

THE FORT ST. GEORGE MUSEUM

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History.

The original idea of protecting the historic buildings inside Fort St. George, Madras and the ramparts, gates, bastions, moats etc. in it, and the formation of the Fort Museum, was mooted in 1944 by Col. D. M. Reid (the author of the interesting book on Fort St. George, published by the Christian Literature Society, Madras), Officer Commanding the Madras Guards, garrisoned in Fort St. George, which was the last unit in the continuous link of the Madras Regiment. This Regiment was associated with the history of South India for well nigh three centuries.

The Madras Government, the Defence Department and the Archaeological Department fell in line with his suggestion and as a first step towards this end, the headquarters of the Southern Circle of the Department of Archaeology were shifted to a building inside Fort St. George, in 1946. In June 1947 an agreement was signed between the Defence and Archaeological Departments whereupon the ancient buildings in the Fort, including its fortifications, gates, etc., were protected under the Ancient Monuments Preservation Act. In October 1947 the building in which the Fort Museum is housed was handed over to this Department and the collection of antiquities preserved by the Madras Guards (disbanded in 1947) and in the St. Mary's Church were transferred to this building.

While arrangements were being made to organise the Fort Museum, the Governor of Madras (then His Excellency Sir Archibald Nye) made a kind offer to transfer all the Regimental Colours to the disbanded units in Madras, preserved in the Government House, to the Fort Museum. These along with the collection of the old Madras Guards formed the nucleus for the Fort Museum.

In January 1948, Lord Louis Mountbatten of Burma, the first Governor-General of free India, made a preview of the Museum and the Art and Archaeology Exhibition organised to coincide with the opening of the Fort Museum. The Museum and the Exhibition were to be opened on the 1st February 1948, but unfortunately, owing to the national calamity in the passing away of the father of the nation, the function had to be abandoned. The Museum was, however, formally opened* on the 25th February 1948 by His Excellency Sir Archibald Nye, Governor of Madras.

* The Fort Museum, Fort St. George, Madras, is open to the public between 10 a.m. and 5 p.m. on all days except Fridays. Admission is free.

The Fort Museum is appropriately housed in an ancient building on the eastern side of the Fort, facing the Bay of Bengal, raised about 1790, and which since Wellesley's time has been used variously as the 'Exchange', the Madras Bank, the 'Reception House', and the British Infantry Officers' Mess. It is thus full of memories of the commercial, social, political and martial activities of the Company days. It is of interest that the first light house of Madras was constructed on the top of this building.

Necessity and Scope.

The great popularity that this Museum has achieved since its inception has amply proved the necessity for a museum of this kind calculated to create the right focus for the study of the development of Fort St. George, the historic centre of South India during the three centuries of European contact and rule in India, by assembling inside the Fort many objects of historic, cultural and artistic value of the Company period, now scattered among various individuals and institutions.

The Fort Museum is the latest among the historical or period-cum-site Museums, the other examples being the Delhi Fort Museum, housing the Mughal antiquities and the Lahore Fort Museum (now in Pakistan), containing materials illustrative of the history of the Sikhs. Thus in its scope it exhibits the antiquities relating to the European period during which the Fort flourished, and which forms one of the large chapters in the history of India. Incidentally the Fort Museum is the first to come into existence after Indian Independence.

Exhibits in General.

Napoleon was the first General to use artillery as a weapon of offence on a large scale, though earlier cannon, mounted or otherwise, was used, exclusively as a defensive weapon, especially in sieges. He massed his guns against the weak links of the enemy formations, pushing the guns forward boldly sometimes well in advance of the infantry. The grape-shots were used with a deadly effect. In India Napoleon's tactics seems to have been anticipated by Robert Clive who used grape-shots, for the first time in the decisive battle of Plassey. A number of such artillery pieces,¹ cannon, grape-shots, mortars, etc., are exhibited in the ground floor of the Fort Museum, which forms the 'Hall of Arms'. Other collections in this section include musketoons, chain-shots, pikes, swords,

1. Most of these were acquired from the Madras Government Museum, the selection being made by Col. D. M. Reid, and Dr. A. Aiyappan, Superintendent of the Museum.

spears, etc. These either belonged to the East India Company or were captured in the many battles which it had to wage before establishing their supremacy over their rival European powers. They belong to the period between the latter half of the seventeenth and the nineteenth centuries.

Recently the Commander-in-Chief of the Indian Army presented a collection of muskets, guns, rifles, etc., all of antique manufacture and design, captured from the Razākārs during the 'Police Action' in Hyderabad. With these and other types already in the Museum, an attempt has been made to classify them into match-lock muskets, flint-lock brownbesses, wheel-lock guns, percussion guns, rifles and other types to illustrate the chronological evolution of fire-arms.

Another group of interesting specimens in the Armoury relates to the bombing of Madras by the German Cruiser, the *Emden*, on the 22nd September 1914, during the first World War. A fragment of the shell, an alloy of bronze weighing about a hundred grams, has been displayed with one of the shell-cases which returned *Emden's* fire from the Madras Coastal Batteries.² The shell-case is cylindrical in shape with the following inscription—"Fired in Defence of Madras during bombardment by the German Cruiser, *Emden*, Sep. 22nd 1914". It is of brass, the height and diameter being 14 $\frac{3}{4}$ inches and 4 $\frac{3}{4}$ inches respectively. With these is exhibited a part of the percussion cap of the bomb dropped on Madras by the Japanese Aircraft on the 20th October 1943, during the second World War.³ This effectively reminds one of the changed tactics in modern warfare and the introduction of aerial bombing as a chief feature of warfare.

The imposing statue of Lord Cornwallis (P. IV, 7), in white marble, about 14 $\frac{1}{2}$ feet in height, is a unique piece of workmanship by the famous English sculptor, Thomas Banks. This has been exhibited at the right entrance of the Museum near the Armoury Section. This statue by Banks, which was sent out to India in 1800 represents the Governor-General wearing the robes of a Peer over military uniform. On the cylindrical pedestal is represented in bas-relief, Cornwallis receiving the two sons of Tipū Sultān, Princes Abd-ul-Kilak and Musa-ud-dīn, boys of ten and eight years of age, as hostages to honour the treaty signed at the conclusion of the Third Mysore War on the 18th March 1792.

The conclusion of the long drawn out wars between Tipū Sultān and the English is represented in the historical oil painting of the 'Storming of Seringapatam', depicting the last Mysore War in 1799,

2. Presented by Brigadier W. T. Wilson, Brigadier Ordnance, Southern Command, Poona, on behalf of the Officers of the Ordnance Corps.
3. Presented by the late A. V. Patro, Commissioner of Police, Madras.



Fig. 7.
Marble Statue of Lord Cornwallis.
By Thomas Banks.

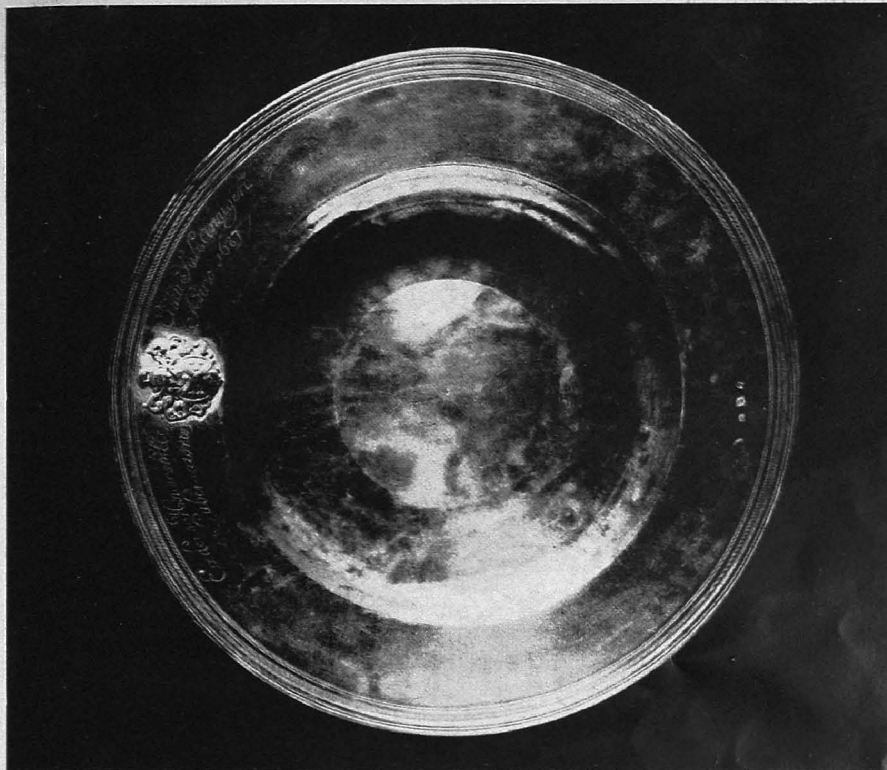


Fig. 8.
The "Yale Plate" (Silver Communion Vessel made in London in 1687).

which is exhibited in the Long Hall in the first floor. It is common knowledge that this war led to the death of Tipū Sultān and the annexation of his territories by the Company. It was painted by Robert Ker Porter, and exhibited in London early in the 19th century. The painting contains actual likenesses of the various personages who took part in the siege and defence, all of them in action.

At the southern end of the Long Hall are displayed the silver communion vessels of three of the earliest Anglican Churches in India—the St. Mary's Church, Fort St. George, Madras, consecrated in 1680 (the oldest Anglican Church east of the Suez); the Pulicat Church near Madras (1717), and the Tranquebar Church in Tanjore district (early 18th century). The collection of communion vessels include a silver plate presented to the St. Mary's Church by Governor Elihu Yale. His name has been perpetuated by the now world-famous Yale University of America, as he gave the largest donation to the Collegiate School of Connecticut, in its early and struggling days, whence it came to be called the Yale College and later on developed into the Yale University. The plate (Pl. IV, 8) bears the coat of arms of Governor Yale at the top centre, with the Latin inscription:⁴ "Ex dono Honorabilis Gubernatoris Elihu Yale Armigeri Anno 1687" (presented by the Honourable Governor Elihu Yale in the year 1687). The silversmith's marks on the plate indicate that it was made in London in the year 1687.⁵ Near the silver communion vessels are displayed the two registers of Baptisms, Marriages and Burials in the St. Mary's Church, dating from the year of its consecration (1680). They form a complete record of the Church except from 1746 to 1749 when Madras was in the possession of the French. The first marriage entry in the register is that of Elihu Yale (1680). Another and more noteworthy marriage registered in this Church is that of Robert Clive with Margaret Maskelyne, solemnised on the 18th February 1753.

At the northern end of the same hall can be seen the large scale wooden model of Fort St. George, which was displayed formerly in the room opposite the St. Mary's Church. It represents the Fort as it was between 1820 and 1865. The comparatively more ancient buildings, all prior to 1800, which are declared as protected monuments are painted yellow.

Immediately behind the model can be seen a painting of Fort St. George, which came from the 'Fron Collection', and is stated to have been painted for the East India Company. It dates about 1732, the artists being George Lambert and Samuel Scott, who were res-

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4. The Latin inscriptions were kindly read and translated by Mr. G. E. Crombie, United Kingdom Deputy High Commissioner in Madras.
 5. Acquired for the Fort Museum through the good offices of Rt. Rev. A. M. Hollis, Bishop in Madras.

possible for the presentation of the Fort and the main view respectively. Some of the details of the background are clearly imaginary. The scene depicted here is said to be substantially identical with that presented in another picture by the same artists, formerly in the India House, London.

A comparison of this painting with the model is quite interesting as it gives us an idea of the changes that the Fort has undergone during the period of about a hundred years. The painting depicts the Fort in the form of a square with practically none of the outer defence works, whereas the model is triangular in shape with bastions, ravelins, moats and other defence works.

A representative collection of medals issued by the East India Company for the early campaigns in which the Madras Sepoys took part is also exhibited here. The more important among them are the Seringapatam medals (1799) in silver, bronze and tin; the Mysore medal (1791) and the Deccan medal (1784).

In the same hall are exhibited⁶ about forty original letters of Robert Clive, Lord Pigot, Arthur Wellesley (later Duke of Wellington), Lord Cornwallis, Lord Bentinck and others. A number of etchings by Thomas Daniell (1749-1840) are hung along the western wall and illustrating the contemporary views of most important places of interest in South India.

Madras was not only the political capital of the South during the past three centuries but also the commercial centre and the chief port for South India. In fact the history of the South during this period centres round the history of the city. The Fort Museum, situated in this commercial centre and the scope of which has been limited to the European period in the history of South India, must naturally exhibit a complete set of coins minted in Madras by the English and other European East India Companies, on their behalf and on behalf of others, in Madras and other places nearabout, like Pondicherry, Pulicat, Arcot, Negapatam to mention a few. Though the numismatic collection of the Museum cannot be said to be complete in this respect, an attempt has been made to display as representative set of coins as possible, arranged chronologically.

The site of Madras was an insignificant hamlet when Cogan and Day acquired the strip of land between the river Cooum and the sea in 1639 to erect a factory on behalf of the East India Company. The growth of this city, one of the four principal cities of India, centred

6. Acquired through the kind help of Mr. M. Bhaktavatsalam, former Minister for Public Works, Government of Madras.

round the Fort, with the development and increasing importance of the Company's activities in the South. In Fort St. George Museum an attempt has, therefore, been made to illustrate this gradual and steady development of the Fort in the form of eight plans from 1653 to 1939, and this is to be supplemented by plans of the growing city round it. Side by side plans of different European Forts in South India (French, Dutch, Portuguese etc.) to illustrate, in comparison with Fort St. George, features of strategy and western military science, are under preparation.