NOTES ON BACSA

The Association was formed in 1976 and launched in Spring 1977 to bring together people with a concern for the many hundreds of European cemeteries, isolated graves and monuments in South Asia.

There is a steadily growing membership of almost 1,500 (2010) drawn from a wide circle of interest - Government; Churches; Services; Business; Museums; Historical & Genealogical Societies. More members are needed to support the rapidly expanding activities of the Association - the setting up of local committees in India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Burma, Sri Lanka, Malaysia etc., and building up the Records Archive in the India Office Collections at the British Library; and many other projects for the upkeep of historical and architectural monuments. The Association has its own newsletter Chowkidar, which is distributed free to all members twice a year and contains a section for 'Queries' on any matter relating to family history or the condition of a relative's grave etc. BACSA also publishes Cemetery Records books and books on different aspects of European social history out East. Full details on our website: www.bacsas.org.uk

The enrolment fee and subscription rates are obtainable from the Membership Secretary.

The British Association for Cemeteries in South Asia (BACSA)

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NOTES ON BACSA

The Residency Cemetery of Babulbona

Earlier this year BACSA member Michael Manser and a friend adventurously set out to tour the countryside of West Bengal. This is almost completely off the map as far as foreigners are concerned, and even Indian friends in the state capital, Calcutta, say apologetically that they haven’t got round to visiting it yet. Before he left England, Mr Manser asked if there was anything he could do for BACSA, and was charged with finding the Old Residency Cemetery at Cossimbazaar, which your Editor had failed to locate on her visit last year. Confusingly, the cemetery turned out to lie in nearby Berhampore, and in fact the BACSA archive file in the British Library was misleading on this occasion, placing it a few miles away from its true location. Berhampore was developed as a military cantonment of the East India Company shortly after the battle of Plassey in 1757. Having defeated the Nawab of Bengal and won the right to collect the land revenue tax, the Company set up a sizeable establishment here of parade ground, officers’ bungalows, sepoys’ huts, a chapel, and of course a cemetery. The small town of Berhampore was in existence long before the British came on the scene, but its development as an important army base was due to the Company wishing to be near Murshidabad, then the old capital of Bengal. Cossimbazaar seems to hover between the two, not helped by a drastic change in the course of the river Bhagirathi, but this is a place of early British settlement, the first English agent arriving in 1658.

The cemetery is hard to find and it was only by showing photographs of it to local people that it was discovered. It lies on the Babulbona Road, hence its name, on a turning near a level crossing in a heavily congested area. ‘It is narrow and not easy to spot amidst the general chaos of the area. About 150 yards down the turning there is a blue sign strung across the road saying ‘Residency Cemetery’. A little further on is the cemetery itself – locked – but the very charming local people advised us to climb over the wall. It is large – 2 to 3 acres possibly. We estimated the number of monuments as being about 150. They look much restored. The cemetery is kept in very good order by the Archaeological Survey of India...but the only inscriptions remaining are a handful cut into stone or marble.’ The cemetery seems to have been in use comparatively recently, for one of the remaining inscriptions is to Stanley Vernon Rouse, missionary of the London Missionary Society, Calcutta, who died in October 1936. An earlier stone is ‘To the Memory of Isabella Sneyd the beloved wife of Lieut F.P. Bailey 7th Regt. N.I. who died 13 March 1856 aged 27 years’. But we know that the cemetery also contains the remains of Captain James Skinner, who died in 1773, and is, presumably, a relative of the more famous Colonel James Skinner who is buried in his own church in Delhi.
Here too is that old rogue George Thomas, the so-called Rajah of Tipperary, one of the most notorious freebooters of the late eighteenth century. Born in Ireland about 1756, his illiteracy was no bar to a brief but spectacular military career, which saw him working for the Begam Sombre of Sardhana and later becoming ‘king’ in the small independent kingdom of Hansi. French mercenaries leading the army of the Maharatta chief, Daulat Rao Scindia, eventually defeated him. Thomas was honorably treated and allowed to leave for his native land with several lakhs of rupees. But years of heavy drinking had taken their toll, and he collapsed on his way to Calcutta, dying from fever at Berhampore on 22 August 1802.

As Michael Manser’s photographs show, the cemetery today is a splendid funerary mixture ranging from extravagant eighteenth century pillars, domed cupolas and pyramid obelisks to the plainer Victorian box tombs. (see page 84) Hopefully a record will exist somewhere of the names of all those buried here. (The Bengal Obituary gives only a partial list.) For the moment we would urge visitors to Bengal to explore this delightful backwater, with its grand, ruinous buildings and lush scenery, and to imagine the early days of British rule in India.

MAIL BOX

Although much of BACSA’s work is ‘impersonal’, in the sense that we restore cemeteries irrespective of who is buried in them, there is something particularly poignant when we are able to help people find the graves of their relatives. Two recent cases come to mind, both concerned with graves in one cemetery in Pakistan. Mark Vanstone first contacted BACSA in October 2009. His father, Peter, had been brought up as a child in Rawalpindi, now in Pakistan, but then part of British India. When he was five years old, a little sister, Hazel, was born, who sadly died at the age of seven months. The grieving parents took a photograph for his elderly father, and this proved almost harder than finding the army of the Mahratta chief, Daulat Rao Scindia, eventually defeated him. Thomas was honorably treated and allowed to leave for his native land with several lakhs of rupees. But years of heavy drinking had taken their toll, and he collapsed on his way to Calcutta, dying from fever at Berhampore on 22 August 1802.

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‘It was overwhelming to receive them and to see the memorial stone still in quite good shape,’ wrote his son ‘despite all the intervening years that have gone by. I was speechless when the photos came through, it was truly amazing to see them and once more I thank you so much for your trouble.’ The inscription on the little grave reads: ‘In loving memory of our darling Hazel, beloved child of F/S Sgt [Sergeant] and Mrs Vanstone, who passed away April 3 1932 aged 7 months. Jesus called a little child unto him.’

Also in the Harley Street Cemetery is the grave of Major Edward Le Marchant Trafford, the great, great, great uncle of James Baxendale. This gallant major was a soldier all his life, having joined the 5th Northumberland Fusiliers Regiment of Foot, as an ensign, at the age of twenty. After serving in South Africa he was appointed lieutenant in 1870 and was posted to India, where he was based in various hill stations. One suspects he found life enjoyable, but rather quiet until the 1st Battalion was informed by telegraph to prepare for service in Afghanistan in October 1878. The battalion’s task was to clear the country of rafters and to protect convoys going to and from Kabul through the Khyber Pass. A year later and the battalion was poised to return home when news came of the murder of Sir Louis Cavagnari, the British representative at the Kabul court. Much to its frustration, the battalion was again on guard duty, holding forts and keeping the road from Jalalabad open ‘with none of the compensation of a good fight’. Major Le Marchant Trafford received the Afghanistan medal for his part in the campaign, but little is known of his subsequent career.

It would not have been possible to locate the grave without BACSA’s help, reported James Baxendale, when he went in search of it. ‘The cross was missing, and the plinth (with the inscription) had to be literally dug out of the ground. The iron railings, if there ever had been any, were no longer here.’ (see page 85) Mr Baxendale is hoping to restore the grave, with BACSA’s help. The inscription, when it was uncovered, read simply: ‘Edward Le Merchant Trafford, Major 5th Northumberland Fusiliers. Son of the late Major General T.S. Trafford, who died Rawalpindi 9th January 1888. Aged 42 years.’ There is also a monumental inscription in the church of St Telios in Pennybont, Wales, which was erected by his brother officers.

A similar query to that of the Vanstone family, above, came from Australia recently. Melissa Honour lost a four-year-old sister eighty years ago in Penang. Helen Margaret Smart was born there in 1926, and sadly died in childhood. She was the daughter of Edward and Ethel Smart, both of English descent. BACSA was able to tell Ms Honour that her sister is...
buried in the Protestant Section of the Western Cemetery, Penang, and that the inscription on the little tomb reads: ‘In ever loving memory of Lettie Helen Margaret Smart taken from us, 18th February 1930.’ The enquiry was passed on to the BACSA Area Representative for Malaysia, Michael Rawlinson, and within what seemed like only hours he had emailed photographs of the grave to Melissa Honour and advice on how to obtain a copy of her sister’s death certificate.

BACSA member Henry Brownrigg, whom members will know as the Area Representative for South India, recently did some restoration work of his own on a family grave in what was the old Central Provinces, and is today Madhya Pradesh. The story is best told in his own words: ‘I never met my grandparents, but there is a 1904 photograph of them with my father, aged two, in a sailor suit and his older brother Jock wearing an Eton collar. Within a year my grandmother was dead of enteric fever. My grandfather, a Royal Engineers colonel, died four years later in a fall from his polo pony, and Jock was killed in action in Mesopotamia aged nineteen. My father was brought up by fierce Saki-esque aunts and took the first opportunity to join the Navy. It was not until last year that I found an old photograph showing my grandmother’s grave in Mhow, near Indore in Madhya Pradesh. Through a BACSA contact I was put in email touch with two local residents, Aruna Rodrigues and Dev Kumar, who very kindly offered to look for the grave. By a miracle they managed to locate it though it was in a neglected corner of the cemetery and in ruinous condition. In March this year we all went to see it. The marble surround was broken and the cross had disappeared, though there was another cross lying nearby.

‘It so happened that the Commonwealth War Graves Commission was working in the cemetery, and their workmen agreed to restore this grave once their own task was finished. There remained the problem of the cross. To get a new cross carved would have been difficult and would have meant missing the window of opportunity offered by the CWGC workmen. I looked at the other cross. There was no sign of which grave it had originally come from, and it fitted Grandmother’s grave well enough. I reasoned that it would be more sensible to reuse it than to leave it to be removed by pillagers. The work is now complete and the restored grave looks splendid. The only point is that the cross sports a relief of Prince of Wales feathers. I think this means that my grandmother is now a Royal Welch Fusilier.’ A photograph of the grave as it originally looked is on page 85 and the inscription then read: ‘Evelyn Mary the dearly beloved wife of Lt. Col. M.J.W. Brownrigg RE died of enteric fever at Mhow Dec 2nd 1906. Mors Janua Vitae. [Death is the Gate of Life] ‘She was his life’ and ‘Thou hast called me to resign What most I prize.’

A useful reminder that BACSA deals with European graves in South Asia, as well as British burials comes in a letter from new member Henning Hoffmann in Germany. Mr Hoffmann has been punctilious in following up information about German prisoners-of-war who were interned in India during the second World War and who unfortunately died in captivity. These men were not combat soldiers, but were German citizens living and working in India when the war broke out. As many as a thousand ‘enemy aliens’ were held in the detention camp at Debra Dun, so it is not surprising that the cemetery contains a number of graves of people who died in detention. The Debra Dun cemetery is not particularly well kept up, and recent efforts to contact the cemetery authorities there have failed. Mr Hoffmann is hoping to involve the German War Graves Association (Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge) in a possible restoration of the graves. The Association appears to cover both military and civilian war graves of German citizens. We have a photograph of the grave of one such PoW, Reinhard Geisse, sent by Mr Hoffmann but the inscription is unfortunately illegible.

A query with another European dimension came recently from Dr Alex Glogowski of Jagiellonian University, Krakow. He is researching the lives of Polish airmen who joined the Pakistan Air Force after Partition. ‘They were veterans of Polish squadrons who fought in the UK during World War Two, some of them were Battle of Britain heroes. I know some of them died in Pakistan in air crashes.’ BACSA was able to confirm that Squadron Leader Zbigniew Kossakowski, who was born in Poland in 1923 was killed in a flying accident in 1959 at Rawalpindi. In the same cemetery, Harley Street, is a memorial to Wladyslaw Banach, born in 1919, who worked as a pilot for the Attak Oil Company and who was killed while on duty in December 1964. His baby son, Julian Michael, who predeceased him by four years, is also commemorated here.

On a more cheerful note, Chowkidar is fond of stories about graves of Britons which have become Hindu shrines in India. This one, sent to us by a corresponding member, Mrs Vicky Singh, is a cracker. In the Rajasthani village of Auwa ‘faith triumphs yet again over reason’ reports Rohit Parihar in India Today. A group of camel-breeders from the Rabari community gather regularly to worship at the tomb of Captain George Henry Monck Mason of the Bengal Native Infantry, who was Political Agent at Jodhpur during the Mutiny. Monck Mason was killed on 18 September 1857 in a minor skirmish with the Auwa headman, Thakur Khushal Singh that is hardly mentioned in any of the standard histories. According to local legend, Monck Mason was beheaded and his head displayed on the Thakur’s fort. His body seems to have been buried in a
plain isolated grave, which today has no inscription, but is verified by the present Thakur of Auwa, as his burial place. A Jain trader is said to have constructed a small shrine on top of the grave and at some point the Rabaris began offering prayers here on festive occasions. Today the grave is covered in marigold garlands and incense is burnt and prayers offered. Folk songs are sung here too, praising the British: ‘The English brought an iron cart that could run on rails without bullocks. Oh Britons, your skills were too great!’ What Monck Mason would have made of all this, we will never know. A chaste memorial in County Wicklow, Ireland records his death in action, and there is also a memorial inscription in St James’s Church, Delhi to this young Political Agent, who was 33 years old when he was killed.

CAN YOU HELP?

Author Anne de Courcy is writing a book about the ‘Fishing Fleet’, the rather unkind name given to girls and young women who went, or were sent, to India from Britain to find a husband. As travel to the Indian subcontinent became easier and quicker, particularly with the introduction of steam-ships, so the number of hopefuls increased, all in search of a good catch. Although it might be easy to poke fun at these young women, as many did, there is a serious side to the story. Many of these female passengers had been born in India where their fathers were serving in the Indian Civil Service, the Army, in business, or in tea planting. They would have been sent home to be educated when they reached the age of seven or so, and a decade later would be considered ready for marriage. Why couldn’t they find husbands in Britain, one might ask? Part of the reason is that British families in India had, on the whole, in spite of hardships and disease, an enjoyable lifestyle. A higher standard of living was possible, even for those of modest means, because the cost of living in India was so cheap (to the detriment of Indian workers, of course). It was understandable that young women, born and brought up during the heyday of the Raj, would seek to recreate the life their parents enjoyed. There was a sadder reason too. After the loss of so many young men during World War One, there was a dearth of eligible bachelors. British India, with its dashing young officers and a ‘terrific social life’ seemed the answer.

Anne de Courcy is looking for people whose mothers and grandmothers may have been part of the ‘fishing fleet’, particularly if they left letters, or diaries, or unpublished memoirs. It may be almost too late, for the generations are passing away, and a considerable amount of work has already been done on the ‘Raj’ families and the memsahibs. But if you can help, please either email our enquirer on anne@annedecourcy.co.uk or write to the Secretary who will pass your letters on.

Queries to BACSA often provide us with previously unknown material, and it can be very much a two-way exchange of valuable information. A case in point was a recent enquiry from Heather Gale about the grave of her grandmother, Agnes Helen James (nee Brailey) who was buried at Maymyo in Burma in September 1914. Heather Gale is planning a visit to Burma and wants to know if the grave, of which she has an old photograph, still exists. Agnes James’s story was a tragic one. The thirty-eight year old woman died of septicaemia, or pyrexia fever, following the birth of her second daughter. Agnes’ widower, Thomas Leslie James, asked one of his sisters to travel out to Burma and help bring up the little girl. (The elder daughter, who was born in England in 1911, was presumably being cared for by relatives there.)

After nearly a decade of working in Burma, Thomas James moved to Lahore in 1919, where he took up a post as Divisional Engineer of Telegraphs. He decided to return to England, possibly on leave, rather than retirement and had booked a passage for April 1921. But shortly before Christmas 1920, he took his own life and died from a gun-shot wound. He is buried in the Taxali Gate Cemetery in Lahore. The fact that he committed suicide was unknown to his descendants, who were told he had died of a ‘broken heart’. The truth may well be that he never got over the death of his wife, but it was thought kinder not to give the family the real cause of death. A photograph of his grave, if it still exists, would be welcomed.

BACSA’s Area Representative for Burma, Sally Hofmann, was able to trace Thomas James’s career through the Ecclesiastical Returns and Service Records in the India Office at the British Library. In return, Heather Gale has sent precious family photographs of the house where the James’s lived in Maymyo, and of her grandmother’s grave, which was recorded in the Burma Register published by BACSA in 1983. A researcher in Burma is checking whether both house and grave still survive at the moment. Sadly the Maymyo cemetery, which was closed in the 1980s has been subject to vandalism and desecration since. Headstones identified in the last two decades cannot be found today, and at least twenty graves were completely obliterated when a number of mature pine trees were felled without supervision.

Mis-spelt, or mis-heard, Indian place names can lead researchers on a merry dance when they try to tackle nineteenth century British census records, now online. You can imagine the Dickensian scene as an old India hand spells out the unpronounceable name of his birth place and the unlettered census clerk attempts to transcribe it. This is what we think happened in the case of Corporal Charles Birch, great, great, grandfather of our enquirer, Meryl Hirons.
Charles Birch first saw service in the 69th Regiment of Foot, which was posted to India in 1805. He would have been a very young man at the time, as there is a record showing his birth in Madras in 1791. But Charles prospered and in 1824 a son, William, was born. (We do not know the name of Charles’s wife.) This was where the census problem arose, because later, in 1861, when William attempted to give his place of birth, it was recorded as Wallagbabul, which of course doesn’t exist. Meryl Hirons sought BACSA’s help to find William’s birth-place and in doing so, to learn more about Charles Birch. BACSA suggested that the place name might be Walajabad, now in Tamil Nadu, and when it was found that the Regiment maintained a presence here between 1823 and 1825, things started to fall into place. However, it appears that while William went to England at some point, his father Charles remained in India. At the time of William’s marriage in England, in 1854, his father’s occupation was given as ‘Soldier’ showing that he was still alive, and presumably still working at the age of 62. Had he perhaps left his Regiment to work for a local Indian ruler, as some Europeans did? It brings us no nearer to finding his burial place, however. Any suggestions for further research would be welcomed, and we add a gentle reminder that Asian place-names in the British census records may not be all they seem.

Although it is clear that BACSA can’t answer every query received for the ‘Can You Help?’ column, it is surprising how often our members can help. In the Spring Chowkidar Professor Stafford from Cardiff asked for information about the Chulsa Polo Club after acquiring a beer tankard of 1900 with four names inscribed on it. Our indefatigable member Alan Lane was able to tell him that the Chulsa Club is still in operation and gave him brief details of the players from the book Recollections of a Tea Planter. One of the men named on the tankard, Fred Thompson, worked on the Sam-Sing tea estate and was described as ‘a fine fellow... an athlete who could play all games. In 1908 he was killed as a result of a gunshot when firing at a tiger at close quarters, or being mauled by the animal...’

The Chulsa tea estate is today part of the Duncan Goodricke company, of which BACSA’s late President, Peter Leggatt, was the chairman. We wonder if they have a record of Fred Thompson’s grave on the tea estate?

Here is another offbeat query, this time from Mrs Ferguson, head teacher at Creetown Primary School in Scotland. Creetown granite was much sought after in the nineteenth and early part of the twentieth centuries for war memorials, we are told. There are granite memorials in Newfoundland and Iceland, and it is believed in Sumatra and other locations in South Asia too. Mrs Ferguson asks if BACSA members might have any information about these memorials, or the use of Creetown granite in graveyards abroad?

An example of how BACSA can help, when other organisations fail, comes from Mr David Hamilton. He had been trying for some time, without success, to find out if his great uncle, Lance Corporal Alfred Appleby, had a grave. The Joint Casualty & Compassionate Centre at the Ministry of Defence was unable to help, but suggested Mr Hamilton contact BACSA. Lance Corporal Appleby, born in 1906, joined the Royal Corps of Signals and was posted to India in 1929. Sadly he died from a hernia in November 1932 at the Military Hospital in Abbottabad, at the young age of 26. A message to BACSA member Sue Farrington, who has surveyed nearly all the Christian cemeteries in Pakistan, brought an immediate response. A headstone in the Abbottabad cemetery reads: ‘Sacred to the memory of No. 2316856 L/Cpl Alfred Appleby, Royal Corps of Signals who died at Abbottabad on 25th November 1932. Aged 26 years. Erected by all ranks of No. 1 Indian Divisional Signals Rawal Pindi’. A photograph of the headstone has been sent to Mr Hamilton. Many people are unaware that the Commonwealth War Graves Commission is strictly limited in its remit, and that soldiers who died outside the period of the two World Wars, although serving their country, were not entitled to burial in a War Graves cemetery. This is where BACSA steps in and why we record military as well as civilian graves and memorials. Incidentally, members will be delighted to learn that Sue Farrington was awarded an MBE in the Queen’s Birthday Honours in June this year for ‘Services to British heritage in Pakistan’, an acknowledgement of decades of painstaking field-work.

BACSA member Miss Thelma Munckton has very kindly donated two watercolour sketches for sale at the Autumn General Meeting on 28 October this year. Both are impressionistic sketches of scenes in Jaipur, painted in 1931. The artist’s signature is M.L. D’Altura, with a monogram above the signature of ‘P’ and ‘W’. Miss Munckton tells us that her mother referred to the artist as Lisa, Baroness von Pott, who had a strong connection to Jaipur. Is anything known of this talented female artist?

FOREIGN GRAVES IN CHINA

Martyn Webster, a BACSA member, has in the past appealed for information about the graves of westerners buried in the vast Chinese mainland, and the results of his research have now been published in two lengthy articles in the Genealogists’ Magazine. As we have long suspected, no foreign cemeteries remain, apart from that at Whampoa, which Chowkidar first highlighted as long ago as 1997 (Vol. 8, No. 2). Hong Kong and Macao, being special cases, retain their cemeteries, although ominously Mr Webster notes that the future of the Happy Valley cemetery seems to be assured only until 2047, fifty years after the handover of Hong Kong itself.
One of the important cemeteries was in fact at Shanghai, the great port city and international settlement area for foreigners. The curiously named Bubbling Well Cemetery was opened in 1898, and was the largest cemetery in China, with well over five thousand graves and some 1,500 cremated remains, including those of 55 servicemen. At least twenty-six different nationalities were represented here in the ten acre plot, with its pleasant walks shaded by plane trees. All this changed abruptly in 1953, when the Communist authorities ordered the whole site to be dug up and the tombstones removed to an obscure area some fifteen miles north of the city. Here the stones suffered a further indignity and one quite unique in the history of European cemeteries in South Asia. All references to imperial or military connections on the stones were defaced, so that in some cases, only the name of the deceased remained. Just imagine how long this must have taken to carry out. But there was worse to come. During the Cultural Revolution ‘these very headstones were cleared and dumped in the vast wetlands surrounding Shanghai. Many have since come to light in use as washboards, floors, tables, steps, bridges and foundations. The remains [of the dead] were probably ploughed over. The fate of grave goods and coffin accessories can only be guessed.” Another Shanghai cemetery, the Shantung Road cemetery attached to the Catholic Holy Trinity Cathedral, erected 1846/47 was the first communal graveyard of its kind in China and survived until about 1967. It has now been built over. The Seamen’s Cemetery, established in 1855 was in a dilapidated condition in 1948 and is now lost. In the capital Peking (now Beijing), the British cemetery, which had been opened in 1864 on land purchased outside the west gate, was destroyed by Kuomintang soldiers in 1949 who also smashed up the attached chapel. The remains of the dead were removed to a remote village. Victims of the Boxer Rebellion (1900-01) were interred in the old British Legation garden. They were carefully moved to the new British Embassy, only to be sacked, along with the Embassy, in 1967. It all makes very dismal reading. One can’t help contrasting the attitudes of the two great Asian super powers, China and India, towards foreign burials. While the former has effectively removed every trace of its colonial past, India has not only assimilated, and come to terms with it, but is actively profiting from cemetery tourism today. Martyn Webster has provided the definitive and sorry story of the loss of European graves in China.

**MAJOR GONVILLE BROMHEAD’S TOMB**

On 31 January this year, the *Independent on Sunday* ran an excited article headlined ‘Rorke’s Drift hero’s grave lies in ruins.’ A dramatic photograph of Major Gonville Bromhead’s tomb at Allahabad, with its marble cross toppled off its plinth and broken in two accompanied the article. ‘Last resting place of soldier portrayed by Michael Caine in “Zulu” lies mouldering and desecrated.’ it went on.

The journalist, Jonathan Owen, contacted BACSA for comments and was told that the damage to the grave was more likely to have been caused by an animal straying into the cemetery than a resentful Zulu who had waited 131 years to take revenge. But it wouldn’t have made such a good story. BACSA Council member Lieutenant General Menezes contacted the Sub-Area Commander, Allahabad, because the cantonment lies within the jurisdiction of the Indian Army. The Brigadier in charge immediately went to the cemetery and personally interviewed the mali (gardener) and chowkidar (watchman) who both confirmed that the tomb had been damaged by neelgai, the substantially built Asian antelope. Within days the tomb was expertly restored by the Army. The toppled cross was eased back onto the plinth, and the break, just below the arms of the cross, was cemented together. The tomb was cleaned, so that the veins of the marble are visible again, and the inscription carefully retlettered in black. (see back cover) Both BACSA and Brigadier David Bromhead, the great, great nephew of the hero, have offered their esteem.’ Interestingly the standard reference works give his death as 1892, although the inscription clearly states 1891. Bromhead died from typhoid at Camp Dabhaura, Allahabad, one of Britain’s greatest heroes of the nineteenth century.
above: the Babulbona cemetery at Berhampore (see page 73)

right: Hazel Vanstone's grave at Rawalpindi today (see page 74)

above: the grave of Evelyn Mary Brownrigg at Mhow (see page 76)

below: digging out the tomb of Major Edward Le Marchant Trafford in the Rawalpindi cemetery (see page 75)
Christopher Ondaatje's subsequent emigration to Canada in the 1950s in search of wealth was so successful that life as a businessman and publisher eventually lost its flavour. Twenty years later, his obsession for leopards and a longing to see the country of his youth has become so overwhelming he finally sets out on his pilgrimage. For years he had identified with predators, realizing those who control the territory have the power, like the British who controlled Ceylon (Ceylon) and now the Tamil Tigers who were trying to do the same. Finally he decided to walk away from his business territory and explore that of the leopard.

As the memories of the past come flooding back we share his thoughts as he goes south to the old Dutch city of Galle, to Yala, the national park through the jungle paths, and gaze in wonder at its flora and fauna. Once started it is impossible to put down and can be read over and over again. (EFH)

Christopher Ondaatje - The Man-eater of Punanai

This beautifully illustrated and intriguing account of Christopher Ondaatje's journey to Sri Lanka, the country of his youth, for the first time in 44 years is far more than just a travelogue set in the 1980s during the civil war. As we travel by his side we return to the places of his childhood and capture his longing for times past and people who will never come again. Halcyon days before his alcoholic father squandered the family fortune and his mother went to England so her children would have some chance in life. She survived by running a boarding house. We also learn the Ondaatjes (a family of Dutch Burgher extraction) were considered to be high achievers and had a reputation for being either brilliant or mad.

As with the Indian subcontinent, increased interest in the young men who went out to seek their fortunes in far-flung parts of the Empire has been serviced by a number of well researched reference books. This latest one has been written by, and primarily for, collectors of medals to the men who served in various Volunteer units in the Malay Peninsular.

Described as a history of the volunteer forces of Malaya and Singapore the authors, in the first few words, stress that this is not a comprehensive history of volunteering there, as this has already been dealt with elsewhere. Thus, in a disappointingly brief 20 pages some 180 years of volunteering is covered, although the interesting chapter on Captivity should stimulate further reading on the subject. A reading of British & Indian Armies in the East Indies (1685-1935) by our late member and Area Representative for Malaya, Alan Harfield, and other books in the bibliography, would be worthwhile before enjoying the undoubted strength of the remaining 470 odd pages of this book, which provide a vital biographical resource for medal collectors, but don't be put off by this. These pages comprise an outstanding 'Who's Who' of several hundred men and some women of volunteer units stretching from Singapore northwards through Malaya up to Thailand, but only for those who served during the period 1941-45 – potted biographies of an eclectic mix of tin miners, rubber planters, public works engineers, civil and commercial administrators, accountants, car salesmen, lawyers, etc – including Sir Alastair Blair-Kerr who later conducted the notorious Godber corruption enquiry in 1970s Hong Kong – who fought, escaped, died in combat and captivity (some on the infamous Thai/Burma Railway), and those who survived.

Following some excellent photographs is a comprehensive and very useful list of recipients of awards and medals – including the unlucky Sir Franklin Gimson who arrived in Hong Kong to take up the post of Colonial Secretary on 7 December 1941, the day before the Japanese invaded, but who survived three and a half years of captivity to be rewarded with the Governorship of Singapore. Gathered from a wide selection of sources this information provides a valuable resource not only to collectors, researchers, historians etc. but also those of us interested in the lives of men who sought their fortune, and sometimes died, in the jungles of South East Asia. This is a very creditable effort by the co-authors, and is highly recommended – perhaps best read under the casuarinas on a Penang Beach. (DM)

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In the Wake of the Raj: Travels in 1950s India  Desmond Higgins

Do you have a collection of old diaries or letters recording exciting episodes or events of your youth? You are probably too embarrassed to dig them out and read them, but you think that your grandchildren might be interested, and that is good enough reason to rescue them from oblivion. Private papers can be a mine of information, and oral history is big. It can give insights into the past which do not appear in the written records. It also provides social anthropologists with the primary evidence for researching and analyzing whole classes of people and professions. The observer is not just observed, but categorized within a theoretical framework undreamed of by the subject. Desmond Higgins to his credit has overcome whatever misgivings he may have felt in reviving and publishing an account he wrote as a young diplomat in the late 1950s when travelling round mainly north India, and briefly Pakistan and Nepal. He leaves us guessing who his original intended readers were. Presumably he travelled to get to know India to inform his work as a diplomat. But these are far from being official reports. His thumbnail sketches of Indian government and society are jauntily written, the 1950s time frame of his narrative is unaltered, and his own newness to India at the time mean that they must be considered of limited value as an authoritative source of information either of India as it was then or today. They are perhaps an aide memoire of what he really thought at the time. Very appropriately the book is dedicated to his grandchildren, who will surely have access to enough information about India to take what he writes with an affectionate pinch of salt.

There are several reasons why other readers can be grateful that Desmond Higgins has taken the trouble. In the first place there can be few of us who have such articulate narratives hidden in the bottom drawer from any period of our lives. Secondly the author is patently a broadminded and charming man - he is an Irishman after all - and is writing up for the most part a personal journey of discovery of India and Indians, not thankfully a record of expatriate social life. Many BACSA members will enjoy bringing their own counterpoint to Desmond Higgins, and will find his account stimulates their own perhaps unwritten recollections.

However several potential sources of embarrassment suggest themselves. The narrative is pervaded by a dry and somewhat knowing sense of humour. The quirky ways of Indians were just so amusing. No malice was intended but fifty years later, and after a generation of sensitizing and awareness, incorrectly called ‘political correctness’, these attitudes outside an intimate circle do seem just a bit patronising. The Bengalis for example are ripe and generally willing targets for everyone’s ‘essentialising’ generalizations about their character, including especially their own. I was surprised that Desmond Higgins as an Irishman did not recall the ‘Irish of India’ reputation that the Bengalis had a generation or two earlier, when Bengalis were thought of by Englishmen either as clerks or revolutionaries, - as well as witty, cultured, and (in the word adopted by Nobel prize winner Amartya Sen) ‘argumentative’. But in a comparison I have not heard before, he does call the Rajasthani women carrying sand and cement for the Chambal River development projects, ‘the Irish of north India’.

In this reviewer’s early weeks in India, in the mid-1960s, just a few years after Desmond Higgins, I was told by an English ‘old India hand’ that Bengalis, of all Indians, are either ‘quite the nicest or quite the nastiest’. Desmond Higgins gives a very flattering picture of them, Bengali women especially. ‘The women of Bengal are among the finest and most beautiful of India, and leave their menfolk far behind’. My wife (who is Bengali) tells me that this is a very true and discerning observation, for an Englishman. He does elsewhere also praise the beauty of Punjabi women and of Delhi University girls. His grandchildren will be happy to know that their grandfather was red-blooded. This is however perhaps one of the instances for which he apologises in advance that - because of the mainly northerly routes his travels took him,- he takes the claims and charms of south India so little into account.

His narrative is not free from the occasional solecism. A Bengali reader then and now would find it very quaint that among the poor of Calcutta ‘few are able to afford the odd bullock which would provide them with a supply of milk’. But another aspect of the narrative, which raised sympathetic chords with this reviewer, is his description of the death-defying experience of driving, especially at night, on what used to be narrow Indian roads where the trucks monopolized the centre of the highway - the only surfaced part even at best. Higgins's journeys were by car, mine mainly by scooter, a mode of transport that he recommends highly but does not seem to have used much. In the crush of cars in today's India who remembers the American economist and ambassador J.K. Galbraith's prescription in the mid-60s for the future of India's transport system - 'trucks and scooters'. Wishful thinking indeed.

A further and more disturbing reflection prompted by Higgins's narrative is his view of the Anglo-Indian community, linked by a blood relationship and ties of sentiment to an England they had never seen and which would not accept them. This was a view then widely shared by English people. In today’s multicultural Britain, with very large south Asian communities few
and has come up with a fascinating story of jealousy, snobbery and revenge. Photographed on several occasions with his royal employer. Now for the first time, an Indian author and journalist has looked deeper into this curious relationship.

Victoria

Queen Victoria's penchant for having Indian servants about her has long been regarded as a charming eccentricity and proof of her fondness for her Indian subjects. The munshi, Abdul Karim, seemed to be a particular favourite, and was photographed on several occasions with his royal employer. Now for the first time, an Indian author and journalist has looked deeper into this curious relationship and has come up with a fascinating story of jealousy, snobbery and revenge.
The story unfolds to its tragic conclusion in Agra. The author has been scrupulously fair in portraying the characters of the leading players. She charts Karim's rapid rise to fame, when the Queen gave him his own Indian servants and carriages. He took part in theatrical performances with the royal family, travelled to Europe on the court's annual visits, and quickly lost his slender figure, due to too much good living. However, just when the reader loses patience with Karim's continual tale-telling to the Queen about real or imagined slights, the author reminds us that he was a brown man in a white country, and we begin to sympathize with him again. This is a beautifully written book. Shrabani Basu has been meticulous in her research in the Windsor Castle archives, at Osborne and Agra. She has drawn an accurate picture of an Indian man who rose from a relatively humble background to become a comfort and a close companion to the Empress of India in her later years. Warmly recommended (RLJ)


The Inordinately Strange Life of Dyce Sombre Michael Fisher

The name of Dyce Sombre, the 'black prince' of Sardhana is virtually unknown today, yet in the mid-nineteenth century world it was almost as familiar as that of Queen Victoria herself. Why the sad and extraordinary story of David Dyce Sombre should have faded entirely from public memory is not examined in Michael Fisher's new book, and indeed might have provided a useful epilogue. One can hazard a guess that because so much was written about this unfortunate man, in its multiple meanings as Fisher calls it. One of the most interesting aspects is the question of David's so-called lunacy. His wife and her relatives had him declared a 'legal Chancery Lunatic' after his increasingly bizarre behaviour towards Mary Anne. This meant he lost control over his considerable fortune, and indeed his freedom, becoming in effect a minor, and a ward of the Crown.

The rest of his life was taken up in appealing against the verdict of lunacy and in trying to force the East India Company to return the Begam's property, which had been seized on her death. David managed to escape from the Adelphi Hotel and servants, to scholars, ambassadors and aristocrats. But because David was such a prominent, outrageous figure, his story is particularly worth telling, for its 'multiple meanings' as Fisher calls it. One of the most interesting aspects is the question of David's so-called lunacy. His wife and her relatives had him declared a 'legal Chancery Lunatic' after his increasingly bizarre behaviour towards Mary Anne. This meant he lost control over his considerable fortune, and indeed his freedom, becoming in effect a minor, and a ward of the Crown.

The author, Michael Fisher, like this reviewer, is fascinated by the crossover of Indian and English people during the period of the British Raj, and before. Although there was considerable migration by Britons to India, for army service and adventure, we tend to think that Indians stayed put in India until at least after Partition in 1947. This is simply not so. When David arrived in England there were already several thousand of his fellow countrymen and women here, from seamen (lascars) and servants, to scholars, ambassadors and aristocrats. But because David was such a prominent, outrageous figure, his story is particularly worth telling, for its 'multiple meanings' as Fisher calls it. One of the most interesting aspects is the question of David's so-called lunacy. His wife and her relatives had him declared a 'legal Chancery Lunatic' after his increasingly bizarre behaviour towards Mary Anne. This meant he lost control over his considerable fortune, and indeed his freedom, becoming in effect a minor, and a ward of the Crown.

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the Kashmir Shawl under Maharaja Ranjit Singh 1780-1839'. The author is an acknowledged expert in his field, so much so perhaps that he sometimes takes for granted that readers will be as familiar with Indian terms as he is. It is annoying, for example, to find that the key element of the woven shawl, the ‘boteh’, appears in a different spelling in the glossary and is referred to as the 'Indian term for the Paisley design' without elaborating on the importance of Paisley shawls and their design. In fact the word buta means flower or sprig, particularly when embroidered or woven, and it is that curious conical shape, bulbous at the bottom, with the narrowed top curving over to one side. It is of extreme antiquity, clearly symbolic, and possibly originating in ancient Iran. Its resemblance to the Indian mango is not commented on. The earliest surviving shawls date from the seventeenth century Mughal period and employed single sprigs of naturalistic flowers, widely spaced, against a plain background. How

Legal, medical and academic arguments continued during David's lifetime and beyond. How much of his seemingly odd behaviour towards his English wife would have been perfectly acceptable had he married an Indian lady in India? These intriguing questions are fully explored in this book, and throw light on changing British attitudes towards India during the nineteenth century. It was the late BACSA member Nicholas Shreeve who first brought the Sardhana story back into public attention, with a series of books, including From Nawab to Nabob, an edited version of one of David's diaries that survives in the India Office Records. Michael Fisher has paid gracious acknowledgement to these earlier researches, but his book will stand for a long time as the definitive version of the Dyce Sombre story. There is however, one question he doesn't answer. David's behaviour towards his wife was certainly quite irrational at times. He even accused her of smuggling a lover into the marital bed, while David was actually asleep in it, something we would recognise today as extreme paranoia. But at the same time he was being treated for venereal disease with mercury, then the recognised 'cure'. We know now that mercury affects the mind, hence the old saying 'mad as a hatter' because milliners used mercury in the manufacture of felt and subsequently suffered insane fits. Could this explain David's psychotic episodes? Or was there something much deeper going on in the mind of this unhappy and unfortunate man? Recommended. (RLJ)


Woven Masterpieces of Sikh Heritage  Frank Ames

The sub-title of this very handsome book is 'The Stylistic Development of the Kashmir Shawl under Maharaja Ranjit Singh 1780-1839'. The author is an acknowledged expert in his field, so much so perhaps that he sometimes takes for granted that readers will be as familiar with Indian terms as he is. It is annoying, for example, to find that the key element of the woven shawl, the 'boteh', appears in a different spelling in the glossary and is referred to as the 'Indian term for the Paisley design' without elaborating on the importance of Paisley shawls and their design. In fact the word buta means flower or sprig, particularly when embroidered or woven, and it is that curious conical shape, bulbous at the bottom, with the narrowed top curving over to one side. It is of extreme antiquity, clearly symbolic, and possibly originating in ancient Iran. Its resemblance to the Indian mango is not commented on. The earliest surviving shawls date from the seventeenth century Mughal period and employed single sprigs of naturalistic flowers, widely spaced, against a plain background. How
Born in Gloucestershire, Adela travelled to India in 1881 to join her father who was the Lahore editor of the *Civil and Military Gazette*. Her husband, General Nicolson, Commandant of the 3rd Baluch Regiment was twice her age, but it seems to have been a true love match, so much so that she committed suicide shortly after his death during a failed operation. The conflicting claims of being a senior officer’s wife and a poet, at a time when any literary pretension among members of the British Raj was generally regarded with suspicion are well brought out in this novel. The couple are buried at St Mary’s cemetery, Madras, although the original headstone appears to have been lost, or replaced, according to a visitor in the 1960s. (RLJ)
The newly restored grave of Major Gonville Bromhead at Allahabad