

MADRAS MISCELLANY

S. MUTHIAH



New archives set up



The Observatory was first established in 1796. In 1790, the Astronomical Department was formed by the Board of Directors, and since that period it has continued to be a Public office of record transmitting its annual operations to the Honble. Council and the Astronomer Royal.

*H. C. Whitehead
1st of January 1809*

*Sir,
Yours most obedt Servant
(Signed) John Harrison*

The Madras Observatory, Egmore 1792 (left); from the Madras records attesting to the 1786 foundation of an observatory and the establishment of an Astronomics Department in 1790

I was delighted to hear from Christina Birdie and A. Vagiswari of the Indian Institute of Astrophysics, Bangalore, who had met me a couple of times — and, in fact, helped with information for a couple of paragraphs that appeared in *Miscellany* in the past — that they have succeeded in establishing in the IIA the archives they have been working on for some years now.

The archives holds over 5,000 items, including the records of the pioneering Madras and Kodaikanal Observatories going back to the 1780s.

I feature here today two illustrations they've sent from the archives' holdings. The scrap of manuscript attests to the fact that an observatory, the forerunner of the Madras Observatory, the oldest modern observatory in Asia and the progenitor of the IIA, was established in 1786. The other is a wash drawing of the Madras Observatory's home in Egmore circa 1892.

There are several other pioneering institutions in Madras, such as the Regional Ophthalmic Institute, for instance, which would do well to set up archives such as this one.

Searching for roots

Two more of those in search of roots, whom I referred to last Monday, arrived this past week. Christopher Penn, you've met in these columns in the past (Miscellany, December 8, 2005), and he's still on the trail of pictures taken by his great-grandfather, Albert Penn of the Nilgiris, and the places that he had photographed.

The College of Arts and Crafts, which might have had some, was on vacation, but Christopher Penn was luckier in the newly-restored Madras Literary Society, where he recognised a picture of Mahabalipuram as one Albert Penn had taken.

My other visitors were the Nick McIvers from Scotland who arrived with a family tree dating to William Thomas Nailer, born in the 1780s and who arrived in Madras at the dawn of the new century. One day, I hope to write more of this remarkable bit of research that has traced over 150 descendants of that first Nailer in Madras. But, for now, there's a question arising out of that family tree that intrigues me, and I wonder whether any reader has

an answer to it.

W.T. Nailer's grandson, H.A.F. Nailer was educated at Doveton College — presumably Black Town (today's George Town) — and then passed out of Madras Medical College. After further medical studies in England, he joined the Indian Medical Service and, on his return to India, served in the Madras General Hospital, Chingleput and Tanjore, among other places. Now, comes my poser.

In Tanjore he was "in charge of the Jail and the Medical College" and "one of his students won the gold medal in Medicine for the whole of South India", circa 1900. Now, IMS officers being in charge of jails was common practice, but I'd never heard of a medical college in Tanjore dating to the late 19th Century.

I'd always thought that the only medical college in the Madras Presidency at the time was Madras Medical College. I wonder whether any reader can shed light on a Tanjore medical school or any other medical school in the South in the late 19th Century.

When the postman knocked

* *Walthamstow* (Miscellany, November 23) appears to have brought back happy memories to many who appeared to know the building. Chandra Padmanabhan remembers holidaying there as a child with the family of a relative who had rented the house, and recalls it as a huge mansion with a ballroom and a large dining room that had a table for 18! A couple of others, too, recall the house, and one of them was sure that it was in this house that Macaulay began work on his *Minutes on Education and Jurisprudence* that influence our lives to this day.

I'm afraid old houses tend to generate such legends without too much substance. The facts in this case are that when Macaulay arrived in Madras in 1834 there were summons awaiting him that Lord William Bentinck, Governor-General of Fort William in Bengal, requested his presence in Ooty to discuss pressing matters of state. Bentinck was in Ooty from March to Sep-

tember on a busman's holiday and was staying in the *Rumbold House* that is now the Ooty Club's home. Macaulay arrived there in June and took up residence in *Rose Cottage* in the *Rumbold House's* spacious gardens — and there, he might well have begun work on those *Minutes*; certainly the subjects were very much on Bentinck's mind when he summoned Macaulay to Ooty. Shortly before Bentinck left Ooty, he received in the *Rumbold House* the order that he was being designated as Governor-General of India.

Walthamstow, however, figures in another similar sort of story. Governor-General Lord Dalhousie, during one of his two sojourns in the mansion between March and October 1855, is said to have signed the order for the annexation of Oudh. Again, it did not happen. The fact is that the East India Company's instructions reached him only in 1856 — when he was in Calcutta.