

April - May 2007



Cochin Chronicle

TRACING 150 YEARS OF THE CITY'S HISTORY

Cochin Chamber of Commerce and Industry Newsletter

2 List of presidents of the Cochin Chamber of Commerce

3 Trade show: The romance of the tea trade

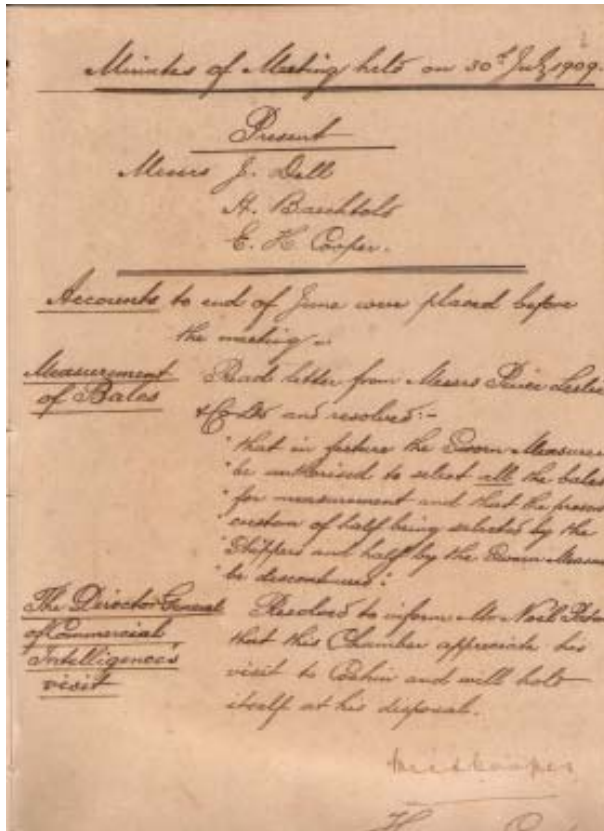
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FROM THE MINUTES BOOK



Special meeting held on Tuesday, the 21st April at 1914 at 5 pm

Present

- Messrs A. Buller
- E.H. Cooper
- H.R. Haigh
- H.E. Day
- C. Mauperce
- D. Cuthbert
- C.A. Innes (Collector of Malabar)
- C.L. Mowbray

Harbour Police: The Collector of Malabar requested the Chamber to state whether they were in favour of a Harbour Police together with a seagoing motor launch, the cost to be charged to the landing and shipping dues. The Chamber decided to give a definite answer after obtaining information from Coconada as to what had been the result of a

Marine police at that post.

Office Peon: It was decided to grant a monthly pension of Rs 5 to the peon considering his inability to work through old age.

C.L. Mowbray Honorary Secretary

The 29 May 'minutes' said that the "Chamber did not consider that at present the expense of a Harbour Police would be warranted. As the chief means of theft is through foreign territory, where British Police would have no standing and if Cochin and Travancore police combine the two latter being entirely native no benefit would probably be derived."

FROM THE PRESIDENT'S DESK

As the Cochin Chamber of Commerce celebrates 150 years, many may wonder why we are looking back, rather than looking forward. The Chamber was founded by C.E. Mirus, R.H. Peirce and P. Leslie, J.H. Berry, N. Fitzgerald, A.S. Lawson, H.Huni, Geo Brunton, and S. Darley, representing eight firms, in 1857 to work for a common good and solve issues affecting their mutual interests. Today, we have close to 50 member

companies based around Cochin's Willingdon Island.

We may not work and live in the tumultuous times of the pioneers, so too often we brush aside, and even dishonour, our past. We forget that our present is shaped by the amalgam of the many cultures that have passed our shores. Through the COCHIN CHRONICLE, we hope to put things into perspective and examine the influences on our city, from the times of our forefathers to the Portuguese, the Dutch and the British up to our

present day government. They say, history repeats itself. But let hindsight give us the wisdom to ensure that we adopt all that is good from the past. All that is negative, let us try and abandon.

The COCHIN CHRONICLE was made possible through the support of our sponsors. We hope to reach all our members and the chambers of commerce across the country through this newsletter.

Jose Dominic
President, Cochin Chamber
of Commerce & Industry
MD, CGH Earth



Support structure for business: The old Chamber of Commerce office in Fort Kochi. The new office is in Willingdon Island

PAST CHAIRMEN/PRESIDENTS OF THE CHAMBER

FROM 1857 ONWARDS

Name	Firm	From To			
J. Oughterson	Oughterson & Co.	1857-1858	J.K. Hopkins	Aspinwall & Co. Ltd.	1957-1958
C.E. Mirus	C.E. Mirus & Co.	1858	D.E. Phelps	Harrisons & Crosfield Ltd.	1958-1959
J.H. Aspinwall	Aspinwall & Co. Ltd.	1877-1879	T.A.K. Nair	Tata Oil Mills Co. Ltd.	1959-1960
Geo Brunton	John Crieve & Co.	1879-1891	W.H. Nicoll, O.B.E.	Madura Co. Private Ltd.	1960-1961
E.H.Black	Aspinwall & Co. Ltd	1891-1898	A.J. B. Dickson	Chartered Bank	1961-1963
W.N. Black	-do-	1898-1900	R.J. Watson	Harrisons & Crosfield Ltd.	1963-1964
E.H. Black	-do-	1900-1901	P.A.A. Majeed	P.A. Abdulrehiman Kutty & Sons	1964-1965
J.Dell	Peirce Leslie & Co. Ltd.	1901-1903	O.Thomas	Forbes, Ewart & Figgis (P) Ltd.	1965-1966
E.H. Blac	Aspinwall & Co. Ltd.	1903-1905	B.V. Pai	Tata Oil Mills Co. Ltd.	1966-1967
E.H. Cooper	-do-	1905-1908	P.H. Shaw	Matheson, Bosanquet & Co. Ltd.	1967-1968
C.L. Mowbray	Bank of Madras	1908-1909	A.D. Peacock	Aspinwall & Co. Ltd.	1968-1969
E.H. Cooper	Aspinwall & Co. Ltd.	1909-1911	M. Sankara Menon	Chakiat Agencies	1969-1970
C.L. Mowbray	Bank of Madras	1911-1914	T.Koshy	A.V.Thomas & Co. Ltd.	1970-1971
A.Fullarton		1914-1915	N.B. Menon	Alleppey Co. Ltd.	1971-1972
J. Dell	Peirce Leslie & Co. Ltd.	1915-1919	C. Prabhakaran	Aspinwall & Co. Ltd.	1972-1973
B.S. Kidd	-	1919-1920	R. Indu Sekhar	Patvolk	1973-1974
E.H. Cooper	Aspinwall & Co. Ltd	1920-1921	Venuguopal C. Govind	Varma & Varma	1974-1975
H.R. Haigh	Peirce Leslie & Co. Ltd.	1921-1922	R. Balachandran	Cominco Binani Zinc Ltd.	1975-1976
H.H. Jones	Aspinwall & Co. Ltd.	1922-1923/23-24	D. Balasubramaniam	Peirce Leslie India Ltd.	1976-1977
H.R. Haigh	Peirce Leslie & Co. Ltd.	1923-1924	R.J. Chandy	Aspinwall & Co. Ltd.	1977-1978
H.R. Jourdain	Aspinwall & Co. Ltd.	1923-1924/24-25	M.S. Parikh	Matheson, Bosanquet & Co.Ltd.	1978-1979
S.C. Rae	Madura Co. Ltd.	1925-1926/26-27	T.C. Satyanath	Thomas & Co. Private Ltd.	1979-1980
P.E.C. Jourdain	Aspinwall & Co. Ltd.	1927-1928	P.J. Weavers	Harrisons & Crosfield (India) Ltd.	1980-1981
S.C. Rae	Madura Co. Ltd.	1928-1929/29-30	B.S. Desai	Premier Tyres Ltd.	1981-1982
P.F.C. Jourdain	Aspinwall & Co. Ltd	1930-1931/31-32	Lt. Col. N.Vasudevan	Alleppey Co. Ltd.	1982-1983
W. Grant	Aspinwall & Co. Ltd.	1932-1933	B.K. Patodia	G.T.N. Textiles Ltd.	1983-1984
J. E. Pitcairn, O.B.E.	Peirce Leslie & Co. Ltd	1933-1934/34-35	V.K. Chandrakumar	Peirce Leslie India Ltd.	1984-1985
W. Grant	Aspinwall & Co. Ltd.	1935-1936	E.B. Unni	Aspinwall & Co. Ltd.	1985-1986
H. Harper	Peirce Leslie & Co. Ltd.		K.T.R. Nambiar	Patvolk	1986-1987
J.E. Pitcairn, O.B.E.	Peirce Leslie & Co. Ltd.	1936-1937	B.K. Saronwala	M.B. & Co. Ltd.	1987-1988
R. Ainsworth.	Harrisons & Crosfield Ltd.	1937-1938/38-39	M.T. Paul	Indian Aluminium Co. Ltd.	1988-1989
W. Grant	Aspinwall & Co. Ltd.		K. Bala Hariharan	Binny Ltd.	1989-1990
J.E. Pitcairn, O.B.E.	Peirce Leslie & Co. Ltd.	1939-1940/40-41	Pamela Anna Mathew	O/E/N India Ltd.	1990-1991
H Black	Madura Co. Ltd.	1941-1942	Mr. K.J. Jose	Darragh, Smail & Co. (I) Ltd.	1991-1992
W.Grant	Aspinwall & Co. Ltd.	1942-1946	M.K. Koshy	A.V.Thomas & Co. Ltd.	1992-1993
B.S. Holloway	Peirce Leslie & Co. Ltd.	1946-1947	Paulose Joseph	Forbes, Ewart & Figgis (P) Ltd.	1993-1994
A. Meadows	Peirce Leslie & Co. Ltd.		M.Gopinath	Avery India Ltd.	1994-1995
J.S. Bruce	Harrisons & Crosfield Ltd.	1947-1948	A.J. Tharakan	Amalgam Foods Ltd.	1995-1996
E. Lefevre	Aspinwall & Co. Ltd.	1948-1950	M. Jairam	Chakiat Agencies	1996-1997
B.S. Holloway	Peirce Leslie & Co. Ltd.	1950-1951	M.H. Ashraff	Tata Tea Ltd.	1997-1998
J.J.Mc Gregor	Madura Co. Ltd.		Manjoo Menon	International Services	1998-1999
B.S. Holloway	Peirce Leslie & Co. Ltd.	1951-1952/ 52-53	A.S. Narayanamoorthy	R.G.N. Price	1999-2000
H.U. Buechi	Volkart Brothers		A.K. Atal	J. Thomas & Co. P. Ltd.	2000-2001
W.G. Black	Aspinwall & Co. Ltd	1953-1954/54-55	V.R. Nair	Hindustan Lever Ltd.	2001-2002
W.E. Northey, O.B.E.	Peirce Leslie & Co. Ltd.	1955-1957	Venkatesh Naidoo	Tata Tetley Ltd.	2002-2003
F. Wichser	Volkart Brothers		N.R. Pai	Aspinwall & Co. Ltd.	2003-2004
			A.K. Nair	Kerala Chemicals & Proteins Ltd.	2004-2005
			N. Sreekumar	Apollo Tyres Ltd.	2005-2006
			Jose Dominic	CGH Earth	2006-

PAST & PRESENT



Which one do you a-door?

Who would have thought that the manner in which doors were opened to commerce would change so literally. Down the years, shopkeepers have opted for aluminium shutters to close shop, over the morning and evening ritual of lining up numbered wooden planks side by side. For convenience and security, modernity has the upper hand. But doesn't the high-decibel downing of shutters make one wistful for the charm of those dusty, weather-beaten, termite-eaten planks?



REFRESHER COURSE

A taste of the tea trade

There is many a process from the garden to the lip

Tea conjures up images of cool hills and hot cuppas. It was also probably one of the few sectors in India that the British continued to work in long after independence. So, there is some

including J. Thompson and Carrit Moran. Now, there are six. "The first auction took place in July 1947," says W.C. Thomas, director of Forbes. "It started on a small scale and the quantities on auction were negligible." Today, Thomas

scattered in hilly regions and remote areas. Auctions allowed producers and buyers to meet at one point, and auctioneers are mainly brokers for the producers. Willingdon Island became a vantage point, because of its accessibility as a

furiously, and the auctioneer marks a sale by a knock of his gavel. "A good auctioneer must also be a tea taster, though a tea taster need not be an auctioneer," says Thomas, who is a veteran at both. The tea taster's valuation, which comprises studying the dry leaf, infusion and liquor, serves as a guideline for the buyers. And though some of the bigger companies have their own tea tasters, the tea broker's valuation is the base. Seldom does the



From cool hills to a hot cuppa: (clockwise from top) Sprawling tea gardens in Munnar; Tea tasting session; Action at the auction house

romance, exclusivity and piquant mystery associated with the trade. Attending a tea auction or witnessing a tea tasting, only seems to increase the mystery. In fact, a newcomer to an auction is most likely not to understand any of the gestures or words that are vigorously exchanged between auctioneer and prospective buyers. Forbes, Ewart & Figgis Pvt Ltd, based in Willingdon Island, the first tea brokers in south India, initiated tea auctions into Cochin. Till as late as the 80s, there were only three brokers in south India,

sells about 300 lots, totaling 2.5 lakh kg, on an average at a single auction. The auctioneer makes a commission of one per cent of the total sale. Thomas's biggest sale in his 42 years of auctioning, which was, in fact, the largest sale in south India, was for Rs 2.2 crore last year. While an average auction would take two hours, he did an almost marathon run to sell the 940 lots listed on the catalogue. The auctions came to be used as the marketing system in the industry as tea producers were

port and its warehousing facilities. Here, the dust auction, which is specific to the internal market, takes place every Tuesday. The leaf auction, the smaller one and catering to exporters, takes place every Wednesday. India, while still the largest consumer of tea, has lost its position as the largest producer to Sri Lanka, Kenya and China. About 100 buyers might take part in an auction. In the old days, most of them would be formally turned out in jackets and ties. Today, the atmosphere is more casual. Thomas remembers when he joined the trade in 1964, "We had three Europeans in the company and many buyers at the auction were English." The bidding process is fast and

buyer's price, except if the market is very bullish, go above the valuation. The average tea might consist of up to 30 blends. Traditionally, auctions were held in an open outcry system, where the auctioneer calls out the lot number, grade and estate. In 2004, the Tea Board started an online auction system. But while the export auction is still electronic, the dust buyers returned to the manual system in 2005. So, the romance is not all gone. Tea is highly subject to seasonal variations. The best quality is produced from November to February. The quality drops between February and March. But a good cuppa, like a beautiful woman, will draw a compliment every time.

"A good auctioneer must be a tea taster, though a tea taster need not be an auctioneer," says W.C. Thomas, director of Forbes, Ewart & Figgis.

Ivan home

While his neighbours on Princess Street are hospitable, Ivan D'Costa can be described as house-proud, a little aloof and even proud to be the latter. The houses on Princess are highly sought after as homestays by tourists who wish to relive the ambience of the many cultures that have influenced the shores of Fort Cochin.

And most house owners are happy to oblige by converting their century old homes into tourist lodges: two years ago, Fort Cochin had 25 homestays, now there are 250. Ivan, on the other hand, who retired as assistant collector at the



revenue department, is fiercely protective of his 125-year-old Dutch style home, even pointedly ignoring his daughter-in-law's request to add an ensuite bathroom to one of the bedrooms.

"I am 71. I am an old-fashioned man. I don't take kindly to such requests," says Ivan, sitting amidst a trove of furniture that clearly belong to a different age and look at home in this ancient house. A 100-year-old, ornately carved, rosewood sideboard is valued at Rs 1 lakh.

The oldest thing in the house is three century old statue of Jesus, named Ecce Hommo, which Ivan inherited from his maternal side, the Carlos family, who owned the house. "The Ecce Hommo is believed to have miraculous properties and I lent it to a friend who was suffering from cancer a couple of years ago," says Ivan. The statue is made of wood, but bears a metal crown of thorns.

Prized possession: (top) Ivan studies the Portuguese document of possession; The 18th century Dutch house



Ivan's most prized possessions, however, are the documents of possession of a house on Lilly Street. "These are the only official document showing continuous possession of a house from 1798 to the present time in Kerala," says Ivan. The 18th century paperwork is ornately, handwritten in Dutch, some following ones in Portuguese. The 19th century documents are in English. The house on Princess Street, which stands on 11½ cents, is constructed from local material redstone flooring and a high ceiling with wooden beams. Valued at Rs 12,600 in 1968, the 14-room house with a little courtyard, will now fetch Rs 1 crore on the market. But Ivan isn't selling.

Q&A WITH DR FALK REITZ, FOUNDER OF EUROPEAN FOUNDATION FOR

Dutch palace is a good ex



art, in particular.

My courses in Indian art history at the Freie Universitaet Berlin cover every period and region in India from the first centuries A.D. to the present time. We also teach about the colonial, modern and contemporary visual arts in India. In our teachings we focus mainly on the traditional visual arts like architecture, sculpture and painting, however, photography, design, installations etc. will be also mentioned.

Tell us about your NGO, the EFIHM. Is it easy to get Europe interested in preserving Indian monuments?

The activities of our NGO started as a private initiative in 2005, following a request from my wife's cousins, Joseph and James Zacharias, to study and document the twin churches in Ramapuram, Kottayam. I invited friends to join me on this campaign. I have always spoken so enthusiastically of Kerala and its people, that my friends were keen to spend a few days here.

If Dr Falk Reitz had his way, he would take Kerala back in time. Architecturally, that is. As an art historian and founder of the European Foundation for Indian Heritage Monuments (EFIHM), he documents monuments so that they can be restored or renovated accurately. The German lecturer's work in the state includes the documentation of two ancient churches in Ramapuram, Kottayam, and the Synagogue in Mattancherry. His NGO is currently working on the Stromberg Bastion Bungalow in Fort Kochi.

Reitz, who teaches Indian art history at the Berlin Free University, is bound to Kerala more than professionally. He is married to the second daughter of M.M. Jacob, the governor of Meghalaya.

In an email interview with *THE COCHIN CHRONICLE*, Reitz, who spends around three weeks of the year in Kerala on work, talks about the urgent need for the preservation of Kerala's architectural heritage, the role that public and private sectors must play and about EFIHM's work.

How did you get interested in Indian art history?

My father was the director of an art museum with an Asian collection, so even as a child I got interested in Asian art. When I met my wife in 1986 at Humboldt University in Berlin, my focus turned from a general interest in Asian to South Asian and Indian

Our concept was: do some volunteer work and also holiday. This is a concept we will continue, not only with friends, but also with students. This combination is an interesting, exciting model for people who have experience in Germany in the field of heritage protection.

Our NGO hopes to "export" ideas and experiences from Germany in the field of landmark protection as "Help for self-help".

What work have you done in Kerala and specifically in Fort Kochi?

In 2005, we brought a LEICA tachymeter to take measurements of heritage buildings, so that exact drawings could be made. These drawings make the first documents in a database used like an archive with all the necessary information on a certain historical building. The database can also contain historical photos, reports etc. This is the basic work of an art historian. Later, when there are requests to renovate or even reconstruct parts of a building, this historical information, along with the drawings are given to architects and conservationists. With-

Example of conservation

out this information, their work is baseless since it is not rooted in a historical sense.

Each historical building gains an identity through the transformation of each generation which has used it. These different strata should, when possible, be displayed through careful conservation. The Stromberg Bastion Bungalow, which was used by the Dutch, British and Indians, is a good example. So we should show the construction model of the Dutch and the later alterations by the British and Indian owners in our documentation, as well as at the building.

We have documented the synagogue and the Jeevamatha church in Mattancherry. We started documentation of the Stromberg Bungalow in December 2006 and will proceed in July 2007.

There was a move to get Fort Kochi included in UN World Heritage List.

I think the UNESCO might have a problem putting Fort Kochi on the world heritage list in its present state. The dilapidated structural remains in the area must be restored in the coming years. First and foremost, local players, like the Kerala government, industrialists, as well as companies in the tourism sector, have to fulfil their role in sponsoring the conserva-

tion in the Fort Kochi area before international agencies can come in.

Compare the World Heritage Site in Goa (with the Basilica Bom Jesus) and Fort Kochi (with the Santa Cruz Basilica). The historical remains in Goa, after Indian Independence, were never so neglected like the ones, such as David Hall or Stromberg Bungalow, in the Fort Kochi area.

You say that there is a dire need, but not enough will, to preserve heritage in Kerala. Has your NGO been able to make a difference?

How can we make a difference coming once in a year for a few weeks to Kerala? We have just started in 2005. And we can only do work when we are invited. I do not want to be labelled a “neo-colonialist” intruder by the left of centre activists in Kerala.

First, the indigenous problems should be solved by the local players according to a priority list. As I understand it, health, food and education was higher on the government agenda than tourism and historical buildings. But after 50 years of Kerala’s existence, one could bring the efforts into a new scheme.

When tourism is the main income of a state like Kerala, one should look after the interests of the target groups, like tourists



from Europe. They are not interested in slogans like “God’s own country” - there are many places in the world which claim this.

They are interested in clean streets and beaches and well-maintained historical buildings. Our NGO can never bring a difference which can be seen immediately. For this to happen, the state government and the city corporation have to step in.

How can your NGO increase awareness on the need to preserve architectural heritage? What are the threats to old monuments here?

We are already using all public channels, mainly newspapers, to put our message across. In July and August 2007, I will teach at a college in Kerala and convey the message of conservation among the young generation. At the moment, there is only one department of archaeology in Kerala, at the Kerala University, Thiruvananthapuram. Later, one can start a faculty for landmark protection/conservation at Cochin University of Science and Technology, where people are trained as conservationists.

A move towards this must start from the grassroot level, like you nourish a coconut tree. This tree has to grow for years until it can bear fruit. It is not possible without building the basics at the university level in the fields of art history and conservation methods to expect to quickly earn the fruits of well-maintained historical places. Luckily, there are good examples which can be used as models, such as the Padmanabhapuram Palace and the Dutch Palace in Mattancherry under state control, as well as the CGH Earth complex at Kumarakom under private control. Let us develop many such places.

What do you envision will

The activities of European Foundation for IndianHeritage Monuments started as a private initiative in 2005 to study and document the twin churches in Ramapuram. Our concept do some volunteer work and also holiday is an interesting model for people who have experience in Germany in the field of heritage protection. Our NGO hopes to “export” ideas and experiences from Germany in the field of landmark protection as ‘Help for self-help’.

be the state of ancient buildings in Kerala 10 years from now? What is your hope for the future, in this regard?

I hope that people like K.J. Sohan (ex-mayor of Kochi and INTACH convener for Kerala), who understands the urgent need for conservation and cleaning-up policies within the Fort Kochi area, the city administration (garbage removal etc.), the industrialists of Ernakulam (through sponsoring) and educational institutions will wake up to such demands. The media, too, play a very important role. Then at least Fort Kochi could be a positive example for the interior parts of Kerala.

I hope that in 10 years we have an office for EFIHM in the Stromberg Bungalow with a sizable archive of the documents on the monuments of Kochi. I can not speak for the whole of Kerala.

Too many institutions are involved in city planning and building conservation, including the Catholic church, which is a major owner of heritage property. What is their strategy for the next 10 years with their landmark buildings? This would be the topic for another interview. So let us first focus on the microcosm of Fort Kochi in the next years and extend our interest only after a success to a state wide perspective.

To know more about the work of EFIHM, please visit www.efihm.de

Measures for protection: Using a LEICA tachymeter to study a church in Ramapuram; (top) Documentation on the Synagogue in Mattancherry made in 2006



VISITORS TURNED NATIVE

Making a mark

Over the centuries, the *Gujaratis* with their vibrant trading skills, have become an integral part of the Kerala business scene

It is difficult to miss the distinctive Gujarati ambience when one walks down the area in Mattancherry around which the close-knit community is largely concentrated in Kochi.

Matrons in tie-and-dye saris worn in the traditional manner buy vegetables, men in kurtas sit at shop fronts and Shantilal S. Mitaiwari does brisk business of dhoklas, jilebis and other Gujarati savouries and sweets.

There are eight temples managed by the various sub-communities, including Jains, Baniyas and Vaishnavas. It is not surprising then that New Road, with old buildings that served as warehouses and homes to Gujarati merchants and their families, was renamed Gujarati Road.

The one quality that the Gujarati shares with the Malayali is probably the fact that their diasporas are equally widespread. The Gujarati pockets in Kerala are concentrated around Kozhikode,

Alapuzha, Kollam and Kochi, which now has the largest population with 700 families. Their settlements around the port towns indicate that they came here mainly to trade.

The Gujaratis are said to have first migrated to Kerala during the invasion of Gujarat by Mahmud Gazni in the 11th century. It is believed that it was a Gujarati who showed the Portuguese the way to Kozhikode, which was a free port. But the large scale and systematic migration of Gujaratis started at the beginning of the 19th century.

The Malayali had no head for commerce, while the Gujaratis are known for their astute business sense. They realised, instinctively, the potential of trade in Kerala, which was rich in spices, but had limited resources of wheat, pulses, chemicals and cement. Also, long spells of drought in Gujarat meant business was lean and they had to seek new markets. The migration of the pow-



Home away from home: The bustling Gujarati Road

erful Muslim Halai merchants from Cochin to Karachi after the Partition presented a good opportunity to the Gujarati traders to establish their businesses here.

While they had business interests in Kozhikode, Alapuzha and Kollam, Kochi became the centre of activity, where adequate facilities were available for the storage of goods and for their export via sea to Mumbai and Surat. In the land allotted to them, they constructed warehouses, which also doubled as homes. They had offices downstairs and lived with

their families upstairs.

They set up prominent business houses, such as Premier Tyres, which was later sold out to Apollo, the Stag brand umbrellas, and the Indo-Mercantile Bank, which was set up by Popatlal Govardhan Lalan, who was also a member of the Cochin Legislative Council and chairman of the Mattancherry municipality.

The Cochin Gujarati Mahajan, which acts as a community centre, was set up in 1883. It first established a *panjarapole* (cowshed to protect non-milch cows from the butchery), a feature that is typical to the community. A Gujarati school was set up in 1908 and officially inaugurated in 1921 by the Cochin State Diwan T. Vijayaraghavachari. It became a full-fledged English medium school recognised by the state in 1956. The high school was added in 1962.

The community gathers at the school grounds for its most important Navratri celebrations, which fall in the Gujarati calendar month of Asso. Youngsters dress

Little Gujarat: The local school built by the Mahajan in 1921



The Gujaratis are said to have first migrated to Kerala during the invasion of Gujarat by Mahmud Gazni in the 11th century.

up and perform the traditional dhandiya dance at the vibrant festival, spread over nine nights in honour of the goddesses Laxmi and Saraswati, a scene very different from the more sober, local celebrations.

"Diwali is the last day of the year for us," says Mulraj Narandas, 76, former secretary of the Gujarati Mahajan. "Accounts were once maintained according to the Gujarati calendar, though now we only use the calendar to mark the days of our festivals. Now, our accounts fall in the regular financial year."

Mulrajbhai, as he is known, remembers the time when Malayali accountants, who looked after sales tax at the Gujarati firms, spoke fluent Gujarati.

And while most of the Gujaratis, too, speak fluent Malayalam, they, unlike the Arabs, Portuguese or British, did not enter into matrimonial union with the locals. "Marriage alliances were made with the Gujarati communities settled in Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh or Karnataka. If this did not work, we went to Mumbai or Gujarat," says Mulrajbhai.

It is only the youngsters of to-



Sweet smell of success: Preparing jilebi at Shatilal S. Mitaiwala

day who have adopted a more modern or even pan-Indian style of dressing. "My generation stuck to our traditional way of dressing," says Mulrajbhai. "We also generally eat Gujarati food. On Sundays, we prepare Kerala food in our homes."

Among a community that still seem like outsiders looking in, Devji Bhimji perhaps provides one of the best examples of the enterprising nature of the Gujarati. Bhimji started not only

the first printing press in Kerala, but also ran *Kerala Mitram*, a Malayalam newspaper. Kandathil Varghese Mappillai, who founded *Malayala Manorama*, once the highest selling newspaper in India, started his career as a journalist at this paper. There could be no better example of a foreign community's integration into Kerala milieu than to have a hand in the newspaper business here. Newspapers are, after all, the Malayali's favourite addiction.

TASTE OF THE PAST

Indo-western masala mix

The Anglo-Indians or Eurasians, as they were originally called, trace their ancestry to the Portuguese and still follow a few European customs. Trying to get old Anglo-Indian recipes, which have elements of Portuguese cuisine, proved a challenge. Housewives confessed to altering ingredients and methods of traditional cooking to fit into what was easily available and possible nowadays. Also, modern-day living did not leave them the kind of time or help their grandmothers probably had to indulge in elaborate cooking.

Take a glimpse of what is truly old-world from the following recipes, taken from an old hand-written recipe book.

Pork vindaloo

INGREDIENTS

- 3 lbs salted pork
- 50 large dried chillies
- 2 bits of saffron
- 2 heaped tsp cumin
- 1 tsp mustard
- 2 pods garlic
- 1 bottle vinegar

METHOD

Take freshly salted pork, cube and dry well in the sun. Cover with towel to prevent dust from settling. Grind the spices and mix well into the vinegar. Dip each piece of pork into this gravy and arrange in a jar. Pour remaining gravy into it. Tie up mouth of the jar well and keep aside.

Portuguese pudding

INGREDIENTS

- 8ozs sugar
- ½ lb finely sifted rice flour
- 6 eggs
- 2ozs butter
- 1 lime
- 1 tbsp brandy
- 1 tsp caraway seeds
- 1½ cups of thick coconut milk

METHOD

Make very thick coconut milk by adding very little water to the grated coconut. Strain the milk and dissolve sugar in it. Add the flour, well-beaten eggs and strained juice of lime, butter, brandy, caraway seeds and mix well. Pour the mixture into a well-buttered pie-dish and bake.



Open the jar after two days and see if the gravy has dried up. Pour a little vinegar into it, let the pieces of pork lie soaking in the gravy. When required, take one or two pieces of vindaloo, put sufficient water and let it boil. When the gravy becomes thick and the fat clears, serve warm.

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Contributions are welcome. If you have any interesting stories from yesteryear Cochin, please mail us at the above address.

Bumpy start, but smooth finish



The proposal for what is now the KB Jacob Road was welcomed in the typical manner in which most new things are received in Kerala: with resistance. Freedom fighter and the first Malayali municipality chairman, K.B. Jacob, mooted the idea, in the late 1950s, and brought British engineers from Madras to study the viability of a road from Veli to Fort Cochin.

It took a hard-fought battle before his dream was realised by his son and municipality chairman, K.J. Herschel in 1962. Colonies had to be cleared for the construction of the road and the concern of its inhabitants, apparently, was that the road was

being built to benefit Herschel, whose house stands on it.

“There were satyagraha and protests before the municipal office for a month,” said Joseph Kattithara, 72, Mattancherry Congress Bloc president, who was a municipal councillor when Herschel was chairman. “But houses were built for the evictees; the first time that the municipality had done this. Until then, the practice was to provide compensation.” The rehabilitated colony is still situated behind the market area in Amaravatti.

The only road in Fort Kochi up until then was a very narrow one from Amaravatti to Veli Junction and there was only one bus service in place of the 70-odd buses that ply the area now. “Students walked about 15 km to attend college in Ernakulam. So did women, who had to go to the city on work,” said Santosh Burleigh, Jacob’s grandson. “The people who opposed the road profit from it today.”

Herschel’s proposal for a 70ft road was rejected for a 50ft one, which stretches from the



Visionary leader: K.J. Herschel at a municipal meeting

Dhronacharya gate to the old Corporation building. The battle for the road earned P.V. Raghavan, Herschel’s man-Friday, the nickname of “50-foot Raghavan”. It makes him sound like a giant-killer, and indeed Raghavan’s tireless efforts to get the Communist government’s approval for the proposal makes it seem apt. A few people, including Herschel and Raghavan, surrendered some of their lands for free to make way for the construction.

It was christened KB Jacob Road, by then archbishop of Bombay, Cardinal Gracias, during the centenary celebrations of the municipality in 1967, when it was also dismissed to make way for the new Cochin Corporation.

The old beach road was rebuilt and rechristened as KJ Herschel Road in the 80s. It was inaugurated by a 4km run from the start of the road to Vasco da Gama Square. “Jacob and Herschel, who was a bachelor, were great visionaries,” said Kattithara. “In those days, it was easier to find politicians who did things for the greater good rather than out of

self-interest.”

Jacob’s greatest contribution as municipal chairman was starting 16 schools in Fort Kochi, some of which are still functioning today, and making primary education compulsory. He also formed a special inspection team to monitor child labour and prosecuted offenders.

Jacob was a fighter till the last. When ICS man Thong walked into a legislature meeting of the municipality, that Jacob was chairing, with a cigar and sat with his foot up on a chair, Jacob asked him to keep decorum or leave. The Englishman soon sought a transfer, but tried to get his own back by writing to the viceroy seeking the dismissal of the municipality and an order to arrest its members.

The sepoy who were asked to make the arrests refused to do so and the order was later rescinded. Interestingly, the sepoy were later known locally as viceroys. Jacob died a day after the viceroy issued the order to dissolve the municipality, but he literally paved the way for change.

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