

WE CARE FOR MADRAS THAT IS CHENNAI

MADRAS

MUSINGS

INSIDE

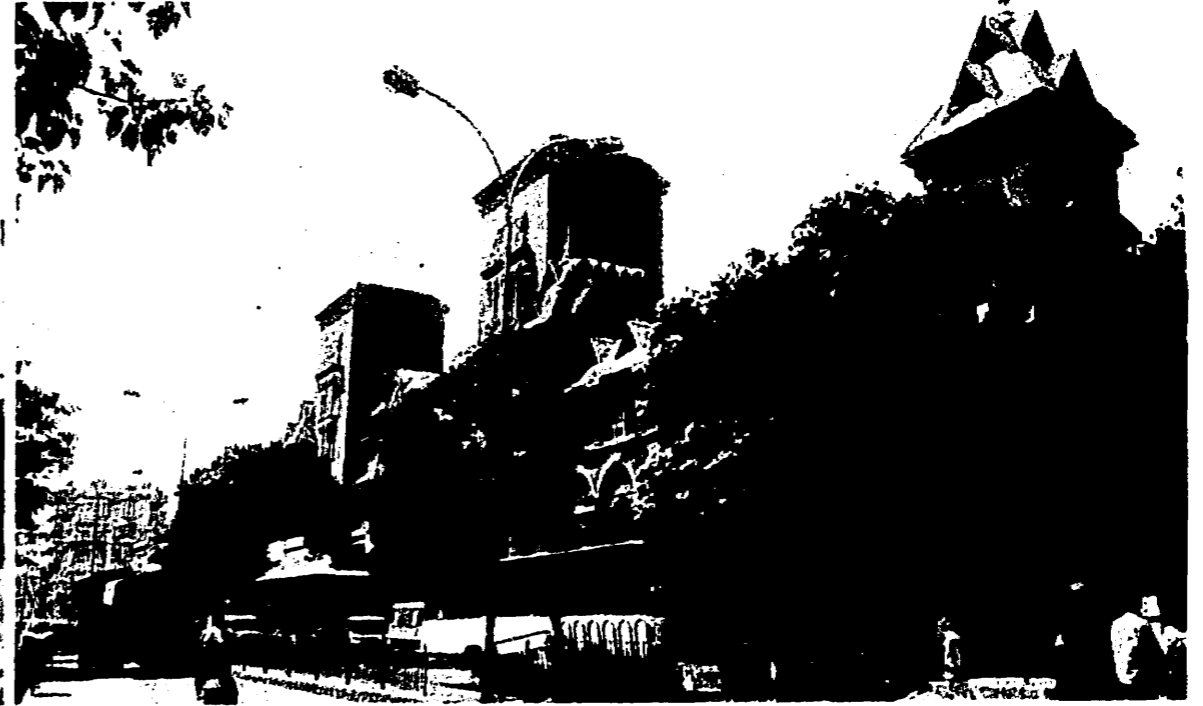
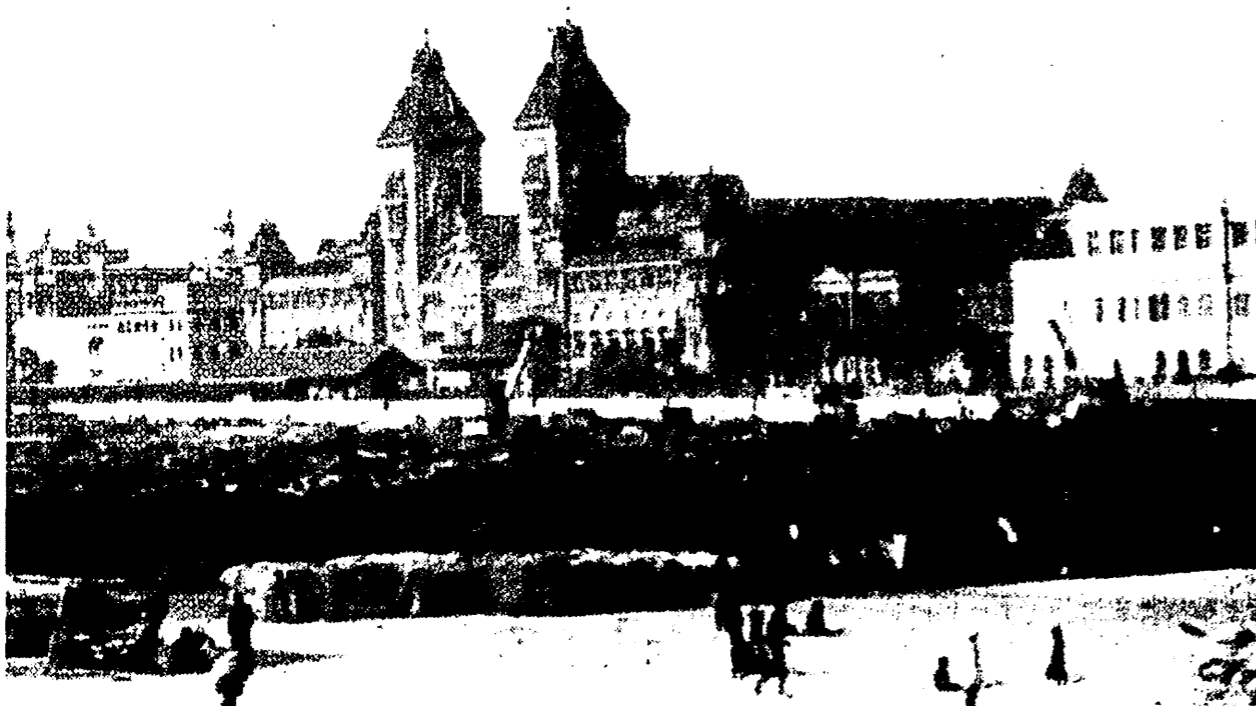
- The community & NGOs
- Dawk days to dark days
- Belated correspondence
- Cholamandalam to Sri Lanka
- Cricket in the 40s

Vol. X No. 15

FREE ISSUE

November 16-30, 2000

Save that building!



(By The Editor)

THE OLD...

What happened to Robert Chisholm's General Post Office building on the night of October 23rd/24th was tragic. But there is no use in crying over burnt wood and paper. What needs to be done IMMEDIATELY is to

- 1) prevent such tragedies occurring in heritage buildings in future, and
- 2) restore the GPO building to what it was, following the fundamental rules of conservation.

A major step towards preventing such tragedies in future would be by incorporating the Heritage Regulations into the Town and Country Planning Act/CMDA building regulations immediately and thereafter widening their scope and making the Regulations more comprehensive by legislating a Heritage Act. Both have been hanging fire for nearly three years now and we hope that the GPO blaze will light a fire under

Our OLD are two pictures of the General Post Office with the Chisholm 'county caps' in place. The picture in the top row dates to soon after the building was built, around the turn of the Century, before the Harbour was developed, and is an enlarged portion of a picture from the VINTAGE VIGNETTES Collection. The OLD (below) was taken shortly before the 'caps' were blown off



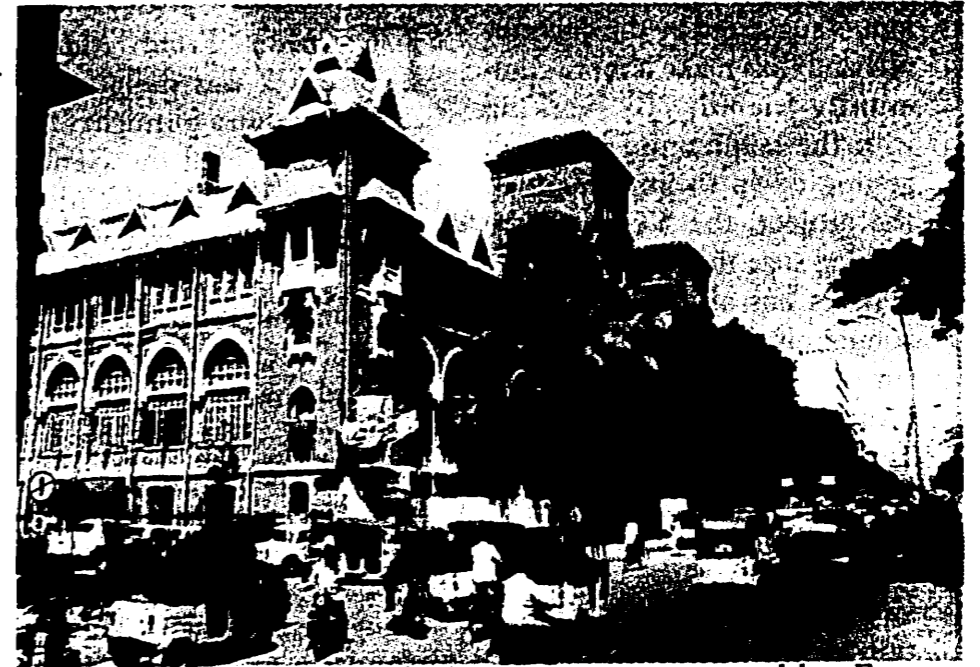
the seats of a few and make them stir into action.

Regulations and Acts will not prevent accidental fires, but they will, through regular inspection, ensure better maintenance, prevent hazardous misuse and inspire greater vigilance. And that will minimise the chances of mishaps occur-

ring. Such Regulations and Acts might just also help create a little pride in occupants of listed buildings and make them want to look after them a little better.

The other way of creating that pride and demonstrating what model use could be made of a dilapidated heritage build-

ing, part of which is now a shell, would be by RESTORING the GPO. In many ways, the fire could be seen as a blessing in disguise. While lighting a fire under people to restore a building whose restoration has long been talked about, it has at the same time NOT damaged the building so badly as to make res-



toration impossible. Expert opinion, Madras Musings' pictures today and our visits to the site all show the wings intact, the walls of the central block —

... & THE 'NEW'

(Contd. on Page 4)

• Madras Musings is pleased to do something different this fortnight. We introduce colour on three pages of this issue. Not because we have received extra support, but because our major story, which occupies these pages and more, warrants it. By bringing readers the pictures of the General Post Office before and after the blaze in colour, we are able to provide them as close a true-life picture as possible of the change wrought by the damage — something black-and-white would never have been able to do. The comparison, we are sure, will make readers realise that this building can be saved — and MUST. — The Editor

Mamallapuram monuments to be 'privatised'?

By A Staff Reporter

Are Mamallapuram monuments to be privatised? The Central Government has plans to list 34 national tourist sites for the private sector to 'take over' and provide better facilities for the tourists. Mamallapuram is the only one on the list from Tamil Nadu.

The monuments will remain government-owned, but the private sector will be allowed to develop the precincts and be expected to maintain the monuments.

The other monuments in the list are the Red Fort, Fatehpur Sikri, Agra Fort, monuments at Sanchi and Khajuraho in Madhya Pradesh, Qutab Minar, Humayun's Tomb, Hemis in Jammu and Kashmir, Chittorgarh Fort, Fort and Churches in Daman, monuments at

Hampi, Pattadakal in Karnataka, Bekal Fort in Kerala, Ajanta, Ellora, Elephanta Caves in Maharashtra, Rani Ka Vav in Patan, Gujarat, Mughal Sarai Dakhni, Jalandhar, Sheikh Chilli's Tomb in Kurukshetra, Kangra Fort, Nalanda in Bihar, Hazarduari Palace in Murshidabad, Temple of Vishnu in Manipur, Unakoti, Tripura, Dimapur Fort, stone memorial of Nartiang, Meghalaya, remains of Bhishmak Nagar, Arunachal Pradesh, and monuments of Sibsagar, Assam.

The Ministry of Tourism also has plans to set up a Tourism Development Fund for infrastructure development at these sites in cooperation with the private sector.

Do they want what's offered?

The presentation that *The Man From Madras Musings* and several others watched one recent evening was a thought-provoking one. It was made by an NGO seeking support for a scheme it felt would improve the lives of the community in one locality of the city. An animated discussion followed. But at the end of it, two questions asked by hardened businessmen remained. And the answers were not the most convincing.

MMM mentions the questions here because they pertain to all NGO projects, particularly those pertaining to the City.

The FIRST one was: What makes the NGO think that the project it has proposed is wanted by the community it is planning to serve?

The SECOND one was: What makes the NGO think that the project will, when completed and handed over to the community, be sustained by the local people?

In fact, MMM thinks that the answers to both questions are interconnected. But MMM is not very certain of the solidity of the answers.

The NGO answer to the first question tends to be on these lines. The local community is happy with what it has only because it does not know that something better can exist. If something better is demonstrated to the community, it will buy into it. To make what is better community-friendly, the NGO will take its project to the community, discuss the need for the project with the community, and build into the project all the inputs suggested by the community and thus make it more community-friendly. By working with the community BEFORE getting down to implementing the project, the NGO will be making sure that what it finally delivers has all the inputs the community wants. But can it be sure that a project that transforms an area where a certain lifestyle has been established is what the community really needs, even if it has community inputs? Thus, at the end of answering the question, the question remains. But as someone pointed out, till you try it out you cannot be certain that what is basically an idea will work in practice.

The second question pertains to sustainability. What makes an NGO transforming a whole area think that the transformation will be tended on a sustained basis by the local community even if the transformation is in accordance with its wishes? The NGO holds that if you give a community a project it wants, done in the manner it wants, it will without doubt care for it, because it sees it as its own project. It is, however, almost axiomatic in India that any NGO project will gradually begin to deteriorate the moment it is turned over to the community. Even AMUL, which MMM holds survives only through strong 'outside' leadership.

There are, as MMM sees it, two reasons for this state of affairs in the Indian context. First, activity in India generally thrives on the father figure, strong leader concept; there is little individual initiative. Two, our version of socialism — curiously first bestowed on us by the Raj — has the community always expecting the Government or some father-figure-like body tending what it grants for the good of the common man. The common man has never been made to feel that he has to contribute something or encouraged to do things on his own. The result is the moment a project is handed over to the local community, it begins to find fewer and fewer caretakers every year. It is only so long as the NGO continues to be a visible presence, offering concrete inputs, that the project is sustainable.

It's not a very hopeful scenario. But if a respected NGO thinks a project worth trying, only by trying it out will we learn at least a little more about answering these pessimistic questions — and plan to build a little better next time out. MMM, therefore, hopes the NGO gets the support it wishes, but MMM also looks forward to discovering what kind of answers to the two questions are found and how they are put into practice to ensure permanency of the project. That may be the most significant part of this exercise, for if some answers are found, replication of them could well help many another project get further ahead.

Commitment needed

The Man From Madras Musings was delighted to hear that within a fortnight of the tragedy that befell the General Post Office, the Postal authorities convened a meeting with the Tamil Nadu Chapter of the Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage (INTACH-TN) and the Civil Engineering Department of the Indian Institute of Technology, Madras. At the meeting the postal representatives expressed the willingness to explore the possibilities of restoring the building to its former splendour and both invitees, MMM learns, agreed to help.

When Moore Market burnt down in 1983 and Spencer's followed suit in 1985, when Ben-tinck's Building was alleged to be "unsafe" and pulled down in 1991-92, the conservation movement was in its infancy not only in Tamil Nadu but in India as well. Awareness of the need to restore and conserve was yet to develop to any appreciable extent. And IIT-Madras, very much in existence, had not as yet demonstrated its commitment to conservation as it has done occasionally in recent years. But what was significant, in the present context, was that though there were conservationists, the beginnings of a conservation movement and IIT around, none of them was invited by those concerned with the fire-stricken or the "weakened" buildings for a discussion on the

possibilities of restoration and conservation. Instead, the buildings were just pulled down, all protests ignored.

Even when the Police Headquarters was "condemned", neither conservationists nor IIT engineers were consulted. Fortunately by then the Heritage Movement had made some headway and gained a modicum of strength to take the issue to court. The consequence of that was the first major public building to be restored in Chennai — and, visually, the end result has pleased all. But here too, conservation experts were not consulted before the restoration, with the result that Government civil engineering methodology rather than conservation techniques was used in the restoration, making the end result something less than a model one. Nevertheless, MMM has held, in the face of disagreement expressed by conservation purists, something is better than nothing, a step taken forward is better than no step at all or, worse, a step taken backward. In fact, that first step has led to the Police tidying up a couple of other buildings it occupies and

begun work on extending the Police Headquarters in harmonious fashion. But this too without recourse to advice from conservation experts — resulting in less than perfect results.

It is in this context that the meeting convened by the postal authorities is significant. By showing a willingness to talk to the conservation experts right from the beginning it has indicated that it is certainly willing to consider restoration on classical lines using the best local experts in the field. But that willingness to talk needs to be translated into something more substantial, MMM feels. It is necessary for the Minister of Posts and Telegraphs to make a public commitment that the building WILL be restored to its former splendour and will, when restored, be a MODEL OF CONSERVATION. Such a commitment — particularly in the context of the expressed willingness of INTACH-TN and IIT-Madras to help — is needed much more than any number of bureaucratic-style meetings convened, MMM feels. May we expect such a commitment from you, Mr. Minister?

The vanishing creek

Passing through what was once Adyar Creek and its numerous islands the other day, *The Man From Madras Musings* found that the road that had made the whole area one land mass with only the faintest vestiges of backwaters left was itself fast being overwhelmed by new

constructions. Indeed, San Thomé High Road, once a pleasant drive connecting Mylapore and Adyar, is becoming another major and congested thoroughfare of the city as construction goes on apace alongside it.

The UNDERground water storage tanks facility has now risen several storeys ABOVE-ground, adjacent to it a huge communication facility is rising, the Ambedkar Memorial is in place, and new blocks of highrise for a variety of purposes are coming up. That much of this building is by Government is tragic, for it was Government that once wanted to make the Adyar Estuary a sanctuary and proclaimed loudly its support to the Forest Department's intentions. Now there is hardly any scrubland left in this area and the backwaters are vanishing faster than ever, the opportunity to even divert them no longer possible, what with all the landfill that's been going on for years.

Give it a few more years and Government will change the whole geography of an area that was once the famed port of Mylapore. The words 'Adyar Creek', MMM predicts, will no longer be in existence, because of backwaters there will be none any more. What we'll find here instead will be one of the busiest parts of the city, with the slums at its edges only spreading further to provide support services for all the buildings coming up. And one more sylvan part of Chennai, a 'lung' the city needs, would have been lost.

Traffic nightmare

Some recent statistics *The Man From Madras Musings* was reading conjured up visions of the present chaos on Chennai roads growing into a frightening nightmare in less than five years. Those statistics pointed out that in the 1980s, at the beginning of the Transport Revolution triggered by Rajiv Gandhi, the entire State had a vehicle population of only around 3.25 lakh. Today, Chennai alone has a vehicle population of 12 lakh! And the predictions are that by 2005, Chennai alone will have 17 lakh vehicles, and the State will have 53 lakh vehicles, most of them in its urban areas. That kind of urban traffic is bound to be a nightmare for both road-users as well as traffic regulators. MMM sees little being done about the present situation; he has no doubt that less is being done about planning for the future.

One suggestion made to ease the situation is to create new roads. Such creation is easier said than done, given all the problems road developers find with land acquisition. But assuming that that problem can be overcome, there are other problems that appear to be far more difficult to solve.

Take the case of just one new road that's been developed

in the city in recent years. This road was to be from Greames Road to Anna Circle, and then developed further south from Greames Road as a kind of duplication of Mount Road. The first stretch developed was along the Cooum bank, from Binny Road to Harris Road, near the Gaiety Cinema. Have you ever taken this road? If you haven't, MMM's advice is DON'T; if you have, MMM is sure you wouldn't have a second time. For it has every problem any new road is bound to have in Chennai — till the attitude of the city's citizens changes — and a few additional ones unique to it.

Broad enough for three-lane traffic, one lane has vanished, with the verge on the riverbank being taken up with wild growth, waste dumps and open-air vehicle repair shops that abound unchecked. As for the road surface, just a few years old, it is abominable and no attempt has been made to improve it. And to top it all, for a road meant to ensure smooth movement of diverted traffic, it has two extra-high speed-breakers on either side of the MES gates where half a dozen security men, who could easily control traffic, stand idle the day long. That is, except when they spring into action to operate one of the unique features of this road — two barriers that can be lowered and raised on either side of the MES gates. MMM has seen neither a rail crossing here nor a sales tax checkpoint nor a toll booth, but these barriers keep coming down at the oddest of times and seem to stay put, closing up the road, after dark. Now if that's how a new road is being treated, no wonder the planners have given up on extending it further south of Binny Road!

Frankly, MMM does not think any such solutions as new roads and newer flyovers are going to work unless there is regular and strict enforcement of traffic rules, the city's citizenry itself becomes more disciplined when using the road, roadside encroachments are removed, and pedestrian and cycle paths created. Till law and order returns to the roads of Chennai we can only head further from chaos into nightmare.

TAILPIECE: MMM saw it happen the other day at one of the busiest junctions of the city. An Ambassador with the red light on its roof switched off jumped a red traffic light and brought to a screeching halt the crossing traffic. A traffic constable on the other side of the junction jumped in the transgressor's way before he could pick up speed, but he would not stop, creeping forward to force the constable out of his way. To the constable's credit he refused to yield and even as he retreated step by step he put his hands on the bonnet of the car as though to stop it. When the car eventually stopped, an Inspector came along, spoke to someone inside the Ambassador and waved it along. The last MMM saw of that little cameo was the Inspector and constable in animated conversation. Was the constable being berated or commended, MMM still wonders.

— MMM

OUR READERS WRITE



Burning buildings — I

Am I paranoid or is there any method in all these fires which we see sprouting around us? First, it was Moore Market which conveniently burnt down when all of us were fighting to preserve it. Then it was Spencer's, which conveniently made way for a very modern multi-storied building. Now it is the G.P.O.

It is a little strange that there is a fire during the monsoon season, when the buildings are wet. While Madras may not have had its due showers of rain, the few showers we have had every night should have been sufficient to keep the building wet and contained the fire.

Has anyone ever discovered the cause of the Moore Market fire?

Nanditha C. Krishna
Hon. Director
The C.P. Ramaswami
Aiyar Foundation
"The Grove"
1, Eldams Road
Alwarpet, Chennai 600 018.

Burning buildings — II

It is with deep sadness that I learnt of the hastily fire in the General Post Office in Chennai.

This great Victorian edifice that once loomed over the other buildings, was the pride of Madras that is Chennai ever since it was opened in 1885. Designed by Chisholm in Indo-Saracenic style, it was a contrast to the Calcutta GPO building that was built with tall Corinthian columns in 1868.

The twin Victorian towers that originally graced the imposing Madras edifice were badly damaged by foul weather early in the 20th century and they were modified by flattening the base with straight sides in the shape of a square.

It is painful to note that this is the third heritage building to be burnt in Madras.

May I take this opportunity to request the authorities to take all possible preventive measures to protect public buildings from fire?

R. Soundararajan
(Retd. Faculty Member of
Postal Training Centre, Mysore)
1/46, Sivasakti Nagar
Nagapattinam 611 002.

Burma days

Reader G. Sundaram has mentioned that his father-in-law, Dr. R. Venkateswaran of Burma, was among the prominent residents of EE Road (MM, October 1st). Dr. Venkateswaran was a senior lecturer in Chemistry at the University College, Rangoon, and I was his student in the late 1930s. He had a commanding personality and used to wear a suit, tie and a turban, and always had a pleasant smile. He was a respected member of the community and liked by staff and students.

He was a good teacher. The professor, Dr. D.H. Peacock, a great teacher and an eminent research chemist who became a scientific adviser to the British Government during the World War II, relied upon him to organise and conduct postgraduate classes.

Among the teaching faculty of the Rangoon University from Madras were Ms. Kamakshi (Chemistry), Mr. Sreenivasan (Physics), Mr. Jambunathan and Mr. Hari Hara Iyer (English). The late Dr. A.R. Iravathy, who was Principal of Queen Mary's College, studied geography under the world renowned Professor Dudley Stamp.

The article on EE Road residents was valuable, as it evoked fond memories in the older generation and gave useful information for

The example of Kingston

I lived in the little Caribbean island of Jamaica for eight years during the Nineties and wish to share with your readers that island's experience in revitalising downtown Kingston.

Downtown Kingston, once the pride of the capital, fell upon evil days during the 1970s and 1980s which were decades of political strife. Capital and people fled and the area soon became mired in poverty and the hotbed of political and drug-related violence.

During the Nineties, a determined effort led by the private sector saw the regeneration of downtown Kingston. The Kingston Restoration Company

was formed with initial equity contributions from private sector companies.

The Company's mandate was to revitalise downtown Kingston and restore it to its former glory. The management of the Company which was entirely in private hands, drew up a plan of action which included the restoration of a number of classical buildings which had lost their lustre and fallen into a state of dilapidation and disrepair. The plans were comprehensive and holistic and took into account the need for all-round development, employment generation, infrastructure upgradation, recreation, secu-

gency unless the wound is severe. However, it is best to safeguard against rabies and tetanus even after a light scratch or lick, if there is a suspicion of the animal's saliva having come into contact with the blood stream through any spot where the skin is broken or sore. The *Readers Digest Family Medical Advisor* mentions that rabies symptoms can develop after ten days to a year, usually 20 to 90 days, if the animal was rabid. So a person bitten should start the anti-rabies treatment the same day or the next, as convenient, without reacting in panic.

The appropriate vaccines seem to be readily available, at least in urban areas. Five ordinary injections are usually necessary, spaced over a month and cost some Rs. 300 each. For those who can't afford it, a much cheaper vaccine is available at government hospitals. (Medical specialists can perhaps comment on their relative efficacy, keeping in mind the possibility of expensive medicines which have cheap alternatives being associated with slick marketing and brainwashing techniques by ruthless multinational corporations.)

My impression is that dog bites from roadside strays are quite rare in comparison to injuries from

vehicles, which are often real and bloody emergencies. I have had several narrow escapes myself, and now every time I step out or attempt to cross a road it is a conscious journey into the unknown. So I am not inclined to join the ranks of those who rail against stray dogs (even if it means being bracketed with the likes of the third Mrs Gandhi). At least the ones which frequent our street have the merit of raising an alarm when strangers come by at night and the watchmen are slumbering. A quote from Mark Twain's *Pudd'n head Wilson* comes to mind: "If you pick up a starving dog and feed him and make him prosperous, he will not bite you. That is the principal difference between a dog and a man." Doth any reader care to comment on such trivial matters?

Thomas Tharu
4-A-7, "Kasyap"
Nehrunagar Fourth Street
Adyar, Chennai 600 020.

the younger generation. Can I hope to see a similar article on the eminent doctors of Poomalallee High Road, then known as the Harley Street of Madras.

Dr. H.D. Singh
Retd. Dean, KMC & H
3362/O, AE, 8th Street
Anna Nagar, Chennai 600 040.

Of dogs and men

A recent encounter with a stray dog, necessitating a series of anti-rabies shots, has NOT made me change my opinion regarding the RELATIVE magnitude of various road hazards to which pedestrians are exposed.

The greater danger by far is from the two-legged species — those which whiz about in four- / three- / two-wheeled contraptions, as well as those who occupy positions of 'authority' from which they routinely abolish pavements, sanction or encourage encroachments (like hoardings, fenced gardens on public sidewalks, fly-overs which leave no road space at the sides...), and ignore complaints from ordinary folk who have no influences in high places.

To the best of my knowledge, a dog or animal bite is not an emer-

gency unless the wound is severe.

A large part of the funding for the programme came from USAID, with smaller contributions from Government and the private sector.

The results of the programme, particularly as regards the restoration of many heritage buildings, were striking.

Could we not apply a similar model in Chennai?

R. Sankar
Flat 2B, Svethaa
2 (old 15)
9th Cross Street
Shasri Nagar
Chennai 600 020

Waiting for orders

Reference reader S.R. Rajagopal's letter in MM, October 16th, we have already requested the Government to issue specific orders to extend the issue of free passes to schooling handicapped children studying in schools which are not recognised by the Director of School Education or the Director of Elementary Education, on par with other students studying in schools recognised by the Director of School Education / Director of Elementary Education. On receipt of the orders from the Government, free passes will be issued as per those orders.

General Manager
Metropolitan Transport Corpn.
(Ch.Dn.I) Ltd., Pallavan House
Anna Salai, Chennai 600 002.

Editor's Note: How long does an order take to come in these circumstances?

PLEASE NOTE

• All letters for The Editor's attention should be addressed to The Editor, c/o Lokavani Hall-Mark Press Pvt. Ltd., 62/63, Greames Road, Chennai 600 006.

• All business correspondence should be addressed to The Director, Chennai Heritage, 260-A, TTK Road, Chennai 600 018.

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Notes on an absorbing issue

Madras Musings of October 16th contained so much information to be 'mused' over I wonder whether any other journal is capable of packing so much within such a size!

1. Chitrakulam, Mylapore, which is being renovated for the third time, should at least get water this time. Care, however, has to be taken to provide steps only on the eastern side of the tank, for access from the temple, so that the tank does not get dirtied by antisocial elements.
2. 'Short 'N' Snappy' mainly deals with slum clearance. These facts had been already gone into when the Slum Clearance Board came into being in the 1970s, after a detailed study by a ministerial deputation of the condition of the slums in

Singapore. Slum Clearance Board apartments were constructed only after this study, but sadly, no attention has been paid for the periodical maintenance of the flats nor have concrete steps been taken to prevent the proliferation of slums. That is the reason for the present predicament.

3. Quite interestingly, or may be as a strange coincidence, 'The OLD and the NEW' photographs were printed above the caption "Two buildings to save". The old Victory House (which is now the VGP showroom) housed the once-famous Tamil daily *Swadesamitran* in which the great national poet Bharathir worked. This building had ornamental cast iron pillars, spiral staircases, teakwood flooring etc. The front portion was occupied by the 'Annapoorna Cafete-

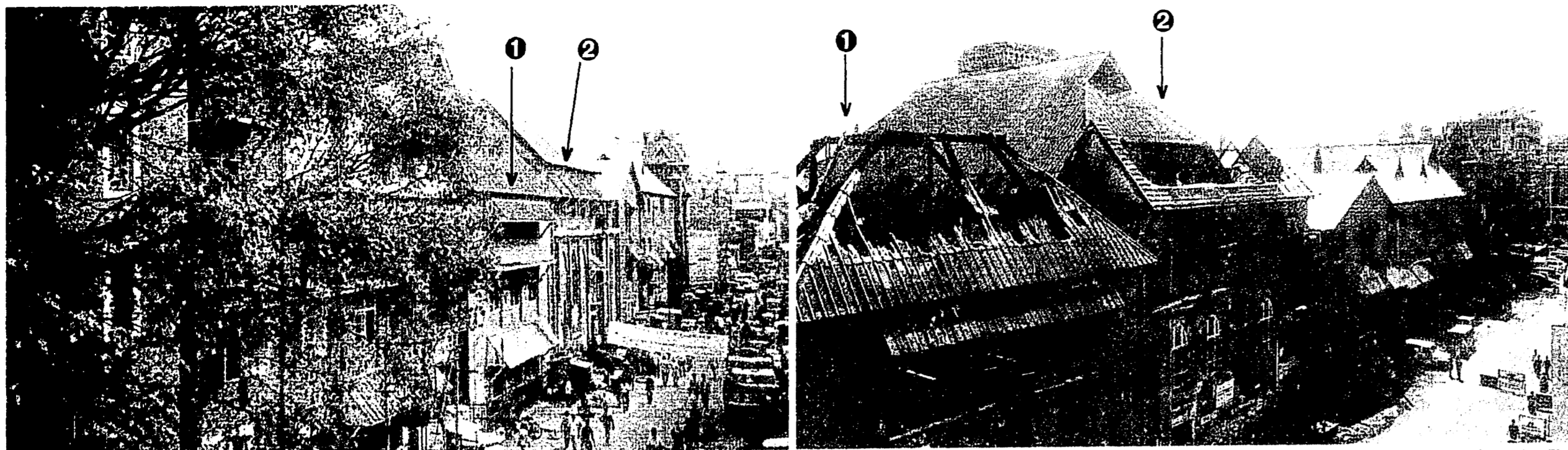
ria' (in the 1950s) which served hygienically prepared food items at cheap rates. After it was shifted to its present building inside Government Estate, *Victory House* was occupied by Air India before it came into the hands of the VGP group. Sadly, this heritage building has been reconstructed. Another heritage building of the former South India Cooperative Insurance Co. Ltd., which had a clock tower, was pulled down to accommodate the present L.L.C. Housing Finance Branch.

4. Strangely, the "Madras Museum" offers conservation services! As the saying goes, "Physician heal thyself". The Museum and other buildings in its complex are in dire need of conservation and I am tempted to ask what the 'Museum' proposes to do about it.

5. Smt. M.L.V.'s interview kindled so many nostalgic memories. After her, who is there to sing Sri Purandaradasa's *krithis* with the same verve and gusto! Her *Tiruppavai* songs, set to tune by the great Ariyakudi, are quite unparalleled and enthrall us even now. Who can forget her melodious rendering of Maharaja Swati Tirunala's *krithis*, some of which were set to tune by Sri Semman-gudi, especially *Bhavayami Raghuramam*. Her untimely demise is surely an irreparable loss to the music world.

With so much more in it, the October 16th issue of *Madras Musings* was an absorbing issue.

T.M. Sundararaman
19, Nallappan Street
Mylapore, Chennai 600 004.

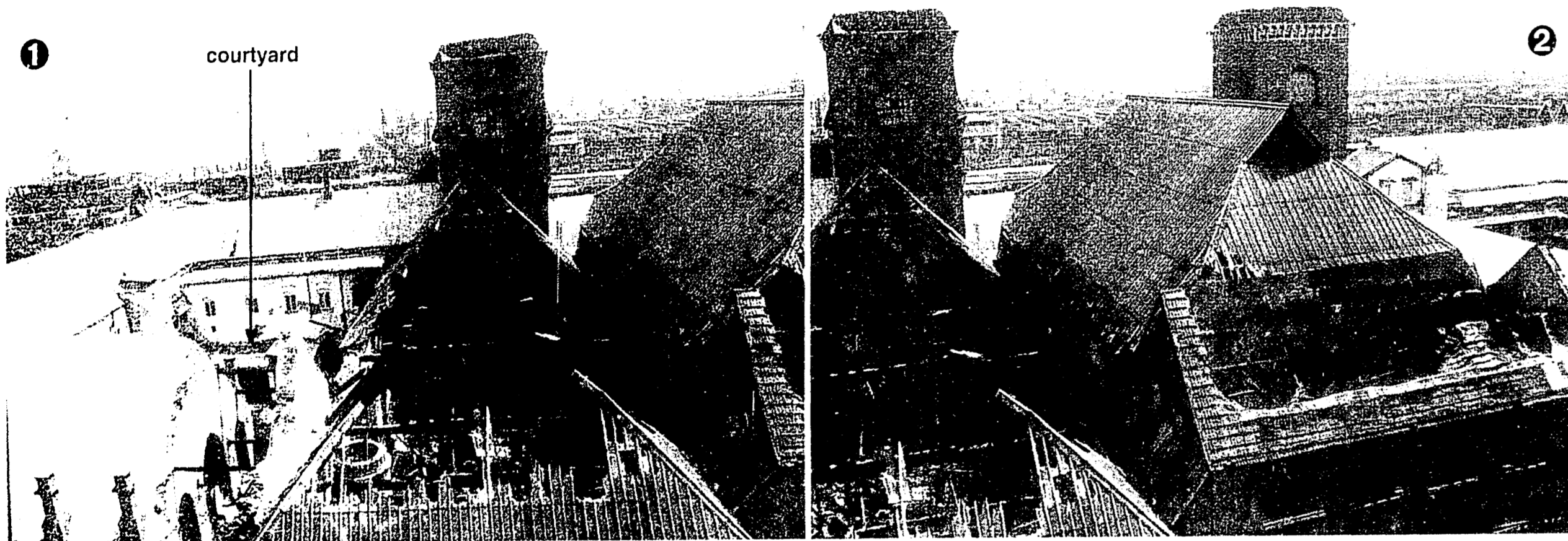


THE OLD...

We give you a second set of THE OLD and THE NEW this fortnight. The 'NEW' shows the two central blocks of the GPO that were most affected by the blaze. Their location, at the rear of the building, is clearly seen in our 'NEW' (above). The arrows indicate the two blocks, close-ups of which, below, clearly show that only the halls within have been destroyed and that the shell stands solid, fit for restoration.

... & THE 'NEW'

With the equally ample wings of the building intact, here is an opportunity to restore the WHOLE building and do a model job of it. NOTE: The picture, below left, shows something few of us realised... that the building had a huge courtyard!



Save that building

(Contd. from page 1)
the affected area — standing strong and tall, and only about two-thirds of the interior of this portion and its roof gutted. Providence would appear to have provided an ideal platform from which restoration could begin — if only there was a will. It is now upto the Postal Department and its Minister and senior officials to make the most of this opportunity and show India how model restoration can be done.

The Indian Railways has in the last couple of years begun to list its heritage buildings and other constructions and has been considering how to restore and conserve them. The Army had begun to do the same about a year or so ago — though what it is doing, or not doing, in Fort St. George, where it had its beginnings, is SAD. The Postal Department, however, had long before these institutions, in fact, in 1993/94, drawn up a list of its heritage buildings and had begun doing something about them by restoring the Bombay General Post Office. In Tamil Nadu, the Madras GPO, and the post offices in Nagapattinam, Udhamandalam and Coonoor were

listed and it was stated at the time that restoration of the Madras GPO would follow completion of the work in Bombay. In fact, Elias Koshy, a conservation specialist in Madras, was approached as long ago as 1994 for advice, but nothing came of his response, as his recent letter to INTACH Tamil Nadu, published on page 6, shows. Another letter published on page 6 shows that the Postal Authorities just a month before the fire had sought INTACH's inputs on restoring and renovating the building. But INTACH's response was not replied to — and then was overtaken by events. The Postal Department's request to INTACH followed — but may not have been a consequence of — a report from the Fire Department in July, pointing out that the building was vulnerable to fire and advising on what needed to be immediately done. That advice will, we hope, be heeded when the building is restored.

That restoration is a possibility, Madras Musings infers from the fact that Postmaster General Vatsal Raghu convened a meeting within ten days of the fire with INTACH Tamil Nadu and

the Civil Engineering Department of IIT. Madras Musings understands that both organisations agreed that **THE BUILDING COULD BE RESTORED** and that they would be willing to team together to help the Postal Department restore the building. The PMG was informed that, as a first step, the debris should be examined and the entire building documented. Some of Rajind N. Christy's pictures published today, and others he did for Madras Musings when there was that talk a few years ago that the building may be restored, are possibly the only interior shots available of the building before the fire and could well help in this documentation.

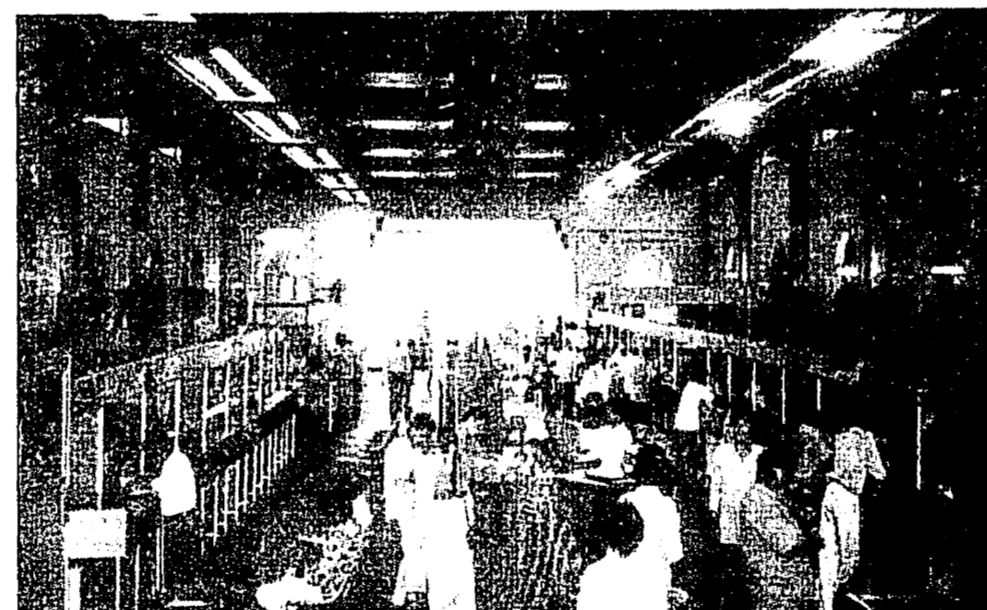
The hope expressed by the invitees at the meeting that since the building was symmetrical, valuable inputs could be derived from corresponding areas in surviving parts of the building, is however likely to be a forlorn one, because the most solid sections of the interior have, over the years, been torn down and replaced with jerry-built haphazard construction. Nevertheless, in the absence of plans, there is enough visible to be able to do a reasonable re-construction.

But in many ways, the most important statement at the meeting was INTACH's in response to the PMG's question whether the use of timber could be avoided in the restoration, in order to reduce the risk of fire. Madras Musings understands that INTACH emphasised,

‘The building would be a Grade “A” heritage building by anyone’s listing standards. As such, any restoration/re-construction work should conform to the highest conservation standards and therefore the materials and techniques used must be as close to the original as possible. Fire risk could be substantially reduced or even eliminated by installing up-to-date fire detection systems such as smoke/fire detectors, fire alarm systems and fire fighting systems. As the Department of Posts had restored similar buildings elsewhere in the country, it should consider the historic context and save the building for posterity by authentic restoration.’

Madras Musings calls on the authorities to take these words to heart and make a commitment on those lines. Madras Musings calls on its readers to react to this tragedy by calling for the Postal Authorities to **SAVE THAT BUILDING** — and save it according to the highest standards of conservation. May the resto-

ration of the GPO prove a model for the whole country and a beacon for the conservation movement.



The main hall (above) and a second big hall (below) leading off from it, photographed a few years ago when it looked as though the building was to be restored.



On right, from left: The arched 'doorway' which connects the two halls above and close-ups of portions of the two halls, all taken a few years ago. Note the amount of woodwork in the building, particularly in the ceiling scheme in the picture in the centre. What the tower is in the picture on far right RAJIND N CHRISTY, who took all these photographs, was never able to discover. Perhaps a reader will shed some light on it.

See page 6

From dawn days to dark days

It was Governor Harrison (1711-1717) who first started a postal service in Madras. To carry mail to Bengal by dak-runner. By 1736, a postal system of sorts was in place. A suggestion in 1785 by John Philip Burton to Governor Alexander Davidson led to a post office being established in Fort St. George.

The first post office in the Presidency was opened on June 1, 1786 outside the Sea Gate of Fort St. George, with A. Campbell as Postmaster General. It was shifted inside Fort St. George on October 1, 1837. Later, it moved to the premises in George Town known as the 'Garden House' next to the general market in 1856 and then to a location on Popham's Broadway. New receiving houses, as they were called, were added — RH-3 Triplicane and RH-4 Mount Road being followed in 1855 by St. Thomé and Teynampet, RH5 and RH6, respectively. There were no letter boxes before 1854 and were provided at post offices only on introduction of postage stamps in 1854. One of the first letter

boxes was placed in Moubray's Road, by John Philip Burton's residence.

The General Post Office that was opened in June 1786 was open from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. for delivery of letters and from 6 p.m. to 9 p.m. for despatch of letters. In 1837 the working hours were revised and were fixed from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. with two deliveries, at 10 a.m. and 3 p.m. Outgoing paid letters were stamped with red ink and unpaid letters in black ink. To distinguish the first delivery, letters were stamped with black ink and the

● by **Rajind N Christy**

second with red ink. In 1834, a subsidiary post office was opened at Hunter's Road, Vepery, and Moubray Sattalah Street, Royapettah, for transmission of letters to GPO on payment of ½ anna over and above the regulated postage. In 1874 there were nine post offices in the city.

Attention to prompt delivery was the order of the day and in 1846 the mails were made ready within 1 hour and 20 minutes of receipt of steamer mails and within 40 minutes in the case of Bombay mails. The rendezvous flag was hoisted on the flagstaff to announce the commencement of window delivery of letters received from England.

In 1840 the Postmaster General, Madras, supplied postmen

with handbells to be rung on the streets. Failure to ring the bell on the street was an offence.

Whenever a boat was sent for the mail, the Admiralty Agent or Captain or Purser of a sailing vessel had to travel in the boat. The boat contractor was required to provide 1 rindal, 12 rowers and 1 waterboy. The mail was carried from the Harbour to GPO in bullock carts accompanied by three coolies and a Postal official.

Three stables were constructed when the new GPO building was completed in 1884. The mail was carried by horse cart in the city till 1918. Motorised transport began in 1915. The Telegraph came to the city in 1853 and was made available to the public only from February 1, 1855.

The Indo-Saracenic GPO Building was designed by Robert Chisholm and came up on a site known as the Abercrombie Battery. In 1868, when the GPO buildings were under construction in Calcutta and Bombay, a site was being sought in Madras too. The Madras Chamber of Commerce took up the issue and the Government allotted the site in 1873. In 1874, Lord Hobart, the Governor, turned the first sod. When the building was opened in 1884, it had twin towers, 125 feet tall with decorative caps, which fell off during the monsoon in 1920. The building, 162'x32' with entrances on the eastern, northern and southern sides, was three-storeyed and



The only damage to the front of the building is to a few panes in the huge Gothic window over the entrance (above, left hand corner of the arch). Above the arch, as in the three other pictures in this grouping, are examples of the small 'human' embellishments, very Indian in creation, to be found everywhere on the facade of the building — something no one ever notices today.



had a large hall on the first floor. The second floor was the residence of the officers. The total cost of the building was Rs.6,80,850.

On March 1, 1884 the office of the Postmaster General moved into its new home from the Char-

tered Mercantile Bank Building on North Beach Road. The General Post Office started functioning from April 26, 1884 at this site. I look forward to it putting behind it those dark hours of October 2000 and rising on its architecture unchanged.



Correspondence too late

Mrs. Kamala Rathnam, Director, Documentation (AR), INTACH Bharathiyam, Near Humayun Tomb, Nizamuddin, New Delhi 110 013.

Maj. Gen. L.K. Gupta Chapter Division Indian National Trust for Art & Cultural Heritage No. 71, Lodhi Estate New Delhi

21.09.2000

This is regarding restoration/conservation works of Chennai GPO, a Heritage building.

The GPO building was constructed in 1884 in the classical Indo-Saracenic style. While such buildings are functional, extensive renovation and special maintenance would be required to strengthen the structures and restore them as near as possible to their original condition. Now it is felt that such pure maintenance will not be useful and serve the purpose unless the extensive renovation work required is attended to.

I would request that detailed inspection may kindly be carried out by your Organisation with the assistance of the Department early. After joint inspection, estimates with detailed drawings and specifications for the project may be sent to us immediately. Necessary sanctions will be obtained from the Postal Directorate, expeditiously.

Necessary assistance may be obtained from Shri S. Kathiresan, Executive Engineer (Civil), Postal Civil Division, Chennai 600 008 in respect of structural/execution details and Smt. Sugunamani, Architect (Postal), Office of the Principal Chief Postmaster General, Tamil Nadu Circle, Chennai 600 002 in respect of Architectural assistance. Chief Postmaster, Chennai GPO, Chennai 600 001, will of course be available for assistance.

You are also requested to send a representative at an early date for a meeting with Principal Chief PMG for co-ordination purpose.

Lt. Col. T. Panneer Selvam Director of Postal Services (Chennai) C/o Principal Chief Postmaster General Tamil Nadu Circle, Chennai 600 002.

* * *

Quizzin' with Ram'nan

Quiz master V. V. Ramnan is out of town. His fortnightly quiz will be resumed on his return.

I draw your attention to the letter from the Director of Postal Services (Chennai), (Ed: a copy of the letter above). I am also enclosing (Ed: copy below) the response to this from one of our members, Mr. Elias Koshy, which is self-explanatory. The letter may be replied to suitably by you since it has been addressed to INTACH Delhi.

P.T. Krishnan Convener INTACH Tamil Nadu

* * *

But there's still hope

Mr. P.T. Krishnan, Convener INTACH (Tamil Nadu Regional Chapter) 1, 2nd Street, Wallace Garden Chennai 600 006.

18.09.2000

Further to the letter from the Director of Postal Services, Chennai, to Ms. Kamala Rathnam, copy of which was marked to me by you, I wish to mention that I had responded to the Postal Department as a representative of INTACH on two earlier occasions, once in 1994 and once in 1997, regarding restoration of the GPO Building at Chennai.

On the first occasion I had stressed the need of documenting the building (as there were no drawings available of the building in India as well as in London), and then preparing a preliminary report for conservation, that could be followed by a detailed programme for restoration. A costing for documenting the building and preparation of the preliminary inspection report was also submitted; but there was no response from the department after that.

On the second occasion, the department requested a proposal to restore only the Main Hall of the building to its original glory as the grant available to them for the purpose was only minimal. The non-availability of documents and the dangers of a piecemeal approach was reiterated after which I have not heard from them in this regard. On both

occasions, Kamala from INTACH, Delhi had requested me to follow up the matter with the local office, but I understand that the pressure at the department level, to pursue the project, was insufficient.

Hope the above information is sufficient to enlighten you on the background of this project.

Elias Koshy Architect/Conservationist

* * *

Lt. Col. T Panneer Selvam Director of Postal Services (Chennai) O/o Principal Chief Postmaster General, Tamil Nadu Circle, Chennai 600 002.

27.10.2000

It is indeed sad that the GPO building which is a landmark in Madras has been damaged by fire, especially, in the light of your recent initiative in taking up the restoration of this important building in the city. This is the third landmark after Moore Market and the Spencer's building which has been badly damaged by such an accident. However, Moore Market and Spencer's were demolished when they need not have been. They made way for new buildings due to a lack of awareness of heritage issues in the 1970s. However, today Government and the public at large are more sensitive to conservation of our heritage, and restoration and reconstruction of the GPO building, which is one of the listed landmarks on the CMDA heritage list, will be a pioneering effort in acknowledging these values.

INTACH will be proud to associate with the department in the reconstruction of this building in an authentic fashion and restoring it, fully conforming to its original architectural style. We have the technical know-how and the means to access additional information wherever required. Meanwhile, may we request you not to remove any of the building elements from the site as these will be required to recreate and document the original structural details to aid in the restoration process. We would also request you to arrange a meeting between INTACH and all the officials from your department to discuss further procedures.

P.T. Krishnan Convener INTACH, Tamil Nadu

* * *

Editor's Note: As of November 13th, there has been no response.



At the inauguration of the Cholamandalam Film Festival in Colombo: Lester James Peries, third from left, Sri Lanka's 'Saryajit Ray', who inaugurated the festival, his wife Sumitra and a film-maker in her own right, second from left, and Antony Bhaskar Raj, Malayalam film-maker who made many Sinhala films, second from right.

Building bridges from Cholamandalam to Sri Lanka

Cholamandalam Film Festival' in Sri Lanka? Some kind of a gag? No, it was for real. In mundane terms it was a vintage Tamil film festival conducted by the National Film Corporation of Sri Lanka, a public sector enterprise to promote cinema in the island nation. To avoid controversy in the current ethnic situation, the festival was strategically named "Cholamandalam Film Festival", a name not used by anybody in Tamil Nadu today!

The historic festival held at Colombo, and then in Kandy, featured seven films of the pre-1950 period. These were screened for seven days, three shows a day, with priced tickets, initially at Elphinstone Theatre then at the Regal in Colombo and finally at the Regal in Kandy.

The Elphinstone was originally a movie house constructed by the famed Calcutta-based Indian film pioneers, Madan Theatres, who were also producers. The popular but now sadly vanished New Elphinstone cinema in Madras was also a part of the Madan movie empire. The Colombo cinema was in recent years taken over by the Sri Lankan Government, restored and is being used as venue for cultural activities, like drama dance and arts festivals.

When the Festival was planned by the well-known Sri Lankan writer-director and now Chairman of the Sri Lankan Film Corporation, Tissa Abeysekera, many were surprised by the very ideal. But with his vision, perseverance, and the support and encouragement of Chandrika Kumaratunga, the charismatic President of Sri Lanka, the Festival — its theme was 'Building Bridges' — became a celluloid reality.

This writer was appointed as 'Curator' of the Festival, and with active help of persons like Deputy General Manager, National Film Development Corporation (NFDC), Madras, P.

Parameswaran, and Director, National Film Archive of India (NFAI), Pune, L.K. Upadhyaya, the necessary clearances were obtained in Delhi, and more importantly, the rare and carefully preserved 35 mm prints at NFAI were obtained without any problems.

The seven movies selected were *Chintamani* (1937). Directed by Y.V. Rao, it featured the charismatic super star M.K. Thyagaraja Bhagavathar, singing star K. Aswathamma and Serukalathur Sama in the lead roles.

Mangamma Sabatham (1943), a Gemini Studio production directed by 'Acharya' T.G. Raghavachari, with Ranjan, Vasundhara Devi, N.S. Krishnan and T.A. Mathuram. *Rajakumari* (1947). A.S.A. Samy made his directorial debut; Kandy-born M.G. Ramchandran starred in his first film as a hero. Others in the cast were the Sri Lankan charmer, K. Thavamani Devi, K. Malathi and M.N. Nambiar.

Chandralekha (1948). Directed by S.S. Vasan, with T.R. Rajakumari, M.K. Radha, and Ranjan.

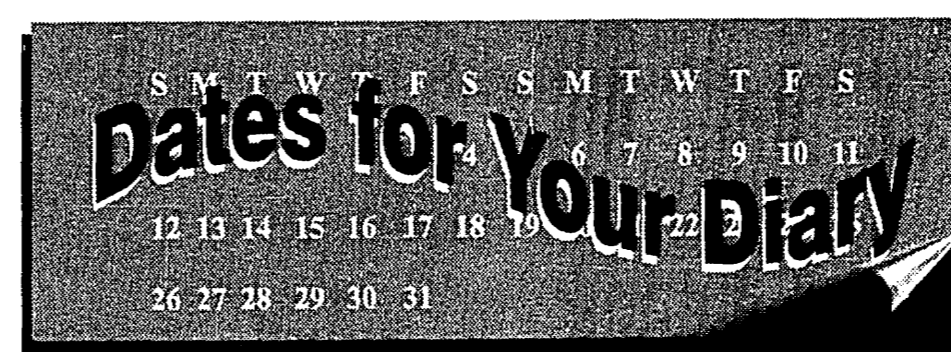
Velaikari (1949) written by C.N. Annadurai and directed by A.S.A. Sami, with K.R. Ramasami. T.S. Balaiah, M.N. Nambiar, V.N. Janaki and M.V. Rajamma.

Aporuva Sahodarargal (1949) directed by 'Acharya' with M.K. Radha, R. Nagendra Rao and P. Bhanumathi.

Manthiri Kumari (1950) written by Mu. Karunanidhi, and directed by Ellis R. Dungan and T.R. Sundaram with MGR, M.N. Nambiar, S.A. Natarajan, Madhuri Devi and G. Sakunthala.

The Festival was inaugurated at the Elphinstone by the most respected and internationally renowned Sri Lankan filmmaker Lester James Peries. The inaugural film was *Chintamani*

(Continued on Page 7)



Till November 21: 'The Family 3' — Group exhibition of paintings featuring Sakti Burman, his daughter Maya Burman and his niece Jayashree Burman. (At the Apparao Galleries.)

November 22-30: Solo exhibition of graphics by Anupam Sud. (At the Apparao Galleries.)

November 25-December 3: Karthigai festival. (At Dakshina-Chitra.)

November 25 and 26: Tie and Dye workshop demonstration. Tie-dye techniques and various methods of dyeing. Also workshop on Palmleaf Decoration on November 25th and Kolam on November 26th. (At Dakshina-Chitra. For details contact Vishalram on 4462435 / 4918943).

November 28-30: Homage to Max Mueller (1823-1900). A programme of theatre, dance and music conceived by Ludwig Pesh and Max Mueller Bhavan. (At Max Mueller Bhavan.)

November 28: Kutiyattam (Sanskrit Theatre) — Episode: *Toranayudham* (Part I of Act III of the play *Abhisheka Natakam* by Bhasa) performed by Natana Kairali Group, Irinjilakuda, guided by Ammanur Madhava Chakyar.

Also Nangiari Koothu: Episode: *Poothana Moksham* — performed by Kapila and directed by G. Venu. (At 6.30 p.m. at Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan.)

November 29: Ushas, choreographed and performed by Manjari. Ensemble music directed by C.V. Chandrasekhar. (At 6.30 p.m. at Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan.)

December 3: Carols and solo — performances by Young Artists. Choirs: Polyphonics (+ Juniors) and Subjuniors, conducted by Gita Menon. (At 6 p.m. at Max Mueller Bhavan Library.)

December 4: A dinner and piano recital by world renowned concert pianist Stephane Lemelin, organised by the CMC Alumni Association, Chennai Chapter, to raise funds for the Ida Scudder Centenary Center for Women and Children.

The total project cost is Rs. 26 crore. This project would have been very close to Dr. Ida Scudder's heart, because it was the plight of women in labour which prompted her to devote her life to medical work.

A souvenir will be released on this occasion and a donation drive inaugurated.

Dr. Ida Sophia Scudder, the founder of Christian Medical College and Hospital (CMC-Vellore), was a visionary who was sensitive to the needs of women and children around her. Responding with compassion she started a one-bed clinic in her father's house on January 1, 1900, which has evolved through the last century to become one of the leading healthcare



In paint and print by Anupam Sud.

facilities in Asia, with about 2000 beds and 94 recognised training programmes in medical, nursing and allied health fields.

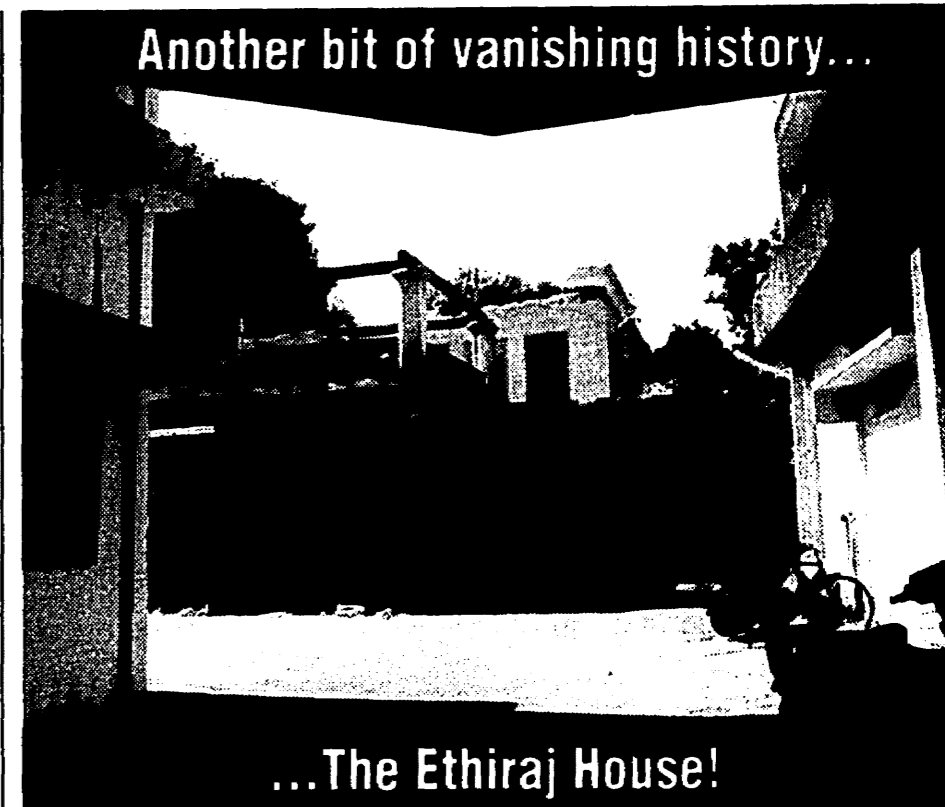
Canadian pianist Stephane Lemelin has received particular praise for his interpretations of Schubert, Schumann, Fauré and Ravel. He tours regularly in the United States and Canada and has given numerous performances in Europe. He currently teaches at the University of Alberta.

For tickets for the dinner / concert (Rs. 500/- per head) and further information: Tele nos. 440 3559 / 442 3883 / 98410-49140 and e-mail: dec4_piano@yahoo.com. (At 7.30 p.m. at the Le Royal Meridien).

December 6: *The Tempest*, based on William Shakespeare's play and directed by Annette Leday and Pit Holzwarth. A co-production of the Bremer Shakespeare Company and the

Annette Leday Company, France / India.

The director Pit Holzwarth and the choreographer Annette Leday joined forces to develop an intercultural stage approach to Shakespeare's crosscultural piece — *The Tempest*. In this version, the Indian dancers create a magic island rich in colour and sound, inhabited by strange powerful spirits. The actors of the Bremer Shakespeare Company portray the Western invaders. (At 6 p.m. at the Music Academy. Entry passes will be available at Max Mueller Bhavan and Alliance Francaise.)



From Germany, with love

The cultural links between Germany and India have a long history. Over the centuries, there has been an ever-growing interaction in various fields of art and science. Given the mutual appreciation of their respective cultural heritages, the German Government and the Government of India reached an agreement in 1989 to hold festivals in each other's countries. The Festival of India in Germany took place in 1991/92. The reciprocal German Festival follows from October 2000 through March 2001.

The following programmes are scheduled in Chennai:

Programme	Date	Programme	Date
Ensemble Sapf & Neumann	7 Nov. 2000	A decade of German Cinema	27 Jan.-1 Feb. 2001
Kathrin Schmidt (Literature)	17-22 Nov. 2000	Dieter M. Gräf (Literature)	9-14 Feb. 2001
The Tempest (Bremer Shakespeare Company)	6 Dec. 2000	Gateways to Weimar	Feb. 2001
German Philharmonic Youth Orchestra	12 Dec. 2000	Theater der Klänge	19 Feb. 2001
Torsten Becker (Literature)	6-11 Dec. 2000	Hockey	26 Feb. 2001
Felicitas Hoppe (Literature)	2-6 Jan. 2001	Susanne Linke & Rheinhold Hoffmann	9 March 2001
Arts and Craft (Exhibition)	10 Jan.-4 Feb. 2001	Merck Philharmonic Chamber Orchestra, Darmstadt	13 March 2001
After all it is just cardboard (Theatre)	11-12 Jan. 2001	Figuretheater tuingen	14 March 2001
Tennis	18-19 Jan. 2001	Ingo von Wilke the magician	24 March 2001
Theater Triebwerk — Boltan the Lion	18 Jan. 2001		
Henry V	19 Jan. 2001		
Arnold Stadler (Literature)	2-5 Feb. 2001		

FROM CHOLAMANDALAM TO SRI LANKA

(Continued from page 6)

which when it first ran in Colombo — at the Elphinstone — broke all box office records, running for over a year.

The pencil-thin heroine Aswathamma was all the rage in Ceylon in the late Thirties after being seen in *Chintamani*. "Some went mad raving over her and a few even committed suicide because they could not meet her," I was told by cine-veterans in Colombo who remembered the success of the film as if it was yesterday.

Aswathamma sported a hairstyle known as *bichoda* (the hair is put up and wound in circles and flowers are strung around the hair-knot). It became popular in South India after the film and Aswathamma's photo with that hairstyle adorned many homes. When I spoke about it Sumitra Peries, Lester's wife and an important

filmmaker in her own right, told me the impact was similar in Sri Lanka too!

Regretfully Aswathamma suffered from tuberculosis, then a dreaded disease. After appearing in only three movies, *Sadaramey* (Kannada, her debut), *Chintamani* and *Shanta Sakkubai* (both in Tamil), she died young in the early 1940s.

What I found significant during my visit was the continuing impact of the songs of *Chintamani* in Sri Lanka even after 60 years. Many of the songs sung by Aswathamma, like 'Krishna... Krishna...' *Divya Dharisanam Tharalagaatha* 'Eena Janmam Eduthen Yen Ayyaney...' have been used in Sinhala films. But what took me by delightful surprise was when we were driving to Kandy. The car-radio was on and a new song on the FM station was being rendered by a top Sinhala musician. The tune was that of

'Eena Janmam Eduthen Yen Ayyaney...' Much to the surprise of one and all, the public response to the Festival in Colombo was overwhelming. Sri Lankans — both Sinhala and Tamil-speaking — thronged the cinemas and enjoyed themselves in an indulgence of sheer nostalgia. All the films drew huge crowds, but *Chandralekha* could not provide enough seats at any show.

Two others from India were 'Special Invitees' to the Festival and joined me on the visit to Colombo. They were a senior official of the National Film Archives, Sasidharan, and the famed Malayalam and pioneer Sinhala film-maker, A.B. Raj (Antony Bhaskar Raj). A veteran of over sixty Malayalam films the 76-year-'young' filmmaker had directed many early Sinhala films in Colombo for the Sri Lankan movie mogul,



The Goethe-Institute Munich and its six branches in India — the Max Mueller Bhavans, which have been dedicated to the dialogue between German and Indian Art and Culture for decades, and the German diplomatic missions in India — have been entrusted with the

organisation of the Festival, the Department of Culture, Government of India being the host.

Over 40 programmes will bring the best of the contemporary cultural scene in Germany to 27 major cities in India, offering a wide audience a kaleidoscope of events from the fields of music, dance, theatre, philosophy, literature, cinema, visual arts and architecture. There will also be exchange programmes, joint publications, symposia and workshops.

S.M. Nayagam. He made hits like *Banda Nagarayata Pamineema* (1952), *Prema Tharagaya* (1953), *Ahankara Sthree* (1954), *Perakadoru Baama* (1955) and *Ramyalatha* (1956).

Raj astonished all by his fluent speeches in Sinhala loaded with wit and humour. He had not visited Colombo since the 1960s, yet had not forgotten the language. It was a memorable trip down memory lane for Raj and the locals! Indeed he was as much an attraction as the vintage movies! For personal and health reasons he could not visit Kandy, which disappointed many in that picturesque and historic hill capital.

While the Festival was on, all at the screenings forgot the ethnic 'war' going on... That's the power and magic of movies!

Randor Guy

NOSTALGIA

Vintage Cricket of
the 40s

The Tamil Nadu Cricket Association had perhaps the best organised league match system in the country in the Forties. The league championship was restricted to the 'A' (1st) Division upto 1946. When cricket activities were resumed in full swing after World War II ended, a number of new clubs were affiliated to the TNCA, necessitating a 2nd Division. Mylapore Recreation Club, Triplicane Cricket Club were the best teams.

A.F. Wensley, the Sussex professional and former England Test player, was appointed Staff coach and was assisted by A.G. Ram Singh, the top lefthand all-rounder in Madras. Nets were held in the mornings and evenings on all days except Sundays. Wensley was a disciplinarian and a strict taskmaster. He used to put a circle with an X in it just in the length area and a bowler had to pitch at least four balls within the circle, which means the bowler has to maintain line and length. A player had to run a full circle of the MCC ground as many times as he failed to land the ball in the marked spot. At his instance, a tour of the southern districts by players selected from the 2nd Division was organised. It was called the TNCA Junior Team and I was a member. Unfortunately the tour had to be abandoned due to the tragic death of the wicketkeeper who drowned in a tank in the Annamalai University campus.

The 1st Division matches were played mostly on Sundays and a few closed holidays, between 10.30 a.m. and 5.30 p.m. with half an hour for a late start and 45 minutes for lunch.

The important cricket grounds were MCC (Chepauk), Madras Medical College, Marina, Pachaiappa College grounds (Chetpet), Nungambakkam Lake Area, Pachaiappa's High School grounds, Esplanade, Southern Railway grounds (Perambur). Except at the MCC, all the other grounds provided matting wickets, though the Marina tried turf for a short period.

The matches attracted excellent, even partisan, crowds, particularly if TCC was playing MRC 'A' or in matches played in the Nungambakkam Lake Area by the local club.

• by S.R. Jagannathan

Excelsior's matches attracted crowds to see the Raja of Pudukkottai, his two brothers and a few District cricketers of repute. Barring the MCC and to an extent the Southern Railway and the Marina, no other ground provided cover against the sun. In fact, it was difficult to get even a cup of tea or coffee during lunch in the Nungambakkam Lake Area. Players used to curse if matches were posted in Nungambakkam.

Most of the clubs had to depend on their own players for their kit and a hidden patron to pay subscription or league fees. It was generally one person running a club and trying to meet all its expenses. K.S. Ranga Rao, V.R. Lakshmi Ratan (popularly known as Naina), V. Pattabhiraman (popularly known as Pattu), S. Sriraman and S. Annadurai (still with us) served the cause of the game well. I successfully ran the Egmore Excelsiors for over a decade.

The MCC had the advantage of playing on turf and they would never play league matches outside their ground. They also had the advantage of using "Duke's Special" balls on those days. In spite of this, clubs like the Nungambakkam Sports Club (the press used to call them 'giant-killers'), Egmore Excelsiors (who have never been beaten by the MCC — a record) and Sounder Cricket Club used to give them a fright, scoring the occasional victory

or achieving, more usually, a draw.

The following teams were in the 1st Division throughout the Forties and I list alongside them a few of their better-known players!"

Mylapore Recreation Club 'A': C.R. Pattabhiraman, G. Parthasarathy, P.S. Ramachandran, M.V. Bobjee, B.S. Badradri and A.V. Rajagopal.

Triplicane Cricket Club: M.J. Gopalan, C.R. Rangachari, A.V. Krishnaswamy and D.L. Chakravarthi.

Minerva Cricket Club: A.G. Ram Singh, C.K. Haridoss, A.G. Kripal Singh, A.G. Milkha Singh and S.V. Vaidyanathan.

Sounder Cricket Club: B.C. Alva, K.S. Kannan, M.O. Srinivasan (WK) and T.S. Parankusan.

Egmore Recreation Club: N. Kannayiram, Balu Alagannan, C.D. Gopinath, E.C. Philip and R.M. Perumal.

Nungambakkam Sports Club: N. Mahadevan (WK), C. Govinda Rao and Ramdas Mardi.

Southern Railway Athletic Assn.: N. Suri, N.J. Venkatesan and Y. Ramachandran.

MCC: C.P. Johnstone, H.P. Ward, Col. Murari and C. Ramaswami.

Egmore Excelsiors: S.R. Jagannathan, Raja of Pudukkottai, Nadu Dorai, Chinnadorai, M. Balakrishnan and George Zachariah.

National Cricket Club: T.R. Kannan

Mambalam Mosquitoes: P.S. Shankar, P.S. Chander and P.S. Narasimhan.

Triplicane United Club: M.P. Damodaran and M.P. Doraikannu.

Egmore Excelsiors entered the TNCA League in 1946. The club had to defeat ERC 'B' (another club from the same area), sponsored by V. Pattabhiraman, it was to be promoted to 'A' Division.

Excelsior's who were put in to bat scored 179 for 6 and declared. ERC 'B' were bundled out for 63. Significantly, it was Aruvathimoovar (63) Day in Mylapore. The match was over with an hour to spare and the author captured 4 wickets for 11 runs with his leg spin.

Another noteworthy match was against the TCC in 1952. TCC was bidding for 'A' Division championship and with a mere draw they would have been the champions. Excelsior's were short of four players and had to seek the help of four stu-

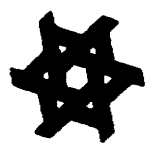
dents from the Victoria Hostel. TCC were all out for 120 runs. Excelsior's were 70 for no loss at lunch but after lunch there was a collapse due to 3 run outs and the score stood at 100 for 4. The four hostel students, thinking that the match would be easily won, did not turn up after lunch. At 100 for 5, I joined V. Aruldoss. M.J. Gopalan was bowling at his best and every year Aruldoss was his easiest victim. Till the 20 runs required for victory, I did not allow Aruldoss to face M.J. As a result of Excelsior's victory, MCC won the 1st Division championship.

On another occasion Excelsior's had to play B & C Mills in their ground. The ground was overgrown and had 2 feet of grass. Our protest that we could not play on a paddy field was overruled by the umpires and we were compelled to play in these conditions. We were all out for 120 runs, very low total for our club. One of our non-regular bowlers, M. Balakrishnan (he later became a bowler of repute) routed the B & C Mills by taking 9 wickets. They were all out for 17 runs — the season's lowest.

Glasse, an Englishman who captained B & C Mills, narrated the remark of the opposing captain to R.D. Denniston, the President of MCC, that evening. Denniston immediately arranged for the MCC to lend its lawn-mower to B & C Mills and sanctioned purchase of a lawn-mower for the Mills ground — (Courtesy: *Straight Bat*).

* The author had a longer list that he stated was "not exhaustive". Your Editor for reasons of space has cut the list further.

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