which the 144 recipes in the *Sarabendra Paka Shastram* were taken are dated 1816 and 1825. They were recorded from oral statements (Jabbani) of "Butler" Venkatasami and Narayanan. Serfoji II had three kitchens in his palace – one for vegetarian food (Brahmani), one for non-vegetarian dishes (Marathi), and the third for English preparations (Angrezi). Note that the food in the court was quite different from the Maharashtra food. Tamarind, for example, was used extensively and, in fact, it is believed that *sambar* as we know it today was created in Tanjore when a Maratha cook added tamarind to *dhal*. Several streets in Tanjore still bear names of 'Mudubhogi', or palace chefs.

In addition to the kitchen was the Sherbet Khana, a department that specialised in liquid drinks – sorbets, milk, liquor, etc. Quality of ingredients was also carefully supervised.

The book has a collection of recipes in both English and Tamil and is divided into the following parts:

NON-VEGETARIAN DISHES

a. *Pulavs*; b. *Kababs* (similar to our cutlets); c. *Kaliha*, *Kurma* and Sauces; d. *Gola*, *Sunti*, *Dalsa*, Fried varieties. Here is a sample recipe:

Mincemeat Pooris

Ingredients: Mutton – 1 pound, garlic and coriander seeds – 1 tola (10.5 grams) each, pepper and cloves – 1/32 of a tola each, onions – 10 tolas, *paneer* – 5 tolas, salt – 1 tola, Ginger – 3 tolas, Cinnamon – 1/16 of a tola, Cardamom – 1/3 of a tola, Ghee – 10 tolas, Mint leaves – 1/2 tola, Maida flour – 40 tolas, and Ghee – 30 tolas.

Method: Make minced meat of 40 tolas of mutton after it is cleaned and washed. Add 1/2 tola salt and 10 tolas of water to cook. When the water evaporates, grind the cumin, garlic, ginger, cinnamon, cloves, pepper very well and then add it to the meat.

In a vessel, pour 10 tolas of ghee and when it is hot, add the onions and when they are brown add the meat and cook till moisture evaporates. Remove from heat and add the mint leaves finely chopped and the *paneer* finely shredded.

Make *maida* dough and between two small discs of dough place some of this meat and then fry it in a vessel with 30 tolas of ghee as you would make regular pooris.

VEGETARIAN DISHES

a. Rice dishes; b. *Sambar*, *Kolambu* and sauces. Here is a sample recipe.

Curd sauce

5 pounds of thick sweet curd. Grind it into a paste after frying it in ghee with 1 tola each of cumin and pepper and 2 red chillies. Grind the following: 1 tola garlic, 2 1/2 tola ginger and 3 tola salt and dissolve them into the curd. In a vessel, heat 4 1/2 tolas of ghee and to that add 1/4 tola of cumin seeds, 1 tola mustard seeds, 1/4 tola asafoetida, a small bunch of curry leaves. When the sound abates, add the curd and immediately remove it from the fire. Add coriander leaves and the other remaining paste. Well-cooked vegetables and *vadas* without holes (*amavadai*) can also be added after they have been cooked/roasted in ghee.

ENGLISH PREPARATIONS

a. Jellies, jams; b. Meat dishes and accompaniments
c. Pickles. Here is a sample recipe:

Mango jelly

12 green raw mangoes (approx. 160 tolas), remove skin, cut to pieces and keep aside. Mix 1 tola powdered cardamom, 4 cups sugar, and 2 tolas rosewater. In a tinned vessel kept on fire, add the mangoes and 20 tolas of water. Cook this well and strain the juice out for about 4 cups with a clean white cloth. Separately mix 160 tolas of sugar with 15 tolas of water into a thick syrup. Ensure the syrup is crystal clear. Mix mango juice into the syrup when the latter is boiling and add the rosewater and the powdered cardamom (in a small cotton bag tied). Remove vessel from fire, remove bag of cardamoms and check for bits and pieces in the jelly. Cool and store in glass jars.

Appendices have useful information on conversations about measures used for the book in our terms, English and Tamil words for Marathi words used, and a bibliography. The author laments the disappearance of the Maratha Military Hotels (in 1988, when the first edition was published) and it will be interesting to compare their menu with those in the book.

The *Sarabendra Paka Shastram* can be purchased from the Library at Rs.150.

Celebrating a sailing centenary

Sailing first started in Ennore, north of Madras, more than 100 years ago and then came to the city. Sir Francis Spring, the first Chairman of the Madras Port Trust, founded the Madras Sailing Club in 1911. The Club was later accorded 'Royal' status by a warrant from the Sovereign of the United Kingdom and its name was changed to The Royal Madras Yacht Club.

The Club used to be located near the timber shed area of the harbour. The popular class at that time was the Bembridge which is a largish boat like the Sea Bird today. The RMYC was a livewire club where the bottom line was Fun. The photographs of the parties held at the RMYC in the middle part of this century are those of ladies and gentlemen dressed in long dresses and tuxedos respectively. The dinners were formal "sit down", service was classy, the waiters wore white uniforms, turbans, etc. and the ambience "proper".

Today, after a number of relocations, the RMYC has come a full circle and is back at the

original premises selected by Sir Francis Springs; the area is now known as the Springhaven Wharf. The new club house was inaugurated on February 4, 1987.

The first of the Inter-Club Regattas, which this year's Centenary Regatta commemorated, was held in 1924 between the Royal Colombo Yacht Club and the RMYC in Madras.

The Club was affiliated to the Yachting Association of India after the YAI was formed in 1960 and has been conducting national sailing events.

At the international level, Rohini and Ajay Rau, Pallavi Shanbhag, Zephra Currimbhoy, Vir Menon, Deep Rekhi, Kuruvilla Abraham, Drona Narayanan, Navaz Currim-



International Regatta 2010 held in Madras.



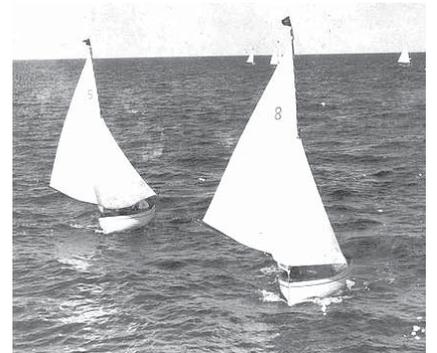
Claudius Cup - Race to the Marina Beach in the late 1990s.



Old Club House.



Evening tea and cake being served in the traditional style.



The Bembridge class of boats.

bhoy, Sandeep Srikanth, Niloufer Jamal, Rohit Ashok and Varun Prabhakar represented India between 1970 and 2010 winning many prizes.

During the December 2004 tsunami, the Club lost 12 boats and materials worth Rs. 25 lakh. Rafiq Sait, Munna Jamal, Jayraj Rau and many others kept the Club afloat during those tough times.

The present Commodore of the Club is Capt. Vivek Shanbhag, a keen sailor and an Airbus flight instructor in Air India.

The Club has planned to celebrate Madras Day on Septem-



Prize-giving head table.

ber 4, 2011 by sailing from the Harbour to Elliot's Beach in a procession. It has welcomed

members of the public interested in the sail to join them - for a fee.

Answers to Quiz

1. China; 2. Shammi Kapoor; 3. Standard & Poor's; 4. It is considered the darkest exoplanet ever; 5. 'Satyameva Jayathe'; 6. Google; 7. Cesc Fabregas; 8. Juno; 9. Widespread riots across London and other places in the UK; 10. Sree Padmanabhaswamy Temple in Thiruvananthapuram.

* * *

11. Raj Bhavan; 12. Bharathidasan; 13. He is the Commissioner of Police; 14. Chamier's Road; 15. Pantheon; 16. Loane Square; 17. It is the first commercial building in India to win a Green Gold rating; 18. Tipu Sultan handing over his two young sons as collateral security; 19. St. Matthias' Church; 20. The University Library and the Teaching (clock tower) Block.

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