

## INTRODUCTION

It is now April 2016 and my East to West journey has been successfully completed. The aim of the trip was to try to follow the crossing of India from 1778 to 1780 made by my Great Great Great Great Grandfather Solomon Earle with the East India Company army. He eventually ended up in Baroda, north of Bombay, where he was appointed as Resident to the then Maharaja of Baroda, Fatehsinhrao 1.

I travelled with a friend, a fellow psychiatrist who I have known and worked with for nearly thirty years, Steve Reilly. I had originally planned to travel with my son but unfortunately he could not get time off work. Steve had never been to India and had expressed interest in the trip many months ago so we decided to travel together. At the beginning we had no idea how we would get on living and travelling together for over three weeks. We were at least aware of each other's personality and ways of seeing things. Steve worked as a psychotherapist as well as a psychiatrist and has a gift of being able to take a different and sometimes unconventional view on things. He comes from a working class background, Glasgow and Leeds, in contrast to my solidly middle-class origins. He is generally easy going and was very content to follow the route I had devised. He has an interest in nature and we therefore planned a diversion to the Sunderbans, one of the largest mangrove delta regions in the world, just east of Kolkata. He also suggested a visit to Khajuraho en route, which turned out to be well worth the short detour, a unique and fascinating place.

We booked the flights back in September 2015 and were able to get a very good deal thanks my sister-in-law's husband, Nick, who works as an airline pilot with BA. Steve and I got together in November to arrange train bookings, followed by hotels.

The train bookings were surprisingly easy to organise. We couldn't help thinking that something would go horribly wrong as surely Indian bureaucracy cannot be that straightforward. All we had to do was to inform the India Rail office in London which places we wanted to visit and when. Within twenty-four hours they came up with a suggested itinerary and within two weeks, after payment, we had our fifteen-day rail passes with a promise that seat and bed bookings would be completed – we had three overnight trains. Sure enough, when I checked on the Indrail website a few weeks later, all our bookings were confirmed. Luckily I printed off all the timetables and seat numbers for each train. This proved very useful information as the booking reference was often accepted by the guard as proof of booking and it was useful to know where the trains were coming from and which station to get off – especially as the station signs were sometimes in Hindi only, so it was difficult to work out where we were. The website was straightforward and worked smoothly, in contrast to the visa service.

We planned to book cheap to mid-range hotels and tried to find hotels that were as non-corporate as possible. We didn't want to stay in places that were the same the world over. Once we had established the parameters, we divided up the

work. Steve booked a very good value two-day Sunderbans trip – £40 each, inclusive of all meals, travel, accommodation and guides.

So by January there was only the visas left to arrange. We planned to arrange short-term tourist visas over the internet, but this could not be done until within four weeks of travel and you did not need to send away your passport. Malaria pills were not necessary, nor were any special vaccinations. I decided to run the risk and not take any rabies jabs, as we were unlikely to be more than twenty-four hours away from a hospital and I planned to avoid dogs and monkeys as far as possible.

So let us go back in time to the beginning, starting with my account from January 2016...

It is now the 18<sup>th</sup> January 2016 and we are about to depart for India in just over two weeks time. There has been loads of hassle getting my visa sorted. Steve, who is not that great with computers, managed to arrange his visa straight away! There was a problem with the *eTV* Visa system and you could fill in the form but not pay. It takes about two hours the first time, but speeds up when you've done it on multiple occasions. It took me eight days. I had to ring my father twice to check his place of birth (Ipswich of all places). The difficulty came when you tried to pay, as the system then just did not work and you were taken back to the beginning again. It was driving me nuts as the whole trip was at stake if I couldn't get this damn visa. I phoned the Indian Consulate waiting nearly an hour for them to answer the phone. But they were no help as they said the tourist visa system had been 'outsourced' and it was not their responsibility. I took the email address of the person in charge and asked them if they actually wanted anyone to visit their country. I resorted to arranging an appointment at a consular office in Bradford last Friday to apply for a three-month+ visa (£110). But this meant letting them take my passport. This could have been a disaster with just over two weeks to go. In the end I went to Steve's house and used his computer. On the second attempt it worked and I had my visa authorisation by the next day. What a relief.

So now most things are ready. All hotels and trains have been booked and so has Sunderbans trip. I have secured an audience with the Maharaja of Baroda and organized a day at the hospital in Bhopal. William Dalrymple has agreed to see us if he is around, so I just need to confirm that now. I have done extensive background reading over the last year and have learnt a great deal about India and the British. In truth the more I discover the worse it gets, but it was a conquest after all.

Here are just a few things I have pondered over in the last few months. In no particular order:

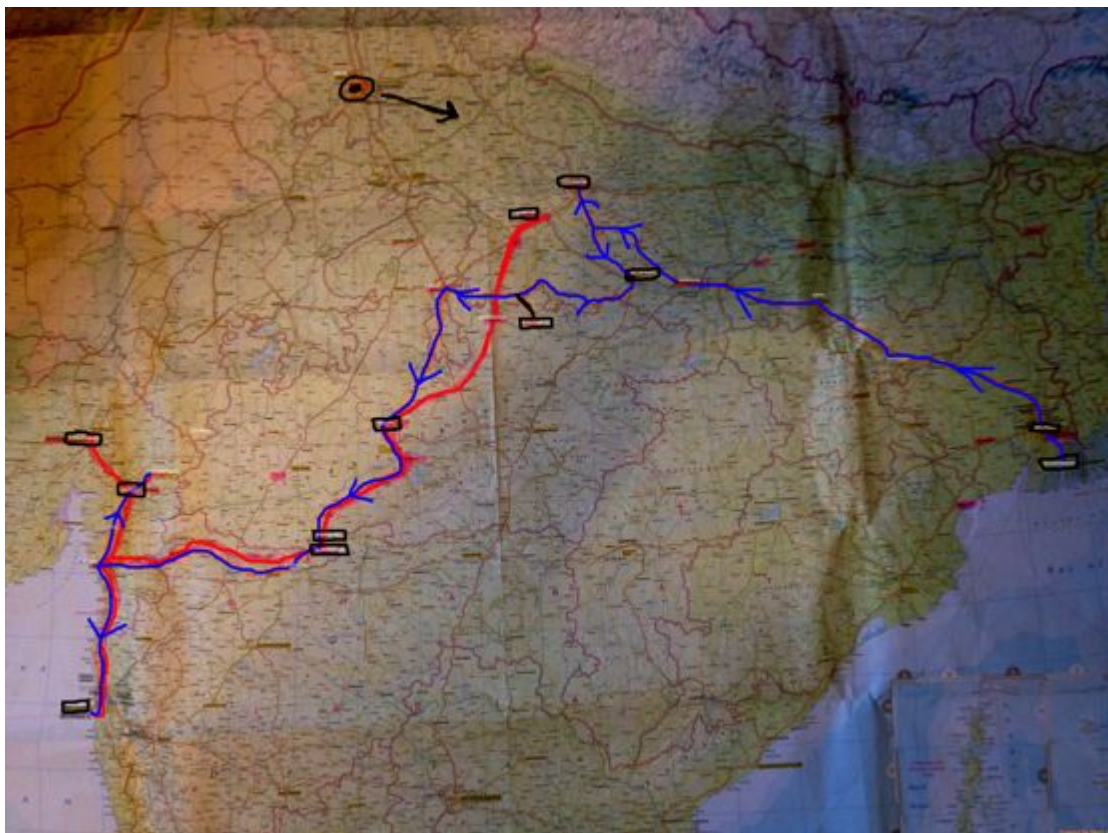
- Indian bureaucracy is frighteningly vast and uncaring. Reminded me of my frustration with getting permits to travel to Darjeeling in 1979.
- The trains are well organized and cheap (£128 for 15 days. First class AC 2 Tier). I hope the paperwork matches the reality.
- History shows divide and rule in operation. However there was no clear plan. The decision to send the EIC force from Bengal to Bombay/Pune in 1778 had

poorly thought out objectives and the goal posts changed as the march proceeded. But it took weeks for messages to get through.

- The British relationship with India was much more culturally fluid in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. All that changed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century with the move to become rulers rather than mingle, the rise of the missionaries and the importing of the memsahibs.
- The role of the Gaekwad dynasty, the rulers of Baroda, is interesting and a story in itself. They were the first to ally with the British on the West side of India and may have had no other option other than to face losing their lands.
- I am very much looking forward to travelling by train.
- I need to read more about the Union Carbide chemicals disaster in Bhopal before we get there.
- I plan to visit my grandfather's church in Colaba, Bombay – the Afghan War Memorial Church. Before he left in 1938, he was promoted to Archdeacon of Bombay. He wrote a history of Colaba and the Church, published in 1938.

What follows is the daily account, written at the time and edited after my return home. As described above, this takes the form of a diary, which I hope will eventually take the form of a longer piece.

#### Plan of Route:



My Route is in blue. Solomon Earle's route with the EIC army is in red.

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## **India Day I. Wednesday 3<sup>rd</sup> Feb 2016. Leaving the UK**

We are on the flight from Leeds/Bradford to Heathrow, a new Airbus A319. It is a glorious sunny day. We left at 1440 and are due to arrive in about forty-five minutes. I'm travelling with Steve. His wife Alison drove us to the airport.

We now are starting to descend slowly to Heathrow. The weather is beautiful after months of rain, floods and darkness. Boxing Day 2015 was significant for some very severe floods in York. Steve does not appear to have any copies of the details about the hotel in Delhi, which we think we booked! He thought I had printed off the information and I thought he had. So we will be arriving into the maelstrom of Old Delhi not knowing where we are going. Hopefully there will be a taxi driver holding a sign marked *Tara Palace Hotel*.

I've known Steve for something approaching twenty-seven years. In fact he encouraged me to apply for the consultant post in York while I was a Senior Registrar in psychotherapy in Leeds. He retired at least two years before I did and, unlike me, is fully retired.

The Captain has just announced that we will be circling at 9000 feet for fifteen minutes *holding*. Heathrow is *a little busy*. No problem for us though as our Delhi flight does not leave until 1855.

It is now 17.50 UK time and we are waiting at Terminal 5, Heathrow. The flight has been delayed from 18.55 to 19.30. I hope it isn't delayed any more. We had a bite to eat at 'Huxleys' and looked at photos of each other's families. We are now sitting next to a Departures notice board. It is dark outside. In the background there is the quiet hubbub of an airport at night. I notice occasional subdued sirens of passing electric vehicles, announcements, talk from the groups sitting, waiting. Other people are walking past, some waiting expectantly, glancing at the departures board. Steve is now doing the Mail crossword – he didn't buy the paper I should point out. I have a slight urge to get a pint but I know it will be the wrong decision – great now but not later. Steve doesn't really drink much for various reasons, including the fact that he is on Doxycycline. The taste of my cheese and mushroom toastie remaining from the restaurant is not unpleasant.

Solomon Earle travelled to India in the 'Salisbury,' presumably an East Indiaman. He left England on the 21<sup>st</sup> March 1768 and arrived in Calcutta on the 21<sup>st</sup> August that same year. He was aged 15 and had been taken on as a cadet by the east India Company, the HEIC.

**India Day 2. Thursday 4<sup>th</sup> Feb 2016. Delhi**

It is 08.20 India time and 02.50 UK time. We are somewhere over Pakistan, over Faisalabad. Surprisingly we have just crossed Afghanistan and luckily no missiles came our way. Some of the land below is covered in deep snow. I got about two hours of fitful dosing while listening to music after giving up on the new Bond film, *Spectre* – rubbish on a small screen. We are due to arrive in forty-three minutes, with just 334 miles to go. We are flying in one of the new Boeing 787s. I don't think it's any quieter than previous incarnations.

We are passing over Lahore now. The Delhi temperature is eight degrees and we are due to arrive at 09.20am, India time.

We have just arrived at the Tara Palace Hotel in Old Delhi. A palace it is not. We got here at around 12.30pm. My room has no apparent windows. I did find a small one behind a curtain but it lets in no light at all, being half way up a narrow channel leading to the roof. The hotel has grills on each floor opening to the floor below, presumably some kind of air-flow system for the hot season. It is not hot now.

It is now 9.30pm and I am in my room trying to stay awake. I have been awake since yesterday morning in UK, about 31 hours, apart from the odd doze on the plane. I am trying to write something about my first impressions of Delhi, before we get accustomed to it. At first it was so unusual and unsettling. The drive in the taxi to the Old City was really something. Despite not having any information about the hotel except it's name, the Tara Palace, the taxi driver was waiting for us with a sign. He took us to an old Maruti Suzuki, battered and worn. We clattered our way along the airport road, weaving in and out of other cars, 'Hero' motorbikes, Leyland lorries, Ashok vans, darting going through gaps not thought possible, funneling through junctions. To win here you take no prisoners and the biggest usually wins.

The hotel was a worry at first. It was down what seemed to be a filthy, rubbish-strewn alley, past piles of new bicycle wheels, a laundry and dark entrances. But the staff are very friendly. We were not sure whether the taxi driver was happy with his 100Rp tip (about £1). Then it was up three flights of stairs to our two rooms, bare and seemingly windowless. Above us is a flat roof with views of the Jama Masjid, Red Fort and acres of falling-down roofs and walls – like Havana, only worse. Miles of wires tangled like spaghetti twist around the narrow streets. Up above carrion birds circle and chipmunk creatures dart around on the rooftops. Earlier we saw a building overrun by monkeys, the young ones swinging on cables and chasing each other. And all around us is the noise of cars horns, revving engines, railway engine hooters and the distorted whine of an imam calling the faithful to pray.



Choru, our waiter, served us vegetable curry and lemon rice in the empty restaurant on our floor. He served us the same in the evening but with the addition of Kingfisher beer, (cost for both of us was £5, minus the beer).

Then it was out into the streets to avoid sleeping. Outside we had to fight traffic, dodge rickshaws and avoid nasty slimy things in the piles of rubbish that line the sides of the streets. You have to keep your wits about you here in Old Delhi. We circled the Mosque on foot then succumbed to a cycle-rickshaw to take us the short distance to the Red Fort.

I have to say the Red Fort exceeded my expectations. And it was different to how I imagined – always the best way to see things. The walls were much higher than I remember. The British barracks inside were not as bad as they said in the guidebook. They may have destroyed other more beautiful buildings in 1857 but many have been left. We took the route that courtiers would have taken, going from outer to inner and then on to more private and ornate staterooms, all open to the outside. The back of the palace would have had views over the Jumna River, but the river had been diverted to make room for a busy ring road. There was enough peace and quiet though to imagine how it must have been. There were ornate pools and even a bathing pool, all empty of water.

A lot of the Indian visitors were dressed up to the nines, the men in smart shiny jackets, the women in bright saris and the children dressed for a party. We spotted a little Sikh boy, his hair in a knot, wearing a tie. It was sad to see the state of decay of some of the buildings. I guess the Archeological Survey of India, who maintain a lot of these old buildings have so many to look after and limited funds.

The barracks looked like well-designed Victorian asylums complete with chimneys and ornate brickwork. One of them housed the 'Museum of Indian Independence' – an alternative viewpoint on what was done to shake off the British yoke. Some of the paintings were bizarre. The English were depicted as yellow-coloured bald creatures, like aliens, while the great heroes of the independence struggle were dressed in flowing white robes. I wonder if this is how they see us, all looking the same with large pink heads. On two occasions while outside the front of the Red Fort we were asked to pose for 'selfies'. Are they just curious about our white skin or do they want a laugh, putting it out to all their friends on Facebook? Do I detect a tinge of paranoia?

The Mughal buildings were amazing though, like Moorish architecture in Spain, red sandstone and marble symmetrical designs, cool and stately. There was still a great deal to see. We left about 5pm with a falling sun and fought off the hordes of rickshaw wallahs to make a dash across the busy ring road to get to

Chandni Chowk, the main road through Old Delhi, itself choked with traffic. After another failed ATM attempt, I had to borrow some rupees from Steve.



In the falling light we hit narrow alleyways to head for our hotel. All seemed quite safe, the main hazard being bicycle rickshaws coming up behind you with their outer wheels much wider – and avoiding nasty things to step on. We are getting old hands at this already.

Then it was egg curry back at the hotel while I tried to get through to Barclays Fraud office on Skype, with Barbara's help. Later the 'Yes Bank' ATM in the street outside finally coughed up some rupees and I now feel like a millionaire with 10,000 Rupees in my wallet, about £100. Even late in the evening the alleyway was busy with men unloading huge sacks from lorries in the street outside. It was time to sleep.

### **Harriet Tytler 1828-1907**

Another of my relatives was present at the Siege of Delhi in 1857 and her account of that time was published in 1986 – 'An Englishwoman in India, The Memoirs of Harriet Tytler 1828-1858,' edited by Anthony Sattin. Her father was John Lucas Earle, one of the sons of Solomon Earle (1751-1824). She and her husband were also keen early photographers and took photos of scenes of India, including the Red Fort and Kashmir Gate, after the mutiny, some of which are now stored in the British Library.



**India Day 3.      Friday 5<sup>th</sup> February.      Delhi**



I slept for nine hours, assisted by a Zopiclone tablet which left me with a metallic taste and a very slightly spaced-out feeling which may have been the jet lag. Over breakfast we planned our day. We wanted see the rest of the sites of Old Delhi and some more. I guess that was achieved except we made the mistake of getting collared by the rickshaw man's friend who I spoke to last night – they all know each other. We hired him for what we thought was 250R to take us around a few places. A friend then joined, his boss, who said he had a bad back (he actually did) and needed help, so we ended up with two cycle rickshaws, allegedly for the same price. But at the end of the day this turned out to be 250R per hour each! So unfortunately a flurry of bargaining and bad feeling was unavoidable at the end when it was time to settle up. That was after five hours. And of course we ended up going to a market or two on the way.

We started at the Jama Masjid mosque, built by Shah Jahan between 1644 and 1658. Steve thought it was a dead mosque, not much sign of presence. I climbed one of the two minarets, visible from our hotel roof, up worn greasy steps. The stripy mix of sandstone and marble complimented by stripes of prayer mats in the courtyard below was really something. There was of course another view of the tumbledown old city.



Then it was on through narrow, teeming alleyways to, you've guessed it, a market. But it was a market worth seeing – the ancient spice market. Smells of spice intermingled with occasional whiffs of urine, incense and something unseen but rather pungent which made our eyes burn. There were views of more tangled electric wiring and twisted streets from a small tower the rickshaw boss showed us. He told us the market was built by the British 350 years ago – nice to get some credit at last, even if it was plain wrong. The market was square with a tower at each corner. In the middle was a ramshackle more modern building just shoved in there, totally out of place. Then we were off again, zig-zagging through more streets and then back up the Chandni Chowk. I thought we were going to the Jain Temple but we sped off south around the Red Fort. I am not sure we had much say where they were taking us.

We joined a side road across some open land, a park, with a few shanty buildings. Along this road were parked cycle and motor rickshaws. It was like we had surprised them skiving as they were all asleep in strange higgledy-piggeldy shapes, contorted like spiders. Some had their legs in the air, others had one leg twisted under the rear transom, some were squashed into the passenger compartment, while others had given up staying on the vehicle altogether and were tucked up in a blanket on the road underneath. One was wrapped up like a mummy, rags around his head to complete the picture.

We, of course, being the men with rupee signs above our heads, ended up at a pashmina and silk emporium. It was good though. I bargained for two lovely examples, but when it came to pay realised I had hidden my credit card back in my hotel room. Steve came to the rescue. Presents for Barbara sorted already. Take note Barbara, they were not bought at the airport on the way back.

The lunch place they took us to was good. I had lamb on the bone with delicious thick 'gravy.' What is best after a good meal? A bumpy ride in a rickshaw. I tell you that is the last time we book one for more than a very short ride.

After what seemed like ages we arrived at the Raj Ghat, Gandhi's cremation site, a bit disappointing. I tried to get a view of the river, but it had clearly been diverted away from here too. Then it was home. The Kashmir Gate was too far away and we'd all had enough, especially the cyclists, who wanted to join their sleeping companions.

There was just one last but of excitement before we got there, crossing ring road. I'm not sure if they waited for the traffic lights to change before both our riders made a suicide dash across, expecting other vehicles to stop or swerve. Luckily they did. Luckily we reached the relative safety of the teeming stall-clogged street around the front of the mosque.

After a short siesta we were back out again at 4.30pm, this time definitely no cycle rickshaws, despite plenty of offers. Walking is hard but more interesting. Every street in Old Delhi seems to be a market. We got to the Jain Temple just in time to nip in and see the bird 'hospital' before it closed for the day. The bad thing was that you had to remove your shoes to enter the temple and then walk past cages of pigeons and other birds in stockings feet.

Then it was a motor-rickshaw ride to the Kashmir Gate for just 100R. It was heaven – suspension, speed and comfort.

I wanted to see the Kashmir Gate as it was the site of the British assault on Delhi after the revolt in 1857. It was not easy to find. We did find the mustard-coloured dome of St James's Church, built by James Skinner, an Anglo-Indian, in the early 19<sup>th</sup> Century. When we eventually found the Gate, by following a bit of wall, it seemed to be facing the wrong way and it was hard to orientate yourself. In front was a lorry park and bus depot and to the left, the railway station. But it was still worth going as it had witnessed such a lot of history. Hundreds of Indians had died there as well as some British and it bore the scars of cannon and musket balls. In front of the gate was a plaque commemorating the volunteers who made the first assault and laid the powder charges at the gates. I guess there is so much history in Delhi that it must be difficult to know what to preserve, but they could at least have kept the road going north. We eventually found the entrance to the Nicholson Cemetery but it was across an eight-lane death-trap road and was probably closed like St James's Church. We took a short cut along supposedly quiet street next to part of the old city wall, which turned into gridlock with lorries, rickshaws, cars and motorbikes all battling it out to pass. There was no room for mere pedestrians. One of the locals was very helpful trying to get us through a narrow gap between the honking vehicles. Then it was a motor-rickshaw back. It was getting dark.

I think that was all for today. I've spoken to Barbara and Facebooked some pictures. We had a light cheese and spinach curry at the hotel and a beer on the roof. It was good just to stand there taking in all the night sounds of Old Delhi for the last time – car horns interspersed with lonesome train sirens, shouting and wailing and drums beating. And above it all the red and orange flashes of the huge Tara Palace sign, high on the roof, that no one could see, except maybe from the road by the Red Fort half a mile away. It was a shame I never got to meet William Dalrymple. I couldn't help feeling a bit peeved that he had responded to my first email and offered to meet if he was around, but then failed to reply to further emails. Maybe he was away and in email down-time. I hope to have more success with the Maharaja of Baroda in about two weeks time.

**India Day 4    Saturday 6<sup>th</sup> Feb 2016,    Delhi to Kolkata**

We left the Tara Palace at 0900 in a taxi to the airport. We had arranged an itinerary of places to see en route. Probably just as well that the taxi driver got tired and so were we as he suggested missing the last one, the Qutb Minar, one of Delhi's ancient cities. New Delhi is so different from Old Delhi. We passed Connaught Place near where I had stayed in 1979, at Mrs Colaco's, a backpacker's place which I assumed no longer existed. We passed wide avenues and stucco'd houses, a bit like London, all designed by Edwin Lutyens in the early 1920s. We visited the Jantar Mantar, (doesn't that roll off the tongue) an 18<sup>th</sup> century observatory. How it worked we had no idea. What we thought was a sensible British explanation on a notice board was just a list of achievements of a Sir So and So. The Indian explanations were no better. There are steps going no where and complex sundials, or planet dials which appear were surreal, a bit like a De Chirico or Dali painting.



We then followed the grandiose route of the Rajpath from the Rashtrapati Bhavan (President's house) to India Gate (like the Arch de Triomphe). Next was a brief visit to the Hanuman Mandir (monkey temple), which we entered through the monkey's mouth, by walking along his tongue. Going up steps to his head level we passed a room full of sadhus, where it appeared as if they were being briefed, ready for their assault on the streets. The variations of colours were amazing, all different shades of ochre, orange and crimson. Upstairs we received 'puja' and were told that our children would be big and strong and have a 'force.' We were tapped on the head several times by what looked like a witches broom. Steve parted with 500R for his share of the force. Outside I had to dole out my meagre supplies of small change to the gathering sadhus.



See



Then it was on to the magnificent Hamayun's Tomb, much bigger than I expected. It is octagonal in shape and is the most spectacular in the line of tombs that culminated in the Taj Mahal. It also has the notoriety of being the place where the last Mughal, Shah Zafar, took refuge before being captured by the British after the 1857 rebellion.

Then it was on to the Indira Gandhi domestic airport. The domestic airport was brand spanking new. Everything ran as smooth as clockwork and we were soon heading over 800 miles west to Kolkata on an *Indigo* jet. Another budget airline was *Spicejet*. I guess everyone with money will soon change to these airlines and first class rail travel might go down-market. Let's hope not.

On the plane I chatted to my neighbour. I noticed he was looking at designs for a coconut drink on his laptop. He explained that his 'part-time' job was to develop a company with door-to-door deliveries of coconuts, with the tops cut off then sealed. He lived in Gurgaon, an up-and-coming suburb of Delhi. He explained to me that Mumbai had reached saturation but there were business opportunities in other cities. What about Kolkata I asked? He said it had been left behind. Why? It was the people and the administration, he said.

On arriving at Kolkata we noticed that it was a bit warmer and the smog was denser. It was dark earlier too; 5.50pm, so we saw nothing from the plane. There was no taxi waiting for us so we had to join the search for pre-paid taxis. I wanted an Ambassador car (much more popular in Kolkata) but our man took us to the usual Maruti Suzuki and demanded the usual tip. On the drive in I had the impression that everything was a bit different from Delhi. It was hard to pinpoint exactly what this difference was. Maybe there was less rubbish. Perhaps it appeared more organised. There were no cycle rickshaws blocking the roads. Our driver put his foot down between traffic lights and the suburbs seemed to go on forever. Then at long last we arrived outside the Kempton Hotel, a five-story glass tower with the usual dangling coloured lights. Outside the noise of car and motorbike horns was deafening. I felt a bit drained and deflated after all that travelling. Maybe a good night's sleep would help.

We ate in the hotel, 'boti' lamb kebabs and nan bread. It was hard deciphering the menu. It was a 'family' restaurant, so no beer. Outside it remained busy until late. Just as we retired to bed, wedding music started up just outside our window, while in the corridor it was party time. I did not anticipate much sleep.

**India Day 5. Sunday 7<sup>th</sup> Feb 2016, In Kolkata,**

As anticipated we didn't get much sleep last night. Surprisingly it wasn't from the noise outside, which stopped before midnight, but from the partying guests inside the hotel. It was Saturday night after all. At around 5am there was a loud clattering as an assemblage of 'put-up' beds and other items, stored on the landing outside our room, were re-arranged by staff. Then there was the sound of fighting dogs, at it hammer and nail until dawn, seemingly just outside our window. No wonder the dogs spend all day sleeping. Ear plugs was the only option. After that we both had a well-deserved lie-in.

Breakfast was a delight. I ate a masala omelette, idli, vegetable sambal, fruit and very sweet tea while watching a Bollywood movie (suggestive dancing on the tops of trains and lorries by muscular men and sexy, almost white women). The other clientele were all well dressed Indians. Then it was outside to tramp the streets.



Kolkata is much quieter than Old Delhi but still fascinating. Half the population seem to live on the streets and all life is there. We saw people fast asleep, covered from head to toe, men being shaved, old men chatting, children being sent out to beg, makeshift chai stalls and extreme washing from a geyser or even a hand pump. We walked down Totte Lane, past the Fairlawn Hotel, which was full when I tried to book, then on down Sudder Street to the Maidan, a huge sun-bleached expanse of grass and clumps of trees.

We were heading for the Victoria Memorial, completed in 1921, across the other side of the park. On the way we walked past herds of goats, crowds of

homeless people washing in a 'tank' and, further into the Maidan, hundreds of locals playing cricket, clearly taken very seriously with some of the players in full whites. In the distance the dome and Mughal-like towers of the Victoria memorial loomed above the trees, luminous and hanging in the hazy light.

In the queue to buy tickets we chatted to a Buddha-like American with his Thai bride. By coincidence Steve and I were just discussing this phenomenon. Entry was 200R for foreigners, 20R for locals. I think the Thai lady had to pay tourist price. Then we wandered past a huge statue of Queen Vic herself, looking morose and unhappy on her plinth. She was proclaimed Empress of India in 1877 but never visited India, or her other colonies for that matter. It must have seemed strange to her subjects to have an Empress who never visited the huge domain that she ruled. To her credit she apparently did have a go at learning Hindi and had an Indian manservant in her later years.



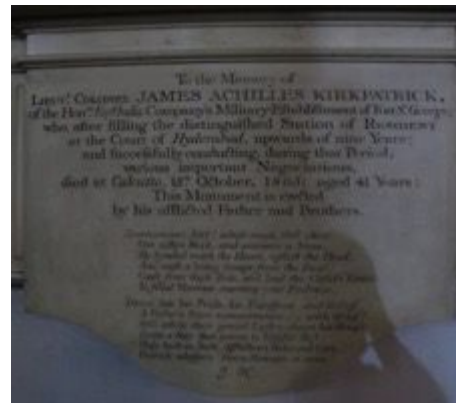
The most interesting thing for me about the Victoria Memorial was that part of it which related to my mission, to investigate India in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. There was a whole gallery devoted to paintings of Indian history. We were particularly impressed by the paintings of Thomas and William Daniell, Johann Zoffany, Tilly Kettle and Thomas Hickey. Tilly Kettle's painting of Shah Allam reviewing the troops (EIC) at Allahabad was especially interesting. There were paintings of the Military Orphan House, built to house the orphans of EIC soldiers and many views of 18C Calcutta. In those days the men had stovepipe hats and frock coats. I found a bust of Major James Rennell, who did the first Bengal survey in 1764. This was of interest as SE married a Rose Renell who came from Devon where James Renell was also born, at a similar time.

Leaving the Memorial we walked across the lawns to have lunch in the official canteen. This was one of the most enjoyable, and cheapest, lunches we had in India – 90pence for two including tea! Then we finally succeeded in hailing an Ambassador taxi to take us to Dalhousie Square, or BBD Bagh as it is now called. Its new name ironically relates to three independence fighters who tried to kill Mr Dalhousie and got hanged for it – although the new name is not used.

We walked around the square past the new 'writers' building, constructed in the later 19C to replace the 18C building SE would have known. The old Fort William was demolished after the war in 1757, when the new fort was constructed on the Maidan, and was eventually replaced by the GPO. Steve and I tried in vain to find a plaque that was said to mark the original location of the Black Hole. We walked

around the whole edifice of the GPO building passing street-dwellers who occupy most of the pavements around here.

Then it was on to St John's Church built in 1787. This is a wonderful, airy 18C building with columns and some steps up to a gallery. It contains Zoffany's 'Last Supper'. He apparently upset one of the residents of Calcutta who was used as the model for Judas. The poor wretch thought he was going to be a different disciple. In the painting Jesus is being embraced by an attractive blond woman, I think another disciple, but maybe Mary Magdalene, if you follow Dan Brown.



We were excited to discover the memorial to James Achilles Kirkpatrick, William Dalrymple's 'white rajah.' There was no mention of his Indian wife who was left bereft and destitute when her husband died of a fever while visiting the city in 1805.

In the churchyard is the mausoleum of the founder of Calcutta, Job Charnock and various other locals who died young apart from one celebrated woman, Francis Johnson, who married four times, the first time at thirteen and died aged 87. See below:



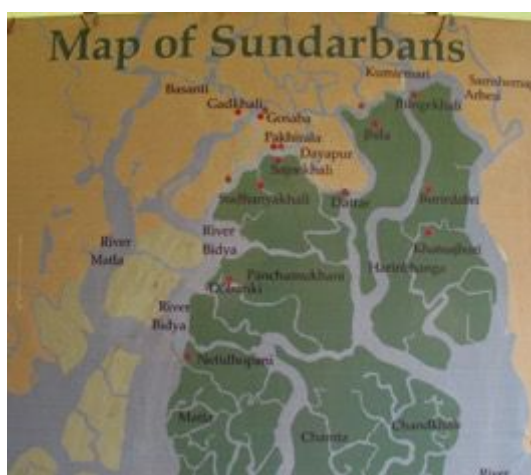


Then it was a long walk back to Sudder Street passing increasing crowds and market stalls to enjoy a welcome Kingfisher beer in the Fairlawn Hotel garden. Kolkata is the only place on our trip where we saw 'human-powered' or pull-rickshaws. They were plentiful in the Sudder Street area. We didn't have the heart to take a ride on one though as it seemed a step too far in decadence.

**India Days 6-7**

**8<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> Feb 2016.**

**Sojourn in the Sunderbans**



The last two days were memorable for the company we were with more than the place itself, but I would recommend it for the whole experience of visiting a different, unusual place. Sunderbans means beautiful forest, Sunder is beautiful and Bans is forest. It comprises the largest area of tidal mangrove forest in the world and is formed by the deltas of four large rivers including the Ganges and the Brahmaputra. Although we were in the boat for a whole day cruising by the mangroves, we only saw a small part of it. Only a quarter of it is in India, the rest is in Bangladesh.

I will state at the outset that we didn't spot a tiger. Although advertised as a place to see them, actual sightings are very rare, on average once every two to three weeks and generally early in the morning. We did see plenty of wildlife: Indian pond heron, Brahminy kites, adjutant storks, collared kingfisher, common Iow, monitor lizard (*varanus salvatore*), lesser whistling duck and whimbrels, a type of curlew. The human spotting was varied too but more about that later.

The company we booked with, based on Tote Lane, Kolkata, advised us that we did not need to bring any money – such a relief after being a walking rupee sign for the last few days. In practice it was useful to have some money, to buy beer for the music night and snacks in the village. Otherwise we felt like the queen. The whole trip was very well organised.



To get there it was complex and took over four hours by minibus, ferry, motorised tractor and then another ferry to the island where the 'eco' village was situated, where we stayed the night. It was good to leave the smog of Kolkata behind. The first ferry was a wooden boat, rather like a skiff, powered by an exposed diesel engine controlled by a length of string. It only had one gear, forward, so the pilot had to approach jetties from down stream. The stream at times was quite strong as the tide changes eighteen feet in six hours. We balanced on the side while others stood. We had to share the boat with motorbikes, bales of luggage and, on the return journey, green hessian bags bulging with live chickens.

Then it was a bone-shaker ride on a the tractor. Steve and I sat at the back with our legs dangling down. Every time we hit a bump our bottoms left the seat and crashed down. We also had to be careful of bashing our heads on the roof frame. I worked out that if I fell off I would probably break several limbs before being mangled by the exposed engine of the vehicle following close behind. It is amazing how much health and safety rules have changed life in the UK – but it hasn't reached here yet. Life is consequently much more varied and exciting. On the way we passed small thatched houses each with their own animals, vegetable garden and 'tank', a square patch of green murky water with steps (ghats) leading into the water. The women all wore brightly coloured saris.

Then it was another motor-powered skiff to our island. Getting on and off was tricky depending on the tide and how much sticky grey mud was exposed. One Indian lady in our group slipped and ended up sitting in the mud, grinning.

As we entered the Eco-Village which consisted of mud huts, some very large and several stories high, we passed two smiling girls who were painting flowers on some of the wooden posts. Had we mistakenly arrived in an ashram? Steve thought it could be a hippy commune. We were shown to our rooms, a row of mud huts. We had 'Bob Marley' cottage – no dope, but two beds covered in mosquito nets, and a small washroom. The Indian family thought the name was a great joke. I think I'll change mine back to Robert. It is much easier to pronounce abroad. Then it was back to the communal area for lunch.

The two flower painters turned out to be delightful, one an art student just finished her degree in London, and her companion, an Egyptian lady having to go back to her family in Dubai after completing her degree. You could stay on for free if you did some work. They had been here six weeks. We only had one night. We settled down to a veggie curry lunch.

After lunch it was siesta. Steve and I climbed up a ladder to the eaves of one of the larger buildings. You could hear birds singing, goats bleating, hens clucking and in the distance, the tutting of a tractor, or generator. It was so peaceful after the craziness of Delhi and Kolkata.



At around 3.00pm we gathered for a walk to the local village along a raised levee with views of paddy fields and smallholdings. We passed children playing football and cricket. It was beautiful in the late afternoon sun. Everyone was very friendly. So much better than living on the streets of Kolkata as a lot of poor people have to do after leaving their villages.

After passing the village we walked back along another flood barrier with views into the mangroves. The tide was out and the ground down there was a glistening grey. There was large hole where mud had been dug out, presumably to make bricks. I chatted to the Indian family.

They were from Bangalore, two sisters with their respective husbands, all in their middle sixties, all very well educated with far more knowledge than the average English person you meet, and friendly and welcoming. The most knowledgeable of them all I called the Professor. He had a large white moustache, very distinguished. Both couples had had arranged marriages around fifty years ago. The Professor used to work in explosives and the other husband was a retired doctor. The two sisters had a psychiatrist father who they said controlled them when they were young. I think they were a bit wary of us at first for that reason. I learned all about Indian history, the different States and many different languages. I was informed about the rise of the Arab culture within Muslim people in India, leading unfortunately to more separation, white outfits and veils. They told me that in India previously Muslims were much more integrated and that even their language, Urdu, was becoming mixed with other words from Hindi etc.

The Professor had worked in Bihar when it went through a lawless period. He had been robbed at gunpoint and had even been briefly kidnapped during a political demonstration when he was forced to drive the protestors around. He had been caught while helping the boss of the factory to get away, which was why the protesters were not happy with him. The other couple had been in Iran where the husband worked for Tata. Coincidentally they had only been a few yards away from me when I passed through Tehran in 1979. After the fall of the Shah, Indians were not allowed to leave the country at first. The two sisters were both educated in English schools.

After the walk we were then taken across the channel by rowing skiff. The pilot expertly propelled it from behind with one fixed oar. At the other side of the channel there was little wildlife to be seen so we chatted and watched the sun gradually descend over the mangroves.



The programme here was packed. After returning we were served chai and onion bhajis. We each ordered a bottle of strong beer (600mls of Kingfisher 8%) for later. Next was the entertainment. This turned out to be the highlight of the trip. We enjoyed wonderful uninhibited local music from a group of local musicians joined by our guide, Om. They played drums, harmonium and a curious one stringed instrument. They imitated a train and sang a song apparently about a man whose wife wouldn't listen to him even when he told her he was dying. The bottle of beer helped. Then it was supper.

After that we were ready for bed but the programme was not over. Om asked us if we would like to go out on the boat to experience the 'bacteria'. Of course we would. The bacteria turned out to be phosphorescence from algae in the water. We crossed the channel again in pitch black, after negotiating the mud to get on board. I remember lying back to look at the stars and going to sleep. Sirius was particularly bright and so was the Orion constellation. At the other side we were steered into the mangroves past clouds of mozzies. The tide was in and we saw little frogs. Luckily we were both fully 'deeted' up. One of the Indian ladies sang an English song then followed it up with a 'rude' version after a bit of encouragement. The phosphorescence was incredible in the pitch black – tinkling stars on your fingers like fairy-dust, appearing out of nowhere and gone in a flash – not something I've ever experienced before.

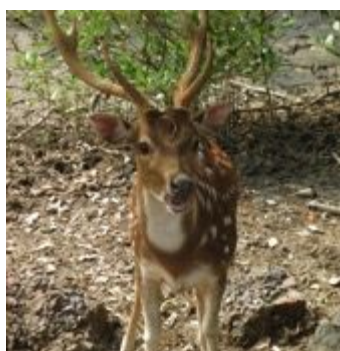
That night I went out like a light only to wake at 02.30am to listen to the crickets and Steve's snores. Music by headphones was the only option – the collected works of Richard and Linda Thompson. I must have gone back to sleep.

Next day it was the jungle trip. We were up at 5.15am for departure at 6.15am. There would be many hours on the boat so plenty of time to doze. It was very relaxing cruising along with the chug of the engine, letting life and the mangroves pass by – a welcome break from the pressures of life cruising down the river on the African, sorry Indian Queen. The jungle has a mesmerising quality. The

boat was the same as the ferry, but with two stories of wooden superstructure built above the deck. We sat on the top deck, with the pilot. Down below were the bedrooms and, presumably, the kitchen. The boat was painted in bright colours and had a roof to keep out of the sun. The whole arrangement was potentially unstable and we had been warned not to rush to the same side of the boat if some interesting wildlife, or even a tiger, was spotted. The younger members of our group spent more time out on the prow, sunbathing.



Just remembered I haven't said much about them. There were two German men, one young, travelling the world and the other in his fifties, working in Shanghai. In fact several of the party had flown over from China, to avoid the Chinese New Year, when nothing is open. China is relatively close to Kolkata. The 'pretty girl,' according to Om, was working in her 'start up' travel agency company in Beijing. One man who I couldn't quite make out I called the 'quiet American.' He wore a bright shirt. He later changed to jungle gear for the boat trip, complete with several assorted zips to open up to let the air in. Then there was a tall bearded Englishman who went to Darwin, Australia, in the 80s, and stayed there. He seemed very self contained, the sort of person who can keep to himself if necessary and spend months on his own travelling the world. He taught us about birds, animal life and the erosion patterns of the delta. The delta is in a constant state of change with the current eroding the inner side of bends and depositing silt on the outer edge. You could see it in action with the mangrove roots exposed on one side, gradually getting undermined and then falling over into the water. On the other side there is a graded beach of grey mud.



We travelled on and on deeper and deeper into the reserve, chatting, dozing and drinking chai, until we got to the first stopping point. The 'hide' consisted of a

tower and a concrete walkway. I won't describe what we saw as I've mentioned this already, apart from the tame spotted deer, who came right up to us on the other side of the tiger-proof fence.

Lunch was served on board, cooked by two ladies who had been picked up en route. Steve and I must have got the hottest chillies in the whole pot. They literally burnt our throats and made me sneeze. That would have scared away any tiger in the vicinity. The only thing that helped was sweet chutney.

The rest of the day consisted of two further stops at hides before we headed back, at dusk. Those going back to Kolkata were dropped off at the main island – another motor-tractor ride back to the final ferry. The others went back to the eco-village, some sleeping on the boat. You could choose. I think the boat was a bit cheaper. The final ferry was packed with local people and various animals, including the aforementioned bags of live chickens. It was just getting dark, around 5.30pm.



One of the employees, looking like a cool dude in his sunglasses and bandana, drove us back to Kolkata. We stopped half way for ginger and cardamon chai, the favourite of the gent from Durban.

Back at the hotel we tried out room service. It is a myth that you cannot get chicken tikka masala in India.

## India Day 8. 10<sup>th</sup> Feb 2016. Kolkata graves

*Solomon Earle – Solomon Earle – Edward Earle – Mary Amanda Earle – Edith Nix-James – Rosita Nixseaman – Robert Adams*

*Henry Augustus Poulson – Sarah Ann Poulson – Mary Amanda Earle – Edith Nix-James – Rosita Nixseaman – Robert Adams*

Today was a day of death. Visiting cemeteries, burning ghats and the temple of Kali, the goddess of time, creation and destruction. But it was actually a very successful day, apart from our Kali experience. The latter experience left a bad taste and a feeling of being dirty, and exploited – but more about that later.

After a much better nights sleep we left our hotel after breakfast and hailed an Ambassador. It took a while to find a driver who knew where the Lower Circular Road Cemetery was. Today we were heading for the graves of my ancestors.



After a chat with the very helpful administrator – he got out several ledgers and quickly found the grave of Solomon Earle (1797-1857), son of Solomon Earle (1751-1824). I had to pretend to be surprised as in fact I already knew it was there, having read the account of its discovery by Rick Earle Desmier in 2007. I gave him few other names to search for including Nix-James (no luck), but we did get a hit with the Poulsons, who married into the Earle family to produce Mary Amanda Earle, my great grandmother.

Together with a whole gang of men, well six of them, we set off to find the Earle grave. We walked to the left of the entrance to an area now clear of vegetation. The grave was intact, but in a bad state, with stones piled next to it. The administrator said we could have it rebuilt for around £240. The graveyard is a working one, he said, and space is short so this would prevent it from being

'recycled' – in other words, another grave being placed on top. I said I would discuss this with my mother.



The inscription reads:

Solomon Earle. Died June 6<sup>th</sup> 1858. Aged 60  
Bridget Earle, (Nee Maples)  
Wife of the above  
Thomas Earle (Lieutenant)  
Son of the above  
Also interred here

And lying on its side amongst a pile of stone flags, within the grave, was another headstone:



This inscription reads:

In Loving Memory  
Sarah Anne Earle  
Wife of  
Edward William Earle  
Died 31<sup>st</sup> October 1921  
Aged 82 years

This must be Sarah Ann Poulson, mother of Mary Amanda Earle, my great grandmother. That would put her date of birth as 1839.



The team then hurried off to the Poulson grave, also clear of vegetation. It was hard to read the inscription but they rubbed it with their 'magic stone' –some red sandstone lying in the grave.



This inscription reads:

Sacred to the memory of  
Henry A Poulson  
Indigo planter Kashnaghur  
Died 7<sup>th</sup> Oct 1861 Aged 47 Years  
Also of his daughters  
Hannah Elizabeth  
Wife of John Black  
Died 17<sup>th</sup> Oct 1868 Aged 30 Y  
Helen ?Lavinia  
Wife of G P Thurlow  
Died Sept 18. ....Age .....

Erected by the Bereaved Family

The team were so excited but I just felt a bit numb. Until I'd had a closer look at the family tree it was difficult to take in the significance of these discoveries, but I think these three gravestones supply a lot of information about the later Earle family and my mother's origins. It doesn't reveal anything about the Nix in Nix-James, but perhaps we will never find where that came from. I believe my great Aunt Kitty (Katherine NixJames) tried without success, and she was around nearer the beginning of the last century.

I paid them all 2000R to share (about £20), and they were very pleased and immediately started dividing it up amongst them, well five of them, as the boss didn't join in. I got them to pose for a group photo. One of them, Kevin Mayne, third from the left, is anglo-indian and proud of it.



Then it was on to South Park Cemetery, just nearby. This is the 'heritage' cemetery described in the tourist guides. It was open from 1767 to 1790 and is a bit like Highgate Cemetery, in London, full of huge mausoleums from well off families – not in the Earle league, although I am sure Solomon would have got one if he had gone back to India and continued his illustrious career in the EIC army. We looked for family names. I found a James grave, but no Nix-James. It was pleasant to wander round in the sun reading inscriptions and imagining what it must have been like to live in those days. It seemed you either died young or went on to a grand old age – but only if you had a tough constitution and survived many tropical diseases. We saw two men balanced high up on a bamboo scaffold, chipping away at plaster on a building adjoining the cemetery. They waved.

We then set off along Park Street to walk to the Indian Museum, about a mile or so away. Park Street is wide and we were able to walk along a pavement not choked with stalls and street dwellers. Near the end we stopped at a 'French' bakery for an expensive croissant and a 'coffee'. The Maidan appeared and we turned right and arrived at the India Museum.

Entry was 35R for locals and 350R for foreigners – we are getting used to the ten-fold increase you see so often around here. I have mixed feelings about it. You wouldn't get away with it in the UK, but it is still only about £3.50 for us.

The Museum was memorable for the crumbling colonial decay of its building and displays rather than perhaps for the contents, although the Hindu and Buddhist carvings were superb, almost worth the entry price on their own. Steve noticed a Greek influence in some of the earlier sculptures, aquiline noses and facial features. Shades of Alexander the Great perhaps?

On the second floor we bumped into a gentleman and his attentive female student looking at a relief of the founder of the museum. We fell to talking. It turned out he was from Pune and had just completed a PhD in zoology and the history of the British Raj. He is the only person so far in India that I have told the reasons behind my trip. We swapped email addresses.

Next was the minerals gallery. We nearly didn't go in but were glad we did because this was one of the most interesting galleries. It was like entering a Victorian time warp, like something out of Sherlock Holmes – vials of mysterious liquids long denatured and cabinets full of rocks. But the climax of it all for me was finding a scale model of the Lonar Crater. Let me explain, I selected a picture from a series of photos from space to write a short story about in my writing group just before we left. Mine turned out to be an aerial shot of the Lonar Crater, a meteorite impact crater near Burhanpur, just close to where we will be travelling in a week's time.



We then took the subway to the Khalighat Temple in Southern Kolkata. In retrospect it would have been better to have gone to the Marble Palace or Howrah Bridge, but Steve wanted to go to a temple and he has been so good today putting up with me and my family graves so it had to be. Going down into the subway was a bit like entering the black hole, very hot, airless and crowded. But it was only a few stops. We walked to the temple by way of some burning ghats. Just next to the incineration area we saw the corpse of an elderly woman lying with her mouth open, wrapped up and waiting for the pyre to be made up. She seemed forlorn, all on her own on the tarmac, which looked a bit like a car park. There was no sign of anyone else. Above the pyres were huge chimneys, signs read 'pollution-free.' Then a troop of mourners arrived and we felt happier for her.

To us our trip to the Kali Temple was one of India's bad experiences. Imagine going into York Minster and having a lot of money extracted from you for very little, and by priests. It all happened very quickly. A smooth talking 'priest' collared us as soon as we entered and lead us to a place to remove our shoes. This turned out to be his 'shop'. Then a coconut, a pile of red flowers and a box of joss sticks were placed in our hands and we were helpless. He said the cost was 200R – reasonable. He then proceeded to barge his way past the queue ushering us along with him. I don't think we ever saw the inner temple of Kali. We did see the place of goat sacrifice, currently unoccupied, then were escorted to a different shrine for a 'blessing,' – basically a means of money extraction by persuasion in a holy place. I won't say any more except that what seems to be large sums in rupees are not that great in pounds, but no one likes this sort of practice.

On leaving we felt stupid but hopefully wiser. We had red spots on our foreheads, Kali wristbands and very very filthy feet.

After that it was a relief to get straight back to the Kempton for a shower and later, a remedial beer at the Fairlawn. A nice fish curry at the Blue Sky Café further completed our rehabilitation. Before bed we walked down Madge Lane to the 'New' market – actually quite an old, Victorian era market with a clock tower. We avoided the 'guides' and shouts from the thousands of stalls (we were learning). It was interesting to walk around the wholesale area selling vegetables and the usual chickens, but this time in baskets rather than sacks. Then it was back to the hotel for bed.

**India Day 9. 11<sup>th</sup> Feb. Kolkata to Lucknow**



Today was our first long train journey, over 900 km. Luckily I had a print-out of the journey which stated that the train started at Kolkata Station, rather than the huge Howra Station. That was lucky as it takes ages travel around Kolkata. Kolkata Station is in the northeast part of town so we missed seeing and crossing the Howra Bridge – something for next time. We tried to get an Ambassador but of course the hotel got us a Maruti Suzuki. But it was very clean and only 350R for the almost hour-long ride.

We were there two hours early but time passed easily. We wandered about and found the laundry area – we will be getting sheets. In a brown paper bag with small towel as well. We sat in the second-class waiting room which was fine, apart from the definitely second class toilets. We had coffee in the café. Then it was time to find our train, on platform four.

It was so well organised. They even had our names right there on a printed list next to the door of Carriage A1, seats 35 and 36. We were in two seats parallel to the corridor. Luckily we managed to catch the food wallah to order food. It came at 3.00pm and there was nothing else so we survived on chocolate for the rest of the day. Clearly next time we must bring some of our own, like everybody else.

The train left on the dot, at 12.20pm. We are due in Lucknow tomorrow at 5.40am. Steve was snap happy taking shots of people outside, the railway dwellers. They dried their clothes on the line. There were even goats grazing between the tracks – we wondered how they avoid the trains. Eventually we crossed the Hoogly and left the city far behind. We travelled on into the plains of Bengal, paddy fields, mostly drained and dry and crops, very flat. The train was very smooth, no clickety-clack, just gently rocking from side to side.

Our food arrived in plastic bags inside a foil container. We also got a bendy paper plate. It was very difficult to eat the watery vegetable curries in our laps. We thought we did very well though. That is until Steve got up and noticed he was sitting

in pool of curry, staining his new Rohan trousers. We were both in stitches. In fact I haven't been so close to dying of laughter for years.

Onwards we travelled past Asanol Junction, followed by Dhanbad. Then Gaya Junction, at 8pm, the station for Bodgaya, the birthplace of the Buddha. It got dark at 5.30pm. I spent several hours typing up my journal. At around 10.30pm I climbed onto the top bunk and managed to get a few hours sleep. Unfortunately a man in the next compartment snored louder than the train – unless it was the elderly nun we saw retire to bed earlier, behind the curtain. Trains are popular in India and are usually full, so have to be booked weeks in advance.



## **India Day 10. Friday 12<sup>th</sup> Feb. Lucknow**

Lucknow has only one name, unlike some other Indian cities, which have been renamed since independence. I read in the local English language paper that the editor (Indian origin) of the Independent (UK) is changing the name of Mumbai back to Bombay for his paper. But then I read the next day that the Independent will stop printing next month! I also read about violent riots in Lucknow the previous day when many vehicles had been burnt. And guess who was rioting? The lawyers. There was even a picture of one touting a handgun! The atmosphere here is very calm though. But there are a lot of armed soldiers and police about – if not armed with a machine gun or ex British army rifle (SLR), they have a hard wood lathi (stick). We even saw one security guard touting a double-barreled shot gun. In the restaurant where we ate that evening, on the table next to us, were a group of soldiers with machine guns. I wasn't sure it felt reassuring but it was strangely exciting. In fact we came across no trouble at all and the people were, as usual, very friendly. Steve talked about the life of Graham Green, who sought out troubled places for material for his books.

Our 'selfie' count is increasing exponentially. What happens is that a group of young men eye you up for a bit then sheepishly approach you to ask for a photograph, or selfie. They then get their phones out to take the picture. Afterwards they say thank you and ask 'where you from?' They then walk away giggling, often holding hands, or with their arms around each other. Male to female contact is not allowed in public, except perhaps in parks, on park benches. We sat in a park at lunchtime and noticed a couple on the next bench, behind a tree. The young woman had a large veil, probably Muslim. The veil was later used as a screen. The young man proceeded from necking (is that first base?) onwards to breast nuzzling, then I'm not sure what next as his head had completely disappeared under the veil and was at about his girlfriend's waste level. In the 'labyrinth' (more about this later), there was a sign stating that only accompanied couples were allowed in. I could see why.

Our hotel (The Best Western Plus Levana) was the best yet. Smart to outward appearances, but some things just did not work properly, eg the TV and air con. A 'technician' came later and fixed the air-con. We also had to call them to re-open the safe, but that was probably my fault.



We had arrived in Lucknow at 6.00am, tired after our first night on a train. The station was very busy, crowds sleeping on the floor and general bustle. Outside there was the usual crowd of rickshaw drivers wanting our business. We are learning now to take one who appears to understand our destination. This is not always possible as they all say they do and nod their heads, anxious to get our business. It felt cold as we raced through the streets, our bags crammed in with us. The hotel let us have our room. Further sleep was in order and we relaxed onto soft mattresses and huge pillows. Wonderful. When we got up we were still rocking from the motion of the train.

We left at 12.00 midday on our tour of the City. The Pyongyang-style soviet era buildings described in our guidebook (Lonely Planet) were not to be found. Our hotel adjoined a busy (all roads are busy) road with shops on both sides, a cinema, just two restaurants and many beggars.

Taking an auto-rickshaw we soon arrived at the 'Residency.' The British residency has been left in ruins as a memorial to the 1857 rebellion. 2000 out of 3000 troops and civilians died on the British side and countless besiegers. Many more after the siege was relieved, four and a half months later, by sword-wielding Highlanders who the mutineers apparently thought were the ghosts of the women and children slaughtered at Cawnpoor (Kanpur). It was a poignant and atmospheric place, much larger than I'd imagined, and a popular place for Indians too. Interestingly we didn't see a single western person the whole time we were in Lucknow, except for a group in the hotel as we were leaving. The walls of all the buildings in the Residency were pockmarked by musket ball dents and larger impressions and holes made by canon balls.

We wandered around in the beautiful gardens and explored the many buildings – very open but on a slight rise so easier to defend. We copped a few more selfies and watched a group of lads being chased by guards with lathis after they were spotted climbing on the walls. Then we wandered down to St Marys Church, just a metre of wall left, and its graveyard. We found the grave of Henry Lawrence with its famous inscription, 'he tried to do his duty.' Most of the officers died in their early twenties. At the side of the church, used as a grain store during the siege, was a depression where the bodies of the defenders were placed. Apparently the defenders kept up decorum and class differences, dressing for dinner each night. But the ladies had to move down to the cellars with the rest of the hoi polloi when one of them got her leg blown off. A famous etching, exhibited in the museum shows the billiard table still in situ at the end of the siege.



Then it was a cycle rickshaw (second alternative mode of transport of the day) to the Bara Imambara, a huge tomb built from 1785 to 1791, supposedly to provide employment during a time of famine. The structure is ostensibly a tomb to Asaf-ud-Daula. During these same years Solomon Earle was fighting his way around India.

There were no places to get lunch so we walked around the corner, fighting off rickshaw wallahs as we went to a small shop where we could buy snacks to eat in the park. This is where we came across the courting couple and also numerous wildlife who came to share our lunch including: a puppy spaniel-type dog, its mother, a flock of grey blackbirds and many chipmunks. It was in this park that I had to use the most disgusting toilet of our trip so far. The urinals were blocked and so was the waist pipe. Water sprayed down from an unknown source above. Unfortunately I had to keep my eyes open to avoid stepping in anything and I could not switch off my sense of smell.

Back in the Imambara, (ten fold markup ticket price as usual) we crossed the courtyard and entered the great hall, apparently one of the world's largest vaulted galleries. On the way in we got shouted at. We had not removed our shoes – more socks to wash. The hall was rather spectacular. It included a walkway high up with minimal protection from falling off and also little alcoves, high above. I was to appear in most of them later as I tried to find my way out through the labyrinth. Steve stayed in the garden.





The labyrinth is actually a maze situated on two floors above the great hall. If you find your way through it you arrive on two flat roofs with wonderful views over the towers and minarets of Mughal Lucknow. Luckily I had a torch and was able to safely explore the passages, some of which lead to sheer drops, blind endings or gratings to the outside. It is said that some of the passages have had to be closed off as people have disappeared. What architect could have conceived of such a construction and why, I don't know. As I crept along I could hear screams and shouts from families likewise engaged. One lost teenage girl asked me for help. Fortunately her family soon appeared. Then she said, 'thankyou uncle!' I guess better than granddad.

On the way out we visited a step-well, the Baori. This was another huge construction but this time lead down a series of steps down to the water level – of course full of secret passages too.

If that wasn't enough excitement for the day we then took our third method of transport of the day, a horse and cart. We trotted along through another series of stucco'd gates to the Clocktower. This was under reconstruction but we enjoyed watching a bit of cricket. We were approached by groups of young men, for selfies and the usual chat. Just one more palace to visit, then it was home, by electric auto-rickshaw this time (method of transport number four). The driver had no idea where to go despite nodding when we mentioned the Levana Hotel. He took us straight into a huge traffic jam. Much carbon monoxide asphyxiation later we finally got back after asking directions from a Sikh with a car who seemed to know.



In the evening we walked out onto the MG (Mahatma Gandhi) Road to the 'Royal Café'. We were in search of typical Lucknow food, all of Persian origin consisting of kebabs and fragrant rice cooked with the meat in earthenware pots, sealed to allow pressure to build up. These are called Dumpukht or Handi. We found them all at the Royal café. We tried them all too. Well, it would have been rude not to. On the way out we rang the bell by the exit three times, as instructed, to signify that it was excellent. We needed a wander around the streets afterwards to help it all go down.

**India Day 11. Saturday 13<sup>th</sup> Feb.**

**Lucknow to Allahabad**

We set no alarms but awoke at 7.30am, the best sleep yet. Our train tonight is another overnighter leaving at 4pm. After breakfast we decided to visit the Botanical Gardens. Out on MG Rd we made the mistake of giving 20R to a beggar and were immediately surrounded by hordes of them. 'Please, please, I have baby...' The mothers sent out small, very grubby children who are trained to grab your clothes. They usually keep hold until their patch ends and another group are sent out. On this occasion however the mothers followed us. The only way we could escape them was to hail an auto-rickshaw. This is a hard part of India to take. It makes you feel cross or want to remonstrate. This doesn't work. Unfortunately the only method that works is to just ignore them, but this makes you feel cruel.

The other thing is that you need so much small notes for tips etc that you can quickly run out, being left only with 500R notes, about £5, that few people, even rickshaw drivers, have change for. A stack of small notes exchanged at the hotel does not get you far.

The norm for Lucknow is that rickshaw drivers here have no idea where you want to go. I don't think it's just language. We eventually found the entrance to the Botanical Gardens only to find they were closed at weekends. We went on to the Residency to look round the museum that had been closed yesterday. It was worth it. We saw interesting etchings made at the time, a scale model and reproductions of the Leaders of the Freedom Fighters. I was surprised to see that three of them were women. The local one was the Begum, wife of the last Nawab of Awad (or Oude as the British called it). The last Nawab was the end of a long line of rulers that apparently became increasingly decadent and fat. There was a reproduction of him in the museum, an effeminate looking chap with his left nipple exposed. Odd but then these guys built the Labyrinth. There were also reproductions of orders and letters sent by the British through the lines during the siege. One advised that at Lucknow they were having a 'bit of bother' and could they please have a 'bit of help'. The reply stated that they would get no relief for many months as the situation was desperate, and in any case Delhi had to be retaken first.



We spent ages trying to get back to the hotel as our rickshaw driver had seemingly never heard of MG Rd! Round and round the city we went until we at last found someone who spoke English and had heard of the Levana Hotel. Then there was just time for a meal before heading for the station. This was consumed in the Moti Mahal, the other restaurant in MG Rd. It was vegetarian and very popular. I'm afraid we had another pig-out. Not by design, it was just that we didn't understand the menu and ordered far too much again – three types of kebab including some flat patties dyed a bright Jolly Green Giant colour, as well as rice and nans. We staggered back to get our bags from the hotel. I'm still full now, sitting in the train at 8pm.



Lucknow Station was crowded. I calculated that you could get at least 1500 people on each train as they seem endless in length. We waited, as was our due, in the 'Upper Class Waiting Room'. The announcer spoke in a proper BBC (c1940s) voice– the manuals must be over 50 years old:

*We regret to announce that train XXXX has been cancelled.*

*Train XXXX Is now standing on platform four...*

*May I have your attention please...*

You work out which train they mean by its number. The Triveni Express, our train, is number 24370. It was forty minutes late. We had no idea where our carriage, sorry bogie (not to be confused with bogey) was but eventually found it at the rear with the better class of Indian traveller. It was old and dusty but not as old and dusty as the other bogies. We had our 'usual' coach, A1.

The journey to Allahabad is taking place while I type this. We are due in at 20.55pm, one hour to go. If the train is not late we will have an hour to wait to pick up the sleeper that starts at Varanasi. It may seem odd to go back East but I wanted to see Lucknow. At Allahabad the River Jumna, from Delhi, meets the Ganges, but we won't see much of it as it is dark.

We actually got in to Allahabad at 21.30pm. There was no sign of the Khajuraho train and there neither was here any mention of it on any of the electronic signs. We took to wandering around in a bewildered state, worried we had missed it. Crowds of people occupied the platform including a group of old men with beards, dressed in orange turbans, jackets and socks. Two of them went up to the edge of the platform and squatted down facing toward the tracks. What on earth were they doing? I should have guessed. There was no sign of a toilet anywhere and I was beginning to worry, not wanting to join them. I went off in search of a ticket office. Nothing. There was no indication that the Khajuraho train existed at all. Then three young men approached us to chat and it wasn't long before the selfies started. They were students on their way home, studying maths, engineering and teaching at Allahabad. They told us that our train did exist. Then their train arrived and we said our goodbyes.

We tried to pay attention to the tannoy... 'You are kindly advised that ...' This went on for what seemed like hours and we resigned ourselves to a night on the platform with the tribesmen. Then the 'Kurj Link E' eased in slowly. Its number was wrong but similar. It turned out that the rear few carriages were marked Khajuraho and soon carriage B2, 3Tier sleeper came into view. What a relief.



On board our carriage was virtually empty but someone else was sleeping in our place. We took another compartment and settled down. It was midnight. The train was only two hours late.

**India Day 12. St. Valentines Day, Sunday 14<sup>th</sup> February. Khajuraho**

Saint Valentines Day was an appropriate day to arrive at Khajuraho, the town of love. The temples were built by the Chandellas, which Steve said sounded a bit like the name of a Motown singing group, appropriate for the theme. We now have only one more overnight train to go. On one hand, this is good – only one more night of waking every hour to turn over, awful toilets and snoring. But I will miss the romance of the train as it rocks slowly through the night, stopping at unknown places. I will miss the lonesome sound of its horn as it train pulls slowly out of stations. We were travelling onwards, further into the Bundelkunde, following the footsteps of Solomon Earle.

We arrived at Khajuraho station at 7.30am. It was dead quiet and very cold. We passed an army battalion at the far end of the platform, starting to muster for parade. Were they expecting trouble or was this just an exercise? Catching an auto-rickshaw into town (eight kilometres) we passed the brand new international airport. Who was it for and how had it been funded? Khajuraho is miles from anywhere. As a local remarked later when we said we didn't want a guide, 'English poor, Chinese now rich.' Maybe it was for them? The town itself only has a population of 22,000. A Google search revealed that the new airport opened in January this year. It is planned to increase tourist visits to the temples by many fold. I am glad we are visiting now.

Our booking was at the 'Hotel Harmony and Zorba the Buddha Restaurant', £15 per room per night. We had a room each. The hotel lived up to its name. It had a pleasant courtyard in the centre and a roof garden above. The owner was said to be a 'tantra' expert. He presided over the place in his kaftan and long hair, looking very much like a guru, which he probably was.



As the weather seemed to be getting hotter by the minute we decided to do some sightseeing straight after a shower and breakfast. We arranged to visit the 'free' temples to the east side of the town first and do the main temple complex, to the west, the next day. This was wise as you can get temple overload, especially the abundance of the type of rock carving they have here.

Sunday morning's trip was memorable for our company, three boys, aged ten, fourteen and nineteen, from the 'old' village, and for the joy of wandering around the city 'tank', along village streets where women operated hand pumps to get water, passing the local shrine and clattering flour grinder. The boys spotted us as we turned left towards the Brahma Temple. Usually we try to avoid guides but these boys were happy to leave us to explore the temples on our own and they were unassuming. The two eldest were called Shivam and Sachin. Yes I know these boys tend to fix on tourists coming through and there was bound to be some kind of financial reckoning at the end, but India is like this and they were good company.



The first temple we visited was the Brahma Temple, small and made of granite situated next to the tank, the Narora Sagar. Bullocks stood in the water and numerous green birds, we thought they were parakeets, watched us from branches. We passed piles of dung neatly arranged in patties to dry. One of the boys told us that it was his job to make them.

The next two temples were more spectacular, the Javari and the Vamana. Each was dedicated to a different Hindu god and each had an inner sanctum. To go in you had to remove your shoes.

The boys then took us to their school, just behind the Vamana Temple. The headmaster, Tinku, was there and he showed us around. He seemed very dedicated young man. He told us he was from the hills, the only boy in his village to get

education. This was why he set up the school. They had a few paid staff but the majority were volunteers. It cost £240 per month in total to run the school. It was situated in an old farmhouse on two floors with a flat roof. There were at least four small dark classrooms where the children sat on the floor. The school was only twenty five per cent government funded and relied heavily on donations. Of course we gave them something.

The boys then escorted us through the village to the next group of temples, the Jain Temples. They waited outside for us. The youngest had a bicycle, like the one my father had. His feet couldn't reach the pedals so he had to stand or sit on the back carrier.



This group of temples had many ancient Hindu carvings, I understand taken over by the Jains, who built a newer temple. The Jain God looks like a hermaphrodite Buddha with a penis and a female body. Male sexual organs are popular. As far as I understand it the Jains were established at the same time as Buddhism, in the sixth Century BC. Whilst the Moslems stamped out Buddhism, Jainism somehow survived. The Khajuraho Temples escaped destruction by the Moslems as they were so remote and had become covered in jungle. The Chandellas constructed them over a hundred year period at the end of the first millennium. It is thought that they had to abandon them for more secure mountain fortresses as the Moslem conquest got underway. They were 're-discovered' by Captain T.S. Burt in 1838. Although shocked by them he recognized their significance and date of construction from a Sanskrit panel found at the site. The carvings on this side are similar to the Western group, beautiful large breasted women posing with their men, elephants and horses.

After this it would have been rude not to go to the older boy's house for chai. His grandfather, a wood carver, appeared and we felt it would be rude not to buy a few of his unusual carvings made from coconuts. I bought an object carved from 'river wood' shaped like a bird. On the way back the two youngest boys asked for school books so we went to the village bookshop to let each choose one appropriate to his age.

We had lunch at the hotel and then got stuck into emails, Facebook, 'Whatsapp' etc. This electronic communication takes ages but it is good to send pictures home. I managed to get through to Barbara on FaceTime. It is Valentine's Day. I took the phone outside to show her the street and several locals joined in the conversation and several waved to her. One asked, 'why she not here?'

Later we had a couple of beers and an authentic pizza from a wood burning stove while sitting on the roof of a restaurant just opposite the Harmony, called the Mediterraneo. The sign stated:

ITALIAN CHEF  
&  
DUTCH SUPERVISION



It seemed intriguing how they had managed to find an Italian chef willing to be supervised by a Dutchman! The results were very good I have to admit. Looking down from the roof the Main Street you could imagine you were in the Wild West, complete with dusty street, various assorted animals and Spanish style buildings – apart from the motorbikes cruising up and down. Sadly most of the Royal Enfields have been replaced by Japanese Honda Heroes and these bikes don't sound proper, not like the one-cylinder Enfields.



**Day 13      Monday 15<sup>th</sup> February 2016.      At Khajuraho.**

It is difficult to describe the feelings you experience walking around these wonderful temples and it is impossible to understand what motivated the Chandellas to spend so much time building them. I understand they built a total of eighty-five temples of which only twenty-five still remain. What were they for? Perhaps to describe the union of Vishnu and Shiva. They have also been described as a sort of wedding party to entertain and placate the gods. Or were they created to act as a 'Kama Sutra,' a sort of love manual for the population? Or was it just for the plain joy of creating beautiful things through the portrayal of sex and the beauty of women – war and hunting is portrayed as well I should point out. Others have postulated theories about tantric cults in relation to the Yantra, the pictorial form of a mantra, for use in meditation. We will never know for sure as the Chandellas barely mention the place in their surviving texts.

We paid the 250R to enter the enclosure and then take part in an eye feast of thousands upon thousands of carvings in at least five temple complexes. Pristine emerald lawns and bright flowerbeds surrounded the complexes. Some of the trees were in blossom. This was in stark contrast to the Eastern Temples that were surrounded by the usual brown grass, litter and smelly tanks that is more common in India. But you get the tourists in the Western Temples, coach loads of them.

We started at the Varaha Shrine where there is a huge boar statue, an incarnation of Vishnu, covered all over with figure of gods and goddesses. The first portrayals of sexual activity were at the Lakshmana Temple next door. These carvings are at the base of the stone plinth and start with a portrayal of an orgy incorporating many sexual positions, culminating with a frieze of a man having sex, or as the guide books states, 'getting very friendly with', a horse. A woman looks on, hands over her eyes, seemingly shocked. Then there is a procession of musicians, dancing girls etc. We noticed a repeating image throughout all the temples of what seems to be a horse, or dragon, on its hind legs. On top of it is a minuscule person. Underneath it, seemingly involved in something to do with its genitals, or perhaps a snake, is another person, usually a woman.



It wasn't difficult to find the most risqué statues, as there was often a crowd of tourists following the direction of a guide, using a mirror to reflect light from the sun on the relevant statue. Then all cameras are trained in that direction. We saw Japanese tourists, some of them in 'disguise' with huge brightly covered masks – are they embarrassed at being identified or do they all have colds? The Italian tourists seemed to take it all in their stride. We noticed a small group of women in their thirties, of indeterminate country of origin, some in tattoos and yoga tights. They were performing handstands with their guide while he grinned all over his face. It was his lucky day.

We avoided having a guide. We like to find things ourselves without being directed to things that seem obvious. We are getting 'India experienced.'

The Mahadeva Temple, the largest, had stone plinths with women and men caressing a stone lion. One of them appears to be pouting at it, as a woman would do to her horse, 'my lovely, beautiful creature,' she seems to be saying, 'give us a kiss.' Nothing crude I should point out. The famous 'handstand' position is well hidden around the corner. After that the Chitragupta Temple seemed positively tame, although a bit of sexual activity still occurs around each corner. Finally there is another bull statue to finish with, at the Nandi Shrine. Now we know why they have built an international airport here.

Incidentally, for reasons of decorum, I have not included pictures of any of the erotic etches in my account here.

After all that excitement we needed a chai and some vegetable parathas to recover. We had them in another Blue Sky Café, not linked to the one in Kolkata. This one had a wonderful view of the temple complex, and even had a tree house across a rickety bridge. I ventured over for Steve to take a photo – he gets vertigo with heights. We then briefly descended on the shops. This is very hard work as the proprietors rush out and invite you in with a pleading manner. Then they are very

upset when you leave. Then the next one collars you as if to say, 'it's my turn now.' They actually say, 'what about my shop?' We went into one shop where the owner conspiratorially shut the door and brought out his 'old' statues. I bought one for 1200R as the workmanship seemed good and it was light and small. He wanted 3600R. He told me not to let anyone know and I have kept my word. Well until now.

Then it was the museum – more beautiful carvings, followed by the handicraft centre. I almost bought a huge wall hanging carved in wood, to be shipped over. Luckily I had left my credit card back at the hotel so had plenty of cooling off time to reflect. Reading this now I am glad I didn't as I don't have anywhere to hang it back home.

One more night in Khajuraho, then tomorrow we are off again, destination Bhopal. It will take a day with two, five-hour train journeys. We are undecided as yet whether or not to see some local dancing tonight at 7pm. It is now 5.50pm – time to ring home and send this copy off by email. In the end we didn't go to the dancing, just had a meal back at the Blue Sky Café while trying to sneal a view of the 'son et lumiere' at the Western Temples. We were the only customers.



**Day 14. Tuesday 16<sup>th</sup> Feb. Khajuraho to Bhopal**

A travel day. I thought I would have nothing to write about but so much happens during an Indian train journey.

First the practicalities. Up at 6.15am, breakfast at 7.00am, auto-rickshaw booked for 8.00am. The train for Jhansi Junction was due to leave at 9.00am. Two five-hour train journeys to get us to Bhopal, so today is mainly about train travel. And it rained, heavily during the night and intermittently until the afternoon. It was cold too.

On the way to the railway station we got another look at the new airport as we passed. It is truly huge and far more spectacular than most city airports in the UK. It has modern glass walls and a curved concrete roof that must have cost millions of pounds to build, never mind rupees. The nice metaled road of course got bumpy and then disappeared altogether for the last half mile to the little railway station.

The town of Khajuraho itself was uncannily quiet with empty tourist shops and restaurants. We were the only customers at the Blue Sky Café last night and I did wonder if the new airport has actually killed off trade in the town by shepherding tourists to the Radisson out of town and making day-trips possible. There were no sign of any antipodeans making the trip as they used to years ago on the hippy trail.



When we got to the station we saw what we thought was our train across the tracks but could see no way of getting to it. Then the huge diesel shuddered into life and it edged forward slowly away only to reverse back to our platform and the waiting crowd. As usual the train was packed, except for our carriage, which was half empty.

The five-hour journey to Jhansi, less than 100 miles, took ages. It was single track with many stops. The huge train accelerated slowly and imperceptibly, you could tell when it was about to accelerate by the clouds of diesel smoke drifting past

the window. We spotted a kingfisher on a telegraph cable that was suddenly engulfed by the stuff. Then train then gradually picked up speed to about sixty mph and started rocking, only to slow down again for yet another stop. Initially it appeared to be going in the wrong direction. The countryside was rolling, arable fields with isolated clumps of trees. Every now and again outcrops of loose boulders in great piles would appear, like tors on Dartmoor.

Steve likes to keep to regular meals and on train journeys has to resort to snacks. He shared some chocolate from a store last night that the shopkeeper had described as *special Indian chocolate*. In the shop I noticed they had Kit Kat bars and remarked that this chocolate came from our hometown, York. However when we inspected the label we discovered this was not the case. It was made in India, outsourced now by Nestle. I said that chocolates were no good in India as it was too hot. It was then that the smiling shopkeeper mentioned that this Indian chocolate was *special* as it *doesn't melt* – these guys are good. Steve bought two bars and was charged 100R. When I complained about the price the shopkeeper, of course, said that was because they were 'special.' So we consumed a bar of melting chocolate with our *Happy Cake*, tooty fruity flavour.

At Maroba Junction the train stopped for ages then headed off back the way we had come, my sense of direction was right, as we had been heading in the wrong direction. The train soon veered off down another line. So we continued our zig-zag progress across India.

Just before Jhansi we passed a station called Mau Ranipur. I wondered if this was the town of Mow that SE described being 'taken' by Colonel Goddard when SE was held up by the rains for three months at Chatterpore, now called Chatarpur, described by SE as the 'capital of the Bundelkund.' Chatarpur is very close to Khajuraho.

We arrived at Jhansi one hour late, with just ten minutes to spare to find our connection to Bhopal, the Samta Express. It was nowhere to be seen. We lugged our bags up to the crossing, the 'Foot Over Bridge,' and waited. Luckily our train was late too, if it existed. The announcer had a slight Chinese accent when she spoke English:

'We are sorry to announce the delay of the Samta Express,' she said. She didn't sound sorry at all. Another train was delayed by 'three hours and thirty five minutes.' How could she be so precise?



The Samta Express came at last and we boarded another half empty AC2 Sleeper. But this train was electric and accelerated much faster and smoother than the diesel on the branch line. It was going all the way across to the west coast and would get there in another twenty-seven hours. Bhopal was only five hours away.

We passed the time staring out of the window, dozing or reading. I had picked up some newspapers at the station and continued to follow the ongoing story of the 'Snapdeal Stalker' in the Times of India.

This intriguing story had started a few days ago when a beautiful young woman, Dipti Sarna, had disappeared while taking an auto-rickshaw from the railway station to meet her father waiting for her in the driveway at their home in Delhi. Her last mobile call was to the effect that her rickshaw appeared to be taking the wrong route. We all feared the worst. The papers are full of trials of gang-rape perpetrators and the terrible things that can befall some unfortunate young women in India.

However just thirty-six hours later she was released on a country road, miles away. Apparently one of her abductors had told her that the 'man' had not come. She was well fed and unharmed. The story update today was to the effect that a 'psychopath' who admired Hitler and Stalin had carefully arranged the kidnap. He had bought two auto-rickshaws and persuaded four men that a large ransom could be obtained. He had apparently fallen in love with Dipti when he spotted her at a metro station a year ago and wanted her to love him, just like Shah Rukh Khan in the 1993 film 'Darr'. He had never spoken to her. He must have changed his mind and they were all arrested.

Here are the sounds of some of the people who pass you in the train:

*Chai, coffee.* That is good. Only 10R

*Panni bottley. Panni. Panni bottle.*

*Or even, panni water, panni water.* Panni means water.

*Tomato soup.* Were we hearing right? Did he just say tomato soup? I almost bought some even though I didn't want it, just to see what it was.

At 9pm we finally arrived at Bhopal. Of course no one knew where are hotel was. The crowd of rickshaw drivers all said they did but they didn't seem definite. They ended up having a huge argument with each other. One said 250R was too much to pay and we should pay 200R. The driver we selected in the end had a pimped up rickshaw, all flashing lights and huge speakers in the luggage compartment behind our heads. Luckily he didn't turn the music on. On the way there was plenty of entertainment from passing floats, lorries followed by people dancing, women dressed up, drummers drumming and finally a man on a horse. We travelled on for ages and the roads became quieter and more deserted. I remembered the abduction story in the paper. But then lights then appeared and we arrived at a mall, an area of new concrete buildings, hotels and stalls. Of course our driver had no idea where our hotel was but things seemed more promising. We eventually homed in on it after consulting several passers by.

The Alankar Palace was one of those glass and marble structures that are popular in India. Everything looks great from a distance but when you get inside things just don't always work as they should – like the unreliable internet and non-adjustable air conditioning, far too cold and the hard beds. It was Ok though, better than sleeping on a train, despite the fact that the only window in my room gave onto

a tiny gap leading to a skylight on the next floor. We don't always need to have daylight.

We then went out to a great vegetarian restaurant, the 'Taste of India' that I had spotted from the rickshaw. I had an excellent thali.



**India Day 15. Wednesday 17<sup>th</sup> February. Bhopal**

This was the day we saw the disaster site and visited a wonderful health centre, the Sambhavna Trust Clinic, set up to treat and care for the victims. But Bhopal has other attractions and we visited some of them too.

Solomon Earle passed by Bhopal in 1778. He called it Bopoltole. The city has two lakes, the Upper and the Lower, which were apparently created in the 11<sup>th</sup> Century by Raja Bhoj, apparently to atone for the murder of his mother. Centuries later Dost Mohammed Khan, a Muslim, took over the city. He was followed by a number of female rulers in the Nineteenth Century. One of these, Shah Jahan Begum, decided to build the largest mosque in the world, but ran out of money. The result is the Taj-ul-Masjid, which was only completed in recent years. It has two minarets and looks half the size it was meant to be. We got our auto-rickshaw driver to drop us off at the entrance.



Wandering around the immense courtyard in our bare feet was quite an experience. Inside there was a great deal of Koran instruction going on to boys and male teenagers. Some were really getting into it, rocking their heads in concentration, while others looked around in a bored manner, yawning. We were able to walk right into the temple.

After our visit to the Clinic we went to the Bharat Bhavan, a new cultural and arts centre situated on the shores of the Upper Lake. Most of it was underground and mercifully cool as by afternoon the temperatures were in the 30s. There were studios, one of which contained potters constructing unusual and unique pieces some of which were on display, and others outside in a huge pile. I particularly liked

the portrayal of two lovers sitting on a real car tire with a city of sky-scrapers on the other side of the tire, all in perfect proportion.

At 12.05am on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of December 1984, forty tons of a deadly gas which floats on water in liquid form and is heavier than air, methyl isocyanate (MIC), leaked out of a poorly maintained storage facility and covered half the city of approximately one million souls. Nearly 4000 died that night, but the death toll mounted to up to 20,000 over the ensuing years. These were terrible deaths from respiratory problems and now foetal abnormalities. This fertiliser factory was run by Union Carbide, an American chemical company. The highly toxic lethal chemical is used in manufacturing of pesticides. To make things worse, after the leak the factory would not release information about the type of gas so the hospitals had no idea what they were dealing with. One assumes this gas has been investigated for military use due to its effectiveness in killing and damaging people, perhaps the reason for the secrecy. Bhopal will now be forever remembered for this incident, but to visit the city without the knowledge of history you would have no idea. Life continues as usual and the population has increased to around two million, many of whom live around the Union Carbide site and some, so we were informed, actually within the site itself.

The city is forty percent Muslim many of who live in the old part of the city where the derelict factory still remains. No one has been extradited to stand trial. It is a terrible story of industrial corruption and the heartlessness of big business.

Walking and riding by rickshaw through the old city was quite an experience. We were driven through the butchery area and saw hanging meat and baskets of live chickens in full view of their chopped up colleagues. I even saw one being held squawking, presumably about to be dispatched. There were vegetable stalls, bookshops, metal workers, motorbike garages and even a gun and ammunition shop. The narrow streets had open sewers, some covered over but with huge gaps left, often at road junctions, for unsuspecting pedestrians, or even a motorbike or auto-rickshaw, to fall into. We experienced a strange mixture of terrible smells interspersed with others which were much more pleasant, spicy and pungent. Motorbikes passed with whole families and babies held aloft, astride them. We even saw a motorbike carrying a full size green wheelbarrow. Muslim men walked arm in arm in groups wearing the traditional white. Some women had the full face covering, useful to keep off the dust, one lady driving a motorbike with sunglasses covering her eyes so she looked like an Egyptian mummy. We got trapped in traffic jams and whenever any gap opened up, however small, our driver accelerated into it.

The Sambhavna Trust Clinic was opened in 1996. The Managing Trustee, Satinath Sarangi, told us that he had visited the city the day after the disaster to offer his help, intending to stay for a week. He is still there now managing the centre. He is a tall man, quietly spoken, wearing a red turban, blue jeans and a black kaftan. He is one of those few people you will meet in life who you can really respect in his dedication and hard work, despite the dangers, as we heard later.





The clinic was like an oasis of peace surrounded by the bustle of busy narrow alleys, just half a mile from the derelict factory. It was quite hard to find and we got lost trying to find our way back after walking returning from the factory site. On entering we met Ed Hanley, a photographer and tabla player, from Toronto. Over chai in the garden he told us that he has made a video for the centre and has just completed a project photographing outlying clinics that run by the centre. Ed was about to leave for Delhi where he had been invited to photograph leprosy clinics. When people contract leprosy they can be outcast by their families.

Ed delivered us to Satinath's office and, after introductions were completed, he took us on a tour of the facilities while explaining the history of the place. The centre is two stories and has a central courtyard. Everywhere there are gardens. Just beyond the boundary walls you are surrounded on all sides by other buildings.

We learnt about the destructive power of free enterprise and big business. Apparently Henry Kissinger pushed through the development of the factory and even Tony Blair was a signatory during later developments, presumably after the disaster. It was a terrible story of denial of responsibility amid efforts to cover tracks and resist extradition and trial by those in power. And this was all despite clear evidence of corporate manslaughter on an industrial scale. Some of this information has only come to light recently after a Wikileaks search. Satinath told us that the Americans have now jailed the instigator of the leak for ten years. He told us that the centre itself had been subject to cyber attacks by ex-CIA/FBI operatives working for the new owners of the factory, Dow Industries.

The sad thing about all this is that people are still suffering and no attempt has been made to make the site safe. Satinath told us that there is a waste dump leaking chemicals into the water-table down to a level of several metres. Wells in the area were regularly used until recently. The Centre has a large database (20,000) of sufferers together with a control group. Various symptoms and signs are being measured including respiratory problems and foetal abnormalities. There are plans to publish the results soon in a high impact journal such as The Lancet.

\$470 Million in compensation has so far been paid to the victims, but adds up to less than \$250 per victim. \$3 Billion was asked for. This can be seen in contrast to the huge compensation demanded and provided by BP to the Americans after the Caribbean oil leak in 2010. Dow Chemicals still has factories in India and other developing countries.

He showed us the herb garden and small medicine factory where natural herbs such as turmeric leaves, asparagus, etc are dried, ground up and then boiled and reduced to make liquids and pills. There was a pleasant musty smell coming

from a cauldron. All the way children followed wanting their photograph taken. They had been in Satinath's office earlier to collect old computer paper to draw on. There was a children's playground made from old tires and, next to it, a small bank of solar panels.



The treatment here relies strongly on ayurvedic principles (herbal medicines), massage and practical approaches, although western type practices and medication are used. It is free to those affected by the disaster. The clinic employs an obstetrician/gynaecologist and a general physician.

After our tour we set off, with a hand drawn map provided by Satinath, to see the factory. It was very hot by then and this was made worse by dust and traffic. We walked up Berasia Road, turning right at the roundabout as directed. We passed shanty dwellings and had to dodge washing lines. Children asked for photos. Eventually we came to a concrete wall on the left, which we recognised as the start of the factory boundary. It was covered with graffiti:

*Punish the Guilty, Enhance Compensation  
Remediate the Contaminated Environment  
Issue Health Booklets to all Gas Victims with Their Complete  
Dow Chemicals. No Justice in Bhopal. No Business in India*



Then we came to a gate that appeared to be open. I entered the site, leaving Steve behind keeping watch. I walked down a quiet lane. To my left was the wall and

up ahead were a number of concrete buildings. To my right was a wood. It was like being in the countryside. At the buildings I saw two parked motorbikes. Then two men appeared. They didn't look official. They asked me for my 'permit'. I said I didn't have one but felt it safest to then exit the site.

As Satinath had promised we got a good view of the site from a flyover near by. You could see quite large buildings, like accommodation blocks and some rusting iron gantries. All around the perimeter wall were shanty houses, some quite large. Children waved to us. To the left was the area of wasteland described to us. This was apparently the dumping ground for waste, thought to be the current source of contamination. We crossed the railway and found an auto-rickshaw to take us back to the centre. It was getting very hot now.



We had been invited to attend the 2pm meeting. This is a weekly meeting with all staff, rather like a community meeting. It took place in a pleasant circular airy building with no walls, called the Round House. I counted about forty people present, half were men and half were women. A lovely lady from the library interpreted for us as it was all in Hindi. In fact few people speak English around here. On discovering we were psychiatrists she told us that a common malady around here is called Ghabrahat – a condition characterised by a feeling of unease and a fear of death, a type of anxiety state.

The meeting was similar to the sort of thing that we had attended many times in the UK. Topics under discussion were the forthcoming women's day and the need for staff to inform the centre if they would be delayed getting to work on time. Then we were invited to introduce ourselves. Steve made it clear that our source of charity money was from doctors, as the Sambhavna Trust do not like to accept money from the state or other big organisations and want to preserve their independence. At 3pm we gave our apologies and left.

My overall impression of the place is how well run it seemed to be, exactly the way I would have liked to run my own service when working for the NHS, without interference from government bureaucracy and form filling for no reason. All patients are given a health booklet and are entered on the centre's database. The data is used for research, not just to collect figures that then gather dust in government departments or get lost in computer systems. It was a truly impressive place.

In the evening we went to our 'regular' restaurant, 'A Taste of India'. When we got there it was early and we were the only customers. Because of this twelve waiters served us. Needless to say they 'forgot' our main course. I had a South India thali, not as good as the North India version. The headwaiter was very helpful although he got things wrong. He reminded us both of Catarella in Montalbano. In the back there was a sign for the 'Kitty Room.' I went to investigate. Of course this turned out to be a special room for women.

**India Day 16. Thursday 18<sup>th</sup> February. Travel to Burhanpur**

As I have written before, travel in India is never without incident. Trains always seem to be a standard two hours late. This is just accepted. Except sometimes they may happen to be on time so you have to be ready, just in case. It is worrying if you have a connection to make but then the train you are catching will inevitably be late too, except of course when it isn't. So far we have been lucky. We had no connection today. Just a straight five hours from Bhopal to Burhanpur on a fast electric train, the 11.55am Kushinagar Express, on its way to Mumbai. It rolled in at 2.30pm.

Our three-hour wait at the station was not unpleasant. I love the slow pace of everything and the pleasant warmth in the mornings before the heat builds up, just like an English spring. While having a masala dosa in the 'food hall' we met three young Indian men. It started, as always, with a request for a photo, then they invited us to join them. They were all students, at the station with their friend, a pharmacy student, to see him off. Quiffs are the fashion of the moment and you see young men combing each other's quiffs. They are very physical.



Then we waited, and waited, in the First Class Waiting Room. It wasn't very first class. Next to us a load of people were lying on the floor on mats, in preference to sitting on the benches. Some of the men had taken off their shoes and left them under our bench – not a great smell. Cleanliness is paramount however and you rarely smell body odour, even with the street dwellers.

We settled down in our compartment next to a gentleman who ran petrol stations. Opposite was Suresh, twenty-nine, a lovely person who we conversed with for a lot of the journey. He ran a restaurant in Bhopal, part of a franchise called Hakeem. He told us that he had worked for a company linked to Hollywood, not Bollywood, in Mumbai working on 3D films. He was on his way to meet up with old

friends in Mumbai. He insisted on paying for our meal (thalis) as we did not have the right small change.

With some trepidation, when asked why we were travelling this route, I told both our companions about my India ancestors. They talked about being ruled by 'ferengies' (foreigners). I thought that might be the end of our conversation but it wasn't the case. They were only describing it like it was. They asked us what we thought and we discussed history, something that is important, that you couldn't forget, in their view. The patrol station guy wanted to look at my iPad. Unfortunately he homed in on my photos and spent rather a long time on my Khajarahho ladies, a bit embarrassing. God knows what impression he might have of us now. He told us that as a child he had written, and received back, a letter from a British prime Minister called 'John' – that would be John Major. He had also written to the US President but had not received a reply. I asked him if had written to the Queen. He said, no, he didn't want to. He got off just after Hushangabad.

Suresh showed us pictures of his restaurant, his staff, and his new car. He had had it blessed, by Kali of course. The restaurant employs eighteen staff, all men. I asked him if he employed women and he told me that the franchise does not allow this. Why? It is too dangerous for them.

While waiting for the train I did a study of interesting articles in the Times of India. There was nothing more on the 'Snapdeal Stalker,' but there a report on a rather nasty abduction and rape of an eleven-year-old girl. The Times uses terms not rare in our tabloid newspapers. For example jail-breakers are 'nabbed' by 'cops.' A man had been 'slapped' with a sedition charge. There was a report about a strange murder case:

*On the night of June 29, 2006, Yasmin and Ali got drunk.*

*Yasmin wanted sex, but Ali pleaded his inability claiming he was drunk.*

*Yasmin then quarreled with Ali, poured kerosine over him and set him on fire.*

*He later succumbed to his burns.*

*Yasmin was found guilty of murder, but after 10 years in prison this was changed to 'culpable homicide' as there was no premeditation. She has just been set free.*

Another story was a horrific one about a man who had been completely cut in half by a truck. *Donate my organs, says youth cut in half by truck*, was the headline. Apparently passers by had filmed his body, with arms flailing, while the lower part of his body had been thrown several feet away. Luckily some other passers by called for help. In the ambulance he had pleaded for his organs to be donated. Apparently his corneas had found a recipient.

The rest of the paper was rather tedious, describing political disputes etc, apart from a report that Prime Minister Modi's party had apparently commandeered all the school buses in Bhopal to transport people to a rally. So no one could get to school. Now imagine that happening in the UK.



Just before we arrived at Hushangabad, we crossed a huge river, the Narmada, The Narmada, known by the British Raj as the Nerbuda, runs for over 800 miles from east to west, discharging into the Gulf of Cambay in the Arabian Sea near Baroda. The other large river we were heading for passes just south of Burhanpur. It is called the Tapti, or Tapi. Both rivers feature in Solomon Earle's journal. Solomon spent several weeks at what he called Husnabad, until the 6<sup>th</sup> January 1777, waiting for orders from Calcutta to proceed. The train line roughly followed his route south, past the massive fortress of Asirgarh. We passed through some hills before Hushangabad, then it was flat with cornfields for miles and no signs of habitation. Then darkness fell and we couldn't see anything.

We arrived at Burhanpur at around 10.00pm. Burhanpur is a very old city and in Moghul times it was the second capital. It is little known to tourists and does not even feature in the Lonely Planet guidebook at all. Shah Jahan spent much of his time here and his favourite wife, Mumtaz Mahal, of Taj Mahal fame, died here in childbirth, either in her palace or at Asirgarh Fort.

Our auto-rickshaw driver took us to the hotel that Steve had booked but they were not aware of the booking. It was here that things nearly went wrong. We wanted to arrange a room for two nights as we were leaving late the next night. But on looking at the rooms our hearts sank. They were dingy and dank and had rock hard beds. Downstairs we argued about the price, which seemed to keep on increasing. That was it. We gave up and decided to leave. Our rickshaw driver was waiting. Did he know something we didn't?

We asked him to take us to the 'best hotel in town.' When we got there it looked OK but was full. The receptionist suggested another, the Hotel Ambar, sorry the 'Hotel and Holiday Resort Ambar.' It turned out to be just like the Best Exotic Marigold Hotel. It was totally eccentric and a real find.

We were welcomed by the proprietor, Mr Hoshang Havaladar, a courteous and rather pale gentleman who I thought must be either Anglo-Indian or Persian. He turned out to be the latter, actually Zoroastrian or Parsi. We discovered later that he was the 'only Parsi in Burhanpur.' Parsis originated from Persia centuries ago but are sadly dying out due to a declining birth rate. It is estimated that by 2020 there will be only 23,000 left. They leave their bodies on the 'Towers of Silence' on Malabar Hill in Mumbai, to be consumed by vultures, but vultures are also dying out. Famous Parsis include Freddie Mercury.



Tired as we were we had sit down to listen to a lecture about the history of Burhanpur complete with pointer and display board. Mr Havaladar informed us about the 'five best sites' to see. Asirgarh wasn't in the top five but Mr Havaladar could arrange a car to take us there the next day. He put a necklace of flax around our necks, a local product, and gave us a glass of Coke. He was the sort of man you didn't argue with so we just let him take over.

Then he took us up the entrance pathway, lit with coloured lights, to a green lawn surrounded by concrete chalets and a bank of cooking pots, tables and chairs, some of them suspended from a frame. He sat at a desk in the middle of the lawn, under a tent with the TV on. We had an air-conditioned chalet with balcony for £22 a night. It was lovely and cool in there, and so welcoming. The only drawback was that the beds were rather hard and the pillow was minuscule. But that was nothing after our experience with the previous hotel. Outside our room was a curious plastic object, like a porpoise carved in ice. A beer would have been good but we knew not to ask. And, guess what, the Internet actually worked – well at least for some of the time.

**India Day 17. Friday 19<sup>th</sup> February. Asirgarh Fort. Burhanpur to Bhusaval Junction**



I think we are both starting to get a little tired of travelling now. It had been non-stop for two weeks. What we need is a nice rest in one place for a few nights. Maybe Baroda will be that place. At present I am typing this in a 'combined second and first class waiting room'. We are presently at Bhusaval Junction, one hour west of Burhanpur. It is 12.15 am and the train to Baroda is not due for over an hour, if it arrives on time. The toilets are disgusting and unfortunately I had to use them. What's more I dropped my toilet roll into the wash bucket. While squatting I took a look at the wall opposite and wished I hadn't. It is at moments like this that I wonder why I put myself in these situations. It has brought back all the bad memories of things I forgot while travelling Interail around Europe in the 1970s. Steve has decided that he cannot tolerate Indian food any more and has hardly eaten anything all day. I had this feeling before in Sri Lanka. I don't think if went away for days.

But we have had some amazing times and I am sure there will be more to come over the rest of our time here. The train may arrive on time and we may not have to ask sleeping people to vacate bunks and the hotel in Baroda may turn out to be a gem. As you can see, I'm trying to cheer myself up.

In the waiting room we were soon surrounded by a group of young Moslem men, about eight of them, in the central seated area. Most of them were dressed in traditional clothes compete with white skullcaps. It wasn't too hot under the fans, but the stainless steel seats were hard. They were laughing and giggling and pointing at us. But it was all innocent fun and we soon started having some halting

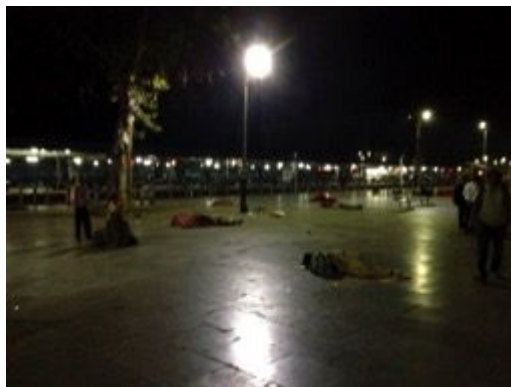


conversations with them. They were on their way to Ahmedabad, a few stops north of Baroda, where the train terminates after its long journey from Howra (Kolkata). They seemed to know when the train would arrive but of course it kept on getting delayed. I think we got on it around 2am in the end.

Outside it was smelly and there were mosquitoes about so we learnt to move back from the edge of the platform. Down on the tracks rats swarmed, getting agitated when a freight train passed when they darted about avoiding the wheels. You only notice them when you look but after spotting them you see them everywhere. There was even one on the steel rafters above our heads. The dogs too were out roaming the platform in groups. Both sets of creatures seemed well adapted to platform life after dark. There were cockroaches too. The newspaper stalls and 'foodhalls' had all closed. Outside, beyond the waiting room and parcel office, there were homeless people sleeping everywhere. You see them first as isolated mounds of clothes, as if dead. Some have no possessions at all and we saw a young boy sleeping in nothing but filthy trousers, his bare feet black with grime. The Moslem men met up with their families, crowds of women in bright coloured clothes, different from what we have seen before, and no veils. Some of them looked at us, smiled and looked away. Their men folk must have told them about us and they wanted to see for themselves. We said goodbye to the men on a number of occasions as we walked up and down trying to work out where our carriage (bogie) will arrive. It is B1, an AC 3Tier sleeper. The Moslem group were in S4, second class sleeper. It looked like there are enough of them to fill half a carriage.

As you walk up and down the platform you notice places where it smells particularly horrible. I guess the rats are don't help. It is probably the smell of rats and effluent from the trains. You can hear train hooters sounding as freight trains rumble past. Each engine has a single bright light at its front, which can be blinding as it approaches. We looked out for our train but there was no sign. The Moslem men kept us up to date. *It is coming in five minutes. It is coming in in one hour.* Etc.

When it did eventually arrive we had to find separate bunks in a pitch-black carriage that appeared full. I used my phone-torch and climbed up to the third tier and tried to make up my bed. You get two sheets, a pillow, a small towel and a blanket. I find one sheet, two pillows and a blanket that came in useful later in the night. I had to leave my suitcase under a seat at the bottom. I must have gone to sleep immediately. The last thing I remembered was the gentle head to toe rocking of the train.



But what about our day in Burhanpur?

Our driver, Sunil, arrived twenty minutes late at 8.20am. But it was OK as it turned out you could drive most of the way to the top of Asirgarh, up a winding track that would have broken the axel of less sturdy cars. We passed the time looking at the accolades Mr Havaladar had received for his 'resort,' pinned up on the walls of the brightly coloured lobby. The car was a Chrysler, non-4WD, but it did have air conditioning, which was helpful as it was very hot and airless today. It looked as if summer had come early. We headed out of town overtaking lorries and bullock carts on blind corners, and a motorbike loaded with a market stall's complement of upside-down live chickens. Asirgarh was only about thirty minutes away. We saw it in the distance with its twin minarets looking like little antlers on the summit of a hill that resembled Table Mountain in Cape Town. I think SE was right when he described it as impregnable. It is around 1000 feet high with sheer drops on most sides.



Here is some history of this historic fort once described as the 'Gateway to the Deccan,' the central part of India:

Asirgarh is mentioned in the Mahabarata where it is known as Ashwatthamgiri. Between the 9<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries it was held by the Rajputs. The Mughal emperor Akbar captured the fort in 1601. When Shah Jahan revolted against his father Jahangir in 1617 he stayed here. He was governor of this area so knew it well. He eventually made peace with his father in 1626. To do this he had to pay a huge ransom and give up his two sons, Dara and Aurangzeb, as hostages. When Jahangir died in 1627, Shah Jahan ascended to the Mughul throne. It is believed by some historians that Mumtaz Mahal, his famous wife, died in the fort while undergoing the delivery of her fourteenth child. Her body was taken to Agra to be buried in a monument called the Taj Mahal. Others, including our host, Mr Havaladar, insist that she died in Burhanpur. In 1658 Aurangzeb forcibly overthrew his father and appointed Ahmad Nazim Sani as commander of Asirgarh. After the decline of the Mughals the Maratha leader Holkar controlled the fort. This was when SE passed by with the EIC army in 1778. The British apparently successfully assaulted the fort in 1819, under General Doveton. It was the last Maratha stronghold to fall. As far as I am aware they set up a battery which could reach the fort, fired a few rounds and soon after this the fort surrendered. The British were the last to occupy the fort and since they left it has been in ruins. It looked to us as if some of the buildings had been destroyed either at this time, or soon after the British left. The barracks,

apparently used as a prison to house rebels, were very ruinous and some looked as if they had been dynamited.

So the fort is not perhaps as impregnable as SE believed it to be. It holds a limitless supply of water in several large tanks and has an underground water system that is still operational. There is room to grow crops and keep animals. The only problem is that it is nearly two miles in diameter and it would have taken an army to defend it. At the top we admired the view then made our way through ruined Mughal buildings to the Asir Masjid, the mosque, which occupies the highest point. The authorities are now taking an interest in preserving the fort and there were several workmen repairing the mosque. Probably because of this, the minarets were barricaded and locked. Maybe just as well as the balconies on the way up were crumbling away. I guess health and safety was a consideration here. Sunil was certainly concerned as he insisted on accompanying us all the time, even though we tried to shake him off to explore some of the ruined buildings on our own. The tops of each minaret are smoothed over, almost phallic in appearance. The mosque itself has a wonderful vaulted ceiling. From the plateau it has a forbidding, solid appearance as if it had been constructed by giants.



We then walked around the perimeter area past another huge tank. In addition to Sunil, we were now being followed by three young men who had braved the rough track up to the fort on a single motorbike. We found the Hindu Temple dedicated to Shiva and possibly built by the Marathas. There was a local legend that Ashwatthama, from the Mahabharata, still comes to offer flowers each morning. There were certainly some flowers inside the temple. Down below was a deep step-well. The boys had found a way down, getting past a metal barrier. I followed. Sunil watched, looking worried. It was actually quite safe, unless you slipped into the deep waters of the well at the bottom.

Walking along past the ruins of the British cantonment, we tried to find the British Cemetery without success. We did eventually find it, behind a wall near the entrance. There were hundreds of graves mostly overgrown and crumbling. But some still had their marble inscriptions and we were able to put some dates to the British occupation:

Herbert Roberts  
Henry Roberts son of above  
Died age 1 year and 5 months  
Date not there

Alexander, son of Conductor  
Died 1845, age 7 months

Thomas Edwardson. 1812, or 1842 (more likely)

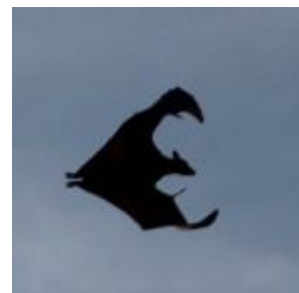
Major George More  
10<sup>th</sup> Nov 1843

Beloved wife of ? Ltn T.L.Jameson  
June 1838 at age 20

John Gordon Deedes Esq  
Attacked with fever at this place on his journey from  
Allahabad to England. 1837

We were fortunate to find it as Sunil was trying to get us to walk back the quick way. He had never been to the cemetery and was found it interesting. I guess Hindus have no memorials of their dead because of the use of cremation.

Back at the car we decided to visit the nearby Moti Mahal. The Moti was another wife of Shah Jahan and, perhaps when Mumtaz became the favourite, wanted her own palace. We spotted the palace from the top of the fort. It had been left to gradually deteriorate but all the rooms were still intact and we were able to go up to the roof. It was a gem. At the back there were steps leading down to a high step where apparently the Moti boarded her elephant. Inside I had a scary experience entering one of the rooms. In the dark I could just make out what appeared to be body on a plinth in the middle. I noticed a screeching sound that I thought was from birds inside. I entered gingerly and a creature flitted past my head just missing me by inches. It turned out to be a bat and the room was full of them, hanging upside down from the ceiling. The 'body' was actually a pile of shawls, perhaps used as a place to sleep by someone.



Back in Burhanpur, we had lunch at the hotel, but this turned out to be relatively expensive as Sunil asked if he could join us, telling us that he had missed his breakfast. Now this was very odd behaviour, for India, but we hadn't the heart to refuse although we just wanted to eat quickly and then have a siesta. Sunil was booked until four o'clock. In the end we asked him to come back after an hour. Of course he was late. We got him to drive us to an underground aqueduct that

supplied the town – but it was closed so we got him to drop us off at the ruins of the Shahi Quila Palace. We let him go then. It was great to lose our shadow. But it was not nit for long because as soon as we entered the palace a group of three giggling fourteen year old boys took his place.



The Palace was raised up several storeys, high above the Tapti River, now just huge lakes as it was the dry season. Down below we saw water buffalo in their natural habitat and fishermen. Havaladar told us that this was the real place where Mumtaz Mahal died – at least I think he said that as he went on last night for ages and we were really tired. I took a photo of our boys posing inside her bath. Around the corner we came across a group of young men doing a photo shoot posing with a broken guitar. Of course we then became the subject of their photos. In this town you can have delusions of being a celebrity.

We then had a memorable walk back through the Old Town trying to find our way back to the 'Hotel Ambar and Holiday Resort,' situated beyond the city wall. It was memorable as we were the celebrities. We attracted interest wherever we went. I have never come across this before but the locals wanted me to take photos of them and no one asked for rupees. I was happy to oblige. I photographed a whole chapatti-making team, starting with the man who flicked away the sacred cows who were trying to eat the flour, followed by the dough-maker, then the cook, using an upturned bowl over a charcoal fire, and then to another man who flitted the chapattis expertly to the final gent who sat cross-legged on a box. His job was to fold each chapatti into four and pile them up high. We passed the main square complete with copper statue of a Maratha king and men selling brooms. In the next street we passed a group of men selling what looked like piles of leaves. They told us it was used to make a drink and offered us some. Unfortunately we had to refuse. Transport was via horse-drawn carts as well as the usual auto-rickshaws and bicycles. We passed a tree full of fruit bats.



Keeping our room for an extra night we were able to stay until 9.30pm and rest and take a shower and get something to eat before heading to the railway station for what was meant to be the 10.35pm train to Bhusaval Junction. But when we got there we found it had been delayed the 6.30 the next morning! So we caught the first train out, the Pune train, but had no seats. We stood outside the toilets. A rather hyperactive young man offered to share his pull-down seat. He had staring eyes and got really close to you. Every now and again he got out his little packet of oral tobacco. There was a huge mound of rubbish piled up on the join between the two carriages. After a while I saw the cleaner push it all out onto the tracks below; plastic bags, curry pots and all. Rubbish is endemic here. It is unfortunately a way of life and will be hard to change. I guess people here are so used to it that they just don't notice it. On the street pigs, dogs and cows munch on it.



**Day 18. Saturday 20<sup>th</sup> Feb. To Baroda, the town of the Rajah.**

Our last overnight train in India was about the oldest and dirtiest so far, covered with many years of ingrained filth, but I slept from about 2 to 7.00am. We were in separate compartments on an AC 3Tier carriage and both on top bunks. I had left my case at the bottom, while Steve slept with his. When I awoke, high above the others, I found most of my travelling companions were women and children. I braved the toilet again then sat in Steve's compartment, as the women were less friendly. I didn't take it personally, it is a culture thing. It is difficult for women to talk to strange men. There is no such problem with the men who are very friendly. We hailed the passing chai man for hot, sweet, milky tea (10R).

As the sun came up we crossed the Tapti River at Surat (pronounced *Soorat*), the first East India Company outpost in India. Our companions got off. They were both in textiles, exporting 'fancy' (traditional) cotton outfits to the Arabs. The other industry in Surat is diamond cutting. We tried to learn how to pronounce Baroda, or Vadodara as it is now known. The correct way to pronounce it seemed to actually be a combination of the two, *Wadodra*. We couldn't get it right so will have to stick to Baroda. They asked us what we thought of India, a standard question, and we answered as best as we could. I asked them what they thought of Britain. I think they were being diplomatic when they said, *the cultures are very different*.

Then we crossed the Narmada River again at Bharuch and we were almost there.

A short rickshaw ride from the station and we reached our hotel, the 'Lords Revival,' our home for the next four nights. It was a good choice, traditional and small, despite being just a few years old. And it was quiet, despite being situated right next to the Sayaji Bagh Park and a fun fair. We could see a big rocking swing and the little train station right outside our windows on the first floor. We had brunch then a rest.

Baroda is dominated by the King and his family, the Gaekwads. Gaekwad means 'cow protector.' The most famous of the Gaekwad dynasty is Sayajirao 111, who reigned from 1875 until 1939. He redesigned the town and built the park, set up

the university and built the Laxmi Vilas Palace. The Gaekwad name is everywhere in this town. The current Rajah is Samarjitsinhrao (born 1967) and King since 2012.

My first task was to contact his secretary, Ms Kejal, to try to arrange the promised appointment. I managed to ring her and she told me she would speak to 'Sir' and ring back. Not long afterwards she rang back with the news. 'Sir' will see Steve and I on Tuesday at 3pm. That felt great, a suitable culmination to our journey. I rushed to Steve's room to impart the good news and we hit the town for supper.



Crossing roads in Baroda is not easy, as is the case in most Indian towns. Traffic clearly has priority and it is not rare for motorbikes to go through red lights and head straight for the poor pedestrians trying to cross. A nice uniformed traffic-control-lady at the junction assisted us. She smiled and blew her whistle, and held up her big stick. The traffic stopped. Unfortunately she wasn't there to help us on the way back.

Baroda is a student city and there were many students hanging around the square chatting while leaning on parked motorbikes and eating from stalls. Gujarat state is dry so that cold beer will have to wait until we get to Mumbai, unless Maharashtra State is dry too. I rather think it is, but the Taj Mahal Palace where we were booked to stay is bound to serve some. So we had to settle for a wifi-less coffee bar. Next to it was a little shop that I went to investigate. The reason why so few people visibly smoke here is that they take their tobacco orally with sugar. The shop sold it in little tins. A pizza was next. Steve is still 'off' Indian food and it looks like he will not recover till after we get back home. Unfortunately I made the wrong choice and ordered the *cheese explosion* pizza. Imagine cutting a pizza horizontally into two parts, spreading Primula cheese liberally on and then reassembling it, a bit like a sandwich. The top half was OK. We amused ourselves seeing how many celebrities we could name on a frieze of photos on the opposite wall. A little girl posed in front of the celebrity pictures while her father took photos of his own celebrity, his daughter.

Back at the hotel I managed to get hold of Barbara on Facetime. She was having a nice lunch out with our son and his girlfriend in London.



**India Day 19.**

**Sunday 21<sup>st</sup> February.**

**Baroda**

One of the great things about travelling to a foreign country is that you notice things much more, your brain filters less. I have been getting into the habit of noting things down before I forget them. Some of the things I notice about this hotel is the fun fair outside, the rounded shape of the widow and walls of my room. And this town has less rubbish. I think we were thrown off the deep end when we arrived at Old Delhi, now over two weeks ago.

Today was the day we visited the Gaekwad buildings; the Laxmi Vilas Palace and then the Baroda Museum and Picture Gallery in the park just opposite. We set off at 9.30am to walk to the Palace. The distance on the map was deceptive but, despite being much further than anticipated, the walk was interesting. We negotiated the roundabout with the Gaekwad horse statue, crossed the river, now reduced to a trickle of brackish water, and walked past the Gaekwad hospital. We both agreed that we were getting less tolerant to smells now. I would have thought this would have been the other way round but it wasn't. We spotted a monkey on top of a shrine. We passed some buildings in the art deco style – rather dilapidated. Then we turned right and crossed a busy road – with the help of a crossing-patrol-officer – negotiated a 'wandering lunatic' (see visit to psychiatric hospital on Day 22) sporting a long beard. He approached us spitting and saying 'welcome to our country.' In the distance, across a dirt cricket field packed with men and motorbikes, we spotted a tower, a bit like a Victorian asylum. It was our first site of the Maharaja's palace. Eventually we came to an amazing gatehouse, like something out of a fantasy Gothic film, but this was for real. The guard waved us on to the tourist entrance.



The palace was really something but the guards who ran it seemed particularly officious, more so than in other places. We managed to get whistled at more than once for straying off the path. I was only trying to find an ancient step-well mentioned in my guidebook. But a Swedish group we recognised from our hotel took the prize for attracting the most whistles. There were signs advising silence too, but this didn't stop people being noisy. But the worst crime was the one committed by Steve when he refused to take one of the audio guides. They ticked off that we had two on entry and at the end wouldn't let us go as we could only return one. I almost raised my voice.

I walked through room after room, trying to follow the audio-guide, each one more ornate than the last. The Palace was a mixture of European, Mughal and other Indian styles but it seemed to work. The architect, Major Charles Mant, apparently suffered from OCD and became preoccupied with the belief that there was something wrong with the foundations. Before the walls got to six feet in height he sadly killed himself while still in his forties. The foundations actually worked very well. The Palace was completed in 1890 at vast cost. It replaced the Nazar Bagh Palace, c.1721, situated in the old city, the residence that SE would have been familiar with. I understand this Palace fell to ruin and was demolished only last year.



Memorable to me was the armoury room which displayed all sorts of lethal weapons, including spinning discs that were shot off the backs of elephants, and many swords, including one used by Akbar himself. The throne room had beautiful paintings of various Hindu Gods, and the Durbar Room was immense. Its Italian marble floor was tiled with semi-precious stones. One of the courtyards had its fountains running and you could feel the way it cooled the air.

After our visit we wandered off in search of another notable house but failed to find it. We did however find the old part of town and wandered through streets lined with textile and clothing shops.



In the afternoon we entered the park. It was packed with locals, it being a Sunday afternoon. The women were dressed up as usual in very bright colours and there were many parties of school children. The Museum and Picture Gallery was a huge red-bricked edifice that had stacks of galleries and a balcony. I did not find much information about the late 18<sup>th</sup> century but did find a painting of 'Futty Singh' and his seal. This gentleman, Fatehsinhrao 1, was the Maharaja that SE spent two years with as Resident from 1780 to 1783. I particularly liked the Mughal paintings. Entering the European galleries was like going into that time warp again. There were paintings by famous painters, for example Rubens, Constable, Van Gogh, Victorian moralistic paintings and copies of classical art. But everything was so dark, lit only by strip lights and all the paintings appeared in dire need of restoration. It must have given the hoards of children trooping round that Europe is a dark dismal place where it always rains and there is never any sun.



Outside in the sun ourselves we wandered around the park. The queue for the little train was too long to consider. We passed the zoo, an aquarium and many monkeys who were not in the zoo. As dusk came the park seemed to get even more packed. We copped several requests for group photos and never saw another European the whole time.

Tonight I feel a bit tired. Holiday blues perhaps. Perhaps I've done too much and seen too much and need to go home or maybe it is a hangover from yesterday's travel experience. Tomorrow we are booked to go to Champaner, a world heritage site, by car. I probably just need a good night's sleep to replenish my batteries.



India day 20. Monday 22<sup>nd</sup> Feb.

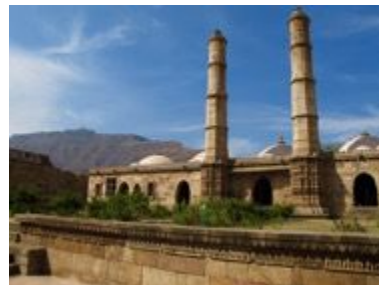


Visit to Champaner and Pavagadh

Today's trip out was the perfect combination, a mixture of history and a fascinating venture into Indian spiritual life, in other words, a visit to a ruined pre-Mughal city, Champaner, followed by an ascent of the pilgrimage mountain, Pavagadh.

We hired a car and driver for the day to take us there, a battered old Tata. On the way we passed a motorbike carrying what looked like a complete drum kit and an auto-rickshaw carrying a three-piece suite. Our way was blocked more than once by herds of cattle but eventually we approached the sacred mountain which was visible from the plain for quite some distance.

SE described Champaner in 1779 as a *neat* town. He went there to *chastise* its ruler. In those days only a small part of the city was in use by a group of Hindu people, perhaps linked to the Marathas. The city declined after the Mughals moved the capital to Ahmadabad. The guidebook stated that when the British took it over in 1803, it was mainly covered by vegetation. This was why it survived intact over the centuries. It is now a World Heritage Site because it is a unique, pre-Mughal city. Some of it, the walls, gates and mosques are in an intact state. It is about 40kms north east of Baroda.



We started by visiting two mosques, the largest and most important of which is the Jami Masjid. They both have the usual format of mosques, with a central courtyard, between two minarets and a covered vaulted building. Both contained intricate stone carvings and the courtyard of the latter was like a medieval cloisters.

Both had the advantage of the backdrop of the mountain of Pavagadh, which towers 820 metres from the plain.

I really wanted to explore the city walls nearby and we took advantage to sneak off when we noticed that our driver had fallen asleep inside the car. He must have had a hard night as he needed plentiful supplies of chai to keep him going. We passed some colourful village women washing clothes at the well outside the East Bhadra Gate. It is strange to have a village with goats, cows and primitive buildings, situated inside the ruins of an earlier, and much more spectacular, city.

I discovered a staircase to the top of the walls and nipped up them to take in the view. Meanwhile Steve, who doesn't like heights, stayed behind and watched the washer women walk back through the gate to the village with wicker work baskets balanced on their heads filled with newly washed clothes. On top of the ramparts, I found myself surrounded by a group of monkeys. Having not bothered with a rabies jab I became a little anxious. Be bold, I tried to tell myself, don't show them that you are afraid. Eventually the female with a baby, who was blocking my way back down the staircase, moved away and I got back down.

We drove on to visit the Kabutarkhana Pavilion before headed back to park near the city walls to begin the ascent of the mountain. It had been exceptionally dry for the last three months and the lake next to the pavilion, was unfortunately dry.

The ascent of Pavagadh takes place in three stages, unless you have a whole day and an incredibly tough constitution and plan to walk the whole way up in the midday sun. The first section is by ageless jeep. We couldn't understand why our driver didn't take us up this bit as the road isn't bad. Maybe the Jeep drivers need to make a living, or perhaps the chai is better at the foot of the mountain. I counted twenty-four people climbing on board our Jeep. These Jeeps have some of the doors removed, so more pilgrims can get on board. At the top of this first stage you walk along some of the pilgrim route, past numerous shops and stalls selling anything from bronze multi-armed gods to colourful headscarves and shawls, jewellery and stacks of snacks.

The second stage is by 'ropeway,' in actual fact a cable car. We queued for half an hour in the increasing midday heat. Then we were whisked almost vertically up the dry and brown mountain, over the pilgrim route, which we saw twisting its way through ancient fortified walls built by the Rajputs.

The Rajputs occupied the place for many years until the Mohammedans ousted them in the 13<sup>th</sup> Century. This took several campaigns until eventually the conquerors stormed the heights after a twenty month siege. The Rajputs could see that the end was in sight and they set fire to the town and killed themselves and their wives and children rather than be taken alive. A few who were captured alive were eventually put to the sword after refusing to change their faith. The King's surviving daughters had to join the Sultan's harem.

The final stage of the ascent was on foot. This stage was very tiring in the heat and was thankfully shaded by tarpaulins in parts. The shops and stalls continue all the way. At the top there were a number of temples but the final temple, the 1000-year-old Kalikamata, the temple built in honour of the Goddess Kali, is up another steep climb up steps with many resting places. Looking down we saw a tank and on the ghats leading down into the water were pilgrims washing themselves.

We passed a holy cow, dressed in a red shawl and jewellery, and several, less holy, braying donkeys.

When we finally reached the top we took off our shoes and followed the crowds into the temple itself. This time there were no special fees for foreigners and no touts, probably because we were the only foreigners in the whole place. Everyone was really friendly and curious as usual and there was a holiday atmosphere. I acquired a Kali headband, a red forehead spot and an orange sweetmeat by the time I emerged outside. Inside you could just see Kali's eyes peering out from within but not much else as it was dark and you had little time to take things in.

At the bottom of the steps we saw two young women who were throwing their long dark hair around in circles in what looked like a build up to a state of ecstasy.



Descending was much easier apart from the long zigzag queue, like Disneyland, for the cable car.

Back at the car park our driver suggested chai before the one-hour drive back to Baroda.



In the evening we tried out the 'Oriental Spice' restaurant near what we now called the 'student' square. The restaurant, up a few floors, was deserted. It was Monday night, they said. So the waiter-to-guest ratio was about three to one. But the food was delicious. We started with chicken tikka then had something vegetarian and rather hot with jeera rice. Outside we could hear the sound of amplified music and drums getting louder and louder. After paying the bill we went outside to investigate. It was one of those walking bands that we had seen in Bhopal. It started

with a bank of portable speakers, followed by drummers, then crowds of people dancing. Women with lights on their heads were on the perimeter and there was the usual gaily-decorated horse to follow. Several middle-aged men were getting the girls to gyrate and dance in the middle and one of them showered rupee notes. We assumed it must be a pre- or post- wedding march.

As usual we had to negotiate the busy roundabout crossing to get back to our hotel at the end of the evening as the traffic police had knocked-off for the night. It was disturbing when two motorbikes suddenly rounded the corner and headed straight towards us at high speed. One step in the wrong direction, I nearly did, and we would be straight under the wheel followed by a few auto-rickshaws on top for good measure.

### **India Day 21. Tuesday 23<sup>rd</sup> Feb. Meeting the Maharaja**



Today was the day we were to meet the Maharaja of Baroda, one of the objectives of this trip. SE spent two years in Baroda as 'Resident' to the then Marharaja who he called *Futty Singh, the Rajah of Guzerat*. SE stayed in Baroda from 1780 to 1782, until the first Maratha war ended and he was recalled. At the time the Rajah was put in the position of having to ally himself with the British. The alternative was to give allegiance and pay crippling taxes to the Peshwa, the Maratha leader, who ruled from Pune. In the end it turned out to be a very successful survival action as it enabled the Gaekwad dynasty to rule Baroda as a semi-independent 'princely state' until independence from Britain in 1947. Since then the Gaekwads have continued as Maharajas but they have no political power. Their glory days were in the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century under Sayajirao 111, as mentioned previously.

I must admit I felt apprehensive, we both did. My relative was a member of a foreign invading force and what I have generally picked up during my travels is that this is not the sort of thing that contemporary Indians want to talk about. We had no idea what our reception would be. The British Raj is a topic I have usually managed to avoid so far. On one of the rare occasions I did mention it the British were described as 'ferengis', or foreigners. And also I was perhaps a little intimidated by the array of weapons seen in the museum at the Palace only two days previously.

However I had written to Samarjitsingh Gaekwad in advance so he was aware of the purpose of my visit and had graciously agreed to see me. So perhaps our reception would not be totally unwelcome.

The meeting was scheduled for 3pm.

In the morning we took an auto-rickshaw into the old town to visit Tambekar Wada, a wooden town house, once the residence of Bhau Tambekar, Diwan of Baroda (1849-54). It took a while to find the house after many stops by the driver to enquire. Eventually he found it and beamed his delight. The house is constructed on three floors with open balconies at the front. To get to each floor you have to come out and walk along the balcony. Unfortunately the courtyard at the back remains derelict. The Archeological Survey of India, who have their office on the ground floor, showed us round for free and were very proud of their building. What we had come to look at were the beautiful wall paintings showing scenes from the Mahabharata, Krishna's love life (in what must have been the bedroom), and scenes from the Anglo-Maratha wars complete with redcoats in squares and columns of cannons lead by bullocks. The colours were delightful, including the green ceiling. We were particularly captivated by a scene from an Englishman's family, complete with children fighting and schoolteacher brandishing a stick, a fascinating insight in how the British were viewed.



On leaving the house I spotted an archway that I thought might be part of the old city wall. On going through it Steve saw a sign advertising the services of a consultant psychiatrist, Dr Rajkumar. What a coincidence. It was too good an opportunity to miss, so we went in. Clinical appointments were in the region of £10.

After waiting for a while in the anteroom, with a loud-voiced receptionist and various waiting patients, we were ushered into his consulting room. Dr Rajkumar must have been a little surprised to when two British psychiatrists turned up unannounced but he didn't show it. We asked if we could visit the local psychiatric hospital. He said there wasn't one but there was a 'mental' hospital. He kindly wrote us a letter of introduction and promised to ring the hospital so we could visit the next day.

On the way back to our hotel we did a bit of shopping. Steve bought some lengths of linen and I bought two pairs of trousers, so I would have something decent to wear for the afternoon. On the way back, in another rickshaw, we passed the statue of the Gaekwad on a horse and surprisingly felt calm. Whatever happened this afternoon would happen.



At 2.30pm we arrived at the second gatehouse and informed security. We were summoned through. The Maharaja's helpful secretary, Ms Kejal, was there and she arranged for a guide to give us a quick tour – so Steve therefore could not avoid being shown round by a guide. At 2.50pm we were ushered into Sir's office, a large, very cool room on the ground floor.

The meeting went well. We sat on a sofa at one end of the room, the Maharaja sat at the other end. He was dressed formally in an Indian Style suit and had a shock of abundant white hair. Everything was very polite and formal. We were offered tea and asked what type we would like. I was thinking about complex blends of masala tea and asked what he would advise. But it turned out he was asking whether we would like Assam, Earl Grey, Darjeeling etc, from a teabag. But the tea was served on a silver tray in China cups and we were offered little biscuits.

He asked us about our travels and we told him about the places we had seen en route, our hotel and the Baroda Museum in the park. He told us that the government now owns the Museum. I asked him if he knew York and he did, having been to the Railway Museum. We realised that we had not been to the Maharajah's private museum, in the Palace grounds, the Fatesingh Museum, where there is a replica of the Flying Scotsman.

I eventually broached the subject of my ancestor and showed him the copy I had of SE's journal and gave him copies I had made of letters SE had written on behalf of the Rajah, now in the British Library. He asked me how I had found the documents. I asked him where the Rajahs would have lived in the 18th century – he said in the old town, in a palace demolished by one of his relatives, just two years ago. I definitely detected a feeling of sadness and concern about the wanton destruction of an ancient historical building. I was aware of the family dispute about inheritance and assumed that this was the relative who is involved in the dispute that is sucking what remains of the family fortunes into legal bills. I thought it politic not to mention this.

He thought the British Cantonment would have been just outside the city walls, perhaps in the vicinity of the park and the Lord's Revival Hotel, right where we were staying now. I asked him if there were any records saved of that time but he said there were no documents available from before about 1850.

He then told us a bit about the cricket club and how the Palace might have to be converted to a luxury hotel in the future. I guessed this would have to be out of necessity in order to preserve the building and pay for repairs – there is no National Trust in India and the sheer numbers of palaces and historical buildings requiring management must run into the thousands. Laxmi Vilas does have the advantage of a world-class cricket ground, a golf course and an art gallery in its grounds. I asked him if it would still be open to the public if it became a hotel. He thought not as the guests would want their privacy. I said that would be a shame. Steve was pleased to hear that Geoffrey Boycott, a fellow Yorkshireman, had stayed at the Palace.

After about forty minutes I had covered all the questions I had planned to ask and the conversation was drying up so we thanked him for agreeing to see us. He was very gracious and said it was the least he could do, after we had come all this

way. He asked his secretary to arrange for a car to take us to the Futesingh museum and to telephone the golf club so we could have tea there afterwards.



The museum was excellent – much better lighting and care taken over the preservation of artifacts than the museum in the park. Just outside, in a glass case, was the replica of the Flying Scotsman the Maharajah had told us about. It was built in 1941 and was used to transport Samarjitsingh's father to school along a 3km track laid out in the palace grounds. In 1956 the Royal Family gifted the railway and engine to the children of Baroda. The engine was used regularly until 1993 when its boiler blew up – rather like the real Flying Scotsman locomotive based in York, which has just had a multi-million pound overhaul. This same railway now runs just outside our hotel window!

In the museum there was a fascinating collection of paintings, statues, china and headdresses, including a whole gallery of Gaekwads. I was particularly captivated by a sad painting of a daughter of Sayajirao 111, painted just before she died while still a child. After this tragic event the King's first wife also died. I found a bust of SE's Rajah, Fatesinhrao 1, looking much better than his portrait in the other museum but still sporting a rather prominent nose. The museum contains a collection of paintings by the Indian painter, Raja Ravi Varma – think oriental Pre-Raphaelite – there were many scenes of voluptuous maidens sleeping in woods.

On the way out we were ushered in for an audience with the head-curator in her office. She has done an excellent job.

We then wandered over to the golf-clubhouse. It is a white-stucco'd building next to an open-air swimming pool. After chai we left through the car park to grab a rickshaw back to our humble hotel.

After that experience what could be better on a beautiful sunlit evening than a ride around the park in the train. After the busy weekend things were quiet and the queue was short. We chatted to an Indian lady in our compartment and it turned out that she lived with a Belgium man in France. She was visiting her sister in Baroda. Afterwards we braved the roundabout to sample a strange vegetarian restaurant we had noticed the previous day. I had a combo plate with three different types of curries arranged across it like a tricolor.



Tomorrow we are leaving Baroda, after our planned visit to the mental hospital.

### **India Day 22. Wednesday 24<sup>th</sup> February. Baroda to Mumbai**

The Shatabdi Superfast Express to Mumbai was booked for 4pm and the hotel were happy for us to check out at 3pm. All that remained was our visit to the mental hospital, and lunch. Being on home ground, both psychiatrists, we were much less apprehensive about this visit than yesterday's appointment with the Maharaja.

Surprisingly our rickshaw driver knew where to go – about two miles from our hotel, on the other side of the park. We were dropped off at the entrance, a gatehouse in a ten-foot wall. The hospital buildings within looked much newer than the wall. We were told that the older buildings inside had largely been re-built.



Before describing the visit I have to say that we were both impressed by the straightforward and efficient organisation of the services and the caring nature of the staff. There were some 300 beds in eight wards, reasonable for a city population of around 1.6 million, plus the surrounding countryside. This included a thirty-bed 'admission' ward called the 'open' ward, where families are allowed to stay. There appeared to be a welcome lack of bureaucracy and a lack of major interference from outside to make the service more complex – as happens with our dear old NHS. For example patients visiting their nurse or doctor collect their own notes (paper not electronic and constructed by service users at the occupational therapy department)

and everything is on the same site; pathology, pharmacy, depot clinic, out-of-hours care etc. There were no computer record systems to complicate matters and necessitate extra staff being employed to input data. There was a visiting inspectorate body that, we were told, had advised closure of the 'seclusion' beds on the admission unit, so there are some outside checks. However the staff on the unit seemed happy to accept this decision. Staff worked until one o'clock then returned between 4 and 6pm, except for those on shifts.

We went into the outpatient area and were introduced to the consultant psychiatrist. He told us that there were two full-time consultants, two visiting part-time consultants and a hospital superintendent, currently on leave. Otherwise the patients were looked after by 'RMOs' who are like ward doctors who work under the consultants. We were then showed round by one of the RMOs and a clinical psychologist.

The outpatient service appeared comprehensive and included a service where street people (described as 'wandering lunatics') who are suspected of having a mental illness, can be brought in by the police and ambulance service for an assessment, rather like our section 136 service in the UK. There was an overnight stay ward with about ten beds run by their 'Crisis' Team and, as mentioned, pharmacy and pathology services were on site. There was a combined ECT and ECG department. They told us that ECT is rarely used now.

We then went on to visit the 'locked' wards. These are divided into male and female areas, each protected by a wall. This meant that patients could wander freely around their compounds that had benches, garden areas and trees. Most of the inpatients were either outside the wards or at occupational therapy when we visited. Some were dressed in hospital issue clothes that were made in the therapy units. Everyone was friendly and the atmosphere was relaxed and non-threatening. Each unit has a padded room in case of emergencies.

We were then shown around the industrial therapy unit where patients were doing various tasks including sewing, – using old-fashioned foot-rocker Singer-type sewing machines (the women) – and woodwork (the men). There was a laundry and a room where medical notes were constructed. We spoke to a cheerful lady who was sewing nametags for the general hospital. Another patient was knitting doormats out of hessian cloth using huge knitting needles. Cotton was being used to re-stuff mattresses. They told us they were waiting for material to make brooms and they even had a soap-making room. It was fascinating to see how everyone was engaged in a useful activity, making things that were going to be used by the service and hospitals in the area – something that has been lost in the UK where everything has to be outsourced.

We then went on to the Therapy Unit where activities were provided according to ability and level of illness. The most ill, or heavily medicated, patients were sitting in a circle on the floor pushing a ball around to each other. Others were sitting in small groups discussing the 'topic of the day.' Today it was 'public services.' Each group was lead by a student nurse. They had music sessions, games and dance sessions.

Finally we visited the 'open' ward. New admissions can stay there with their families whilst being assessed. We chatted to a pleasant gentleman who described

himself as the 'policeman' for his son, who had been recently admitted suffering from a psychosis. We met the son too. During this phase of assessment families are taught how to look after their family members enabling early discharge if possible. Some patients are detained under 'Section 19', which can last up to three months.

Our overall impression of the service was that it was a service that had been set up according to need and designed for those most vulnerable in society. It was a clear indictment for our service in the UK that has been over controlled and meddled with by politicians for many years resulting in the sorry state the NHS mental health services are in today. Visiting the Baroda services was a bit like working in NHS mental health in the late 1980s, before the introduction of the 'market' system when clinicians could design and implement a service based on need.

On the way back we had a final shopping visit to the old city and spotted a cow enjoying a drink from its own special earthenware pot.



We had our last meal in Baroda at the same place as last night, the *Havemore Vegetarian Restaurant*. *Havemore* literally means that you will want to have more as the food is so good. A BOAC ground crew operator set up the first restaurant in the 1940s, before independence. He moonlighted by making unusually flavoured ice creams. We had ordered too much, and so definitely did not want to have more, so took a doggy bag to eat on the train. At the time we were unaware that on a Shatabdi Superfast Express you were provided with meals and drinks. Then we took a rickshaw back to the Lords Revival, even though it was just across the road. We felt that our luck had run out crossing the road and 50R was well spent to keep in one piece. Then it was final packing and goodbye to Baroda.

The 1600 Shatabdi from Ahmadabad to Mumbai was on time. We even found our carriage from the electronic indicators on the platform – the first time we have managed that. Shatabdis are day trains where you sit on normal, slightly reclined seats arranged in rows of two and three, like an aeroplane. The journey to Mumbai took five hours to travel about 300 miles, which is no time for that distance in India. We whizzed back over the Narmada and Tapti rivers, past Surat and then south following the coast to Mumbai.



The suburbs of Mumbai went on for ages. For the first time on this trip we witnessed modern skyscrapers in abundance, of course surrounded by the usual street-dwellers and piles of rubbish. We thought we had arrived at the VT Station (VT stands for Victoria Terminal, now renamed the CST but most people still use VT) but we had actually arrived at Mumbai Central Station, a bit further out. So we were surprised when our black and yellow taxi took so long to get to our destination, the Taj Mahal Palace. This had to be the fastest and most dangerous taxi ride we had on the whole trip. Our driver appeared to be totally manic, perhaps thinking he was on the Monaco Grand Prix, under and overtaking on all sides. He even appeared to hit a pedestrian who had the effrontery to get in his way. I hope the pedestrian wasn't hurt. By the time we realised what had happened we were another mile down the road.

Security at the Taj had to be good, after the 2008 terrorist attacks in Mumbai when at least 164 people were killed. There was a barrier all around it, disguised as a planter and guards checked under and inside all taxis entering. Then we were in, and away from all stress and noise, and racetracks.

We were sharing a room in the 'tower,' next to the main building, on the sixth floor with a view over the harbour. We celebrated by consuming a few glasses of expensive Kingfisher beer in the Harbour Bar. We were the only customers at that time.

We had made it.



**India Day 23. Thursday 25<sup>th</sup> February.**

**Mumbai then Home**

Looking out of the window at 8am I could hear traffic and the sounds of birds. Unfortunately, despite overlooking the sea, the air was not clear. We were both now looking forward to the clean, unpolluted air of North Yorkshire – especially Steve with his dodgy lungs. I made the bed-tea.

We had breakfast in the restaurant on the top of the Tower. Down below we could see India Gate, looking tiny like a toy model far below.

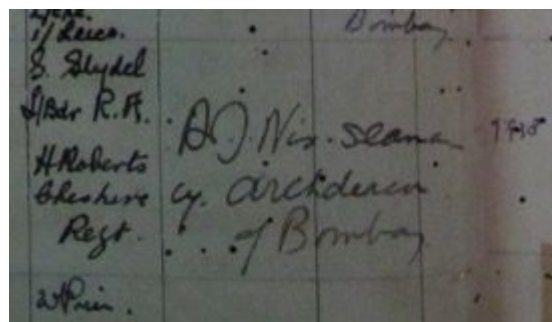


After breakfast it was time to explore the hotel. We decided against a swim in the open-air pool, our first pool of the trip, (1) because it was empty and we would have been conspicuous amongst the jet-set, and (2) we had to pack up and leave our room by midday. We did take plenty of photos however of us posing around the beautiful gardens and the wonderful stairwell. Contrary to what most people think the Taj was not built by the British, it was in fact built by a Mr J N Tata in 1903, supposedly after he was refused entry to one of the European hotels because he was a native.

Out in the open air we checked out the Gateway of India, all high security and photographers trying to sell photos. Haven't they realized that everyone has smart phones now? We then took a taxi a short way along the causeway to the 'island' of Colaba and the Afghan War Memorial Church.

My grandfather was Chaplain here in the 1930s and in fact has published a history of the church, 'The Afghan War Memorial Church and Historical Notes on Colaba,' published in 1938. Inside I was pleased to discover, with the help of the Curator, Roger Martin, the register of births and marriages for that period. They were all falling to bits and gradually being eaten by worms. And what's more I found several entries by an A. J. Seaman, Chaplain, in 1933, 1936 and 1937. Then an A. J. Nix-Seaman, Archdeacon of Bombay, from November 1937 until April 1938.

They were both my grandfather who had changed his name to Nix-Seaman, or Nixseaman, some years after he married my grandmother, Edith NixJames (her mother was Mary Amanda Earle, granddaughter of Solomon Earle 1). My grandfather retired from the Indian service in 1938 and returned to the UK with his family.



So there you have it, I have followed the course of my mother's family from mid 19<sup>th</sup> Century graves in Calcutta to 18<sup>th</sup> Century Baroda, then on to church registers in Bombay from the 1930s.

Before we left the church we gazed at the signature of Charles and Camilla who visited the church in 2013. It was good of Charles to visit, especially as his great, great, great, grandmother, Queen Victoria, never visited India at all. But I guess it was much harder to travel in those days.





Then it was off by taxi to the VT (now renamed the Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus, or SVT) followed by a walking tour of the sites of Mumbai as we meandered slowly back to the Taj and the Gate of India. The VT is actually larger and more ornate, in my view, than St Pancras Station in London, although not so imposing. We called at a clothing store and both bought hand-made Indian outfits for our wives – possibly a bad move – then turned left at the Flora Fountain to St Thomas’ Cathedral, after lunch at a café. I had Bhel Puri as I had read that it was a delicacy of Mumbai – very nice. St Thomas’ Cathedral (completed in 1718) was stuffed full of colonial memorials, enough to keep Steve and I occupied for hours.

Then it was on to the central gardens of Horniman’s Square, where we sat down to relax amongst crowds of resting and sleeping men, and two beautiful girls with long hair, possibly would-be stars in Bollywood movies, on a photography shoot. This kept the men interested, and us. Two policemen in khaki wandered about blowing their whistles at miscreants, clearly itching to use their lathis. We couldn’t work out what they were objecting to and on one occasion they pulled the newspaper away from a gent who was lying on the grass reading it – perhaps it was the wrong sort of newspaper. Meanwhile flocks of rooks swirled about making a din louder than the car horns. Apart from all the above, and if it wasn’t for the fact that the garden was full of tropical plants, you could have been in Belgravia. And not forgetting the fact that it was hot and humid and we could feel insects flying around. It time to apply Deet.

We were taking our time because our flight home did not depart, that name again, the Chhatrapati Shivaji International Airport, until 1.30am. On our slow walk back we passed the Sailors Home, now a Police Station, the Methodist Church (containing a memorial to a certain Mr Clutterbuck, more down to earth than some of the names in the Anglican cathedral) and were refused entry to the David Sassoon Library and Reading Room (so you see times have changed Mr Tata). Near the Taj we stopped at a cake shop for tea and cheesecake. This was odd because later that evening I found a recommended eating place in our guidebook, the Theobromo and we walked out to find it, only to discover that it was the very same cake shop we had been to before. So we had supper somewhere else.

On our evening walk out we promenaded along the seafront, past the brightly lit horses and carts. The only bad thing here was the piles of unpleasant smelling rubbish covering what could have been a nice sandy beach.

In this way we passed the time happily for several hours until it was time to collect our bags and leave. Oh, another pleasant pastime was relaxing back on the

sumptuous sofas in the Taj lobby, people watching. This was a very different experience for us as this was 'posh people watching'. We saw Arabs in white robes, a family of rather loud young men on holiday with Mummy and Daddy, and, on our way out, we followed a large woman who appeared to have her own butler or manservant.

We caught a taxi from around the back, less than a quarter of the price quoted by the hotel. This was our last taxi experience in India and it wasn't too bad. No one was run over en route but overtaking was still done on both sides, with horns blaring. We threw our bag of snacks out in the direction of a bewildered looking beggar woman at one of the junctions. Then it was the bright lights and glass of the brand new, I won't repeat the name again, terminal.

As an aside, I thought it would be interesting to know who the famous Chhaptrapati Shivaji was. His other name was Shivaji Bhonsle and he was a Maratha leader in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century. He became a great hero of the Indian Independence movement and the Hindus after his many battles with the Muslim Sultans and later the Mughals under Aurungzeb.



Our flight back was uneventful, except that we were on a Jumbo Jet that I thought must have been pretty old as it still had ashtrays outside the toilets. In fact smoking was banned on passenger jets from the late 1980s. However a quick Google search revealed that all jets must still have functioning ashtrays outside each toilet. This stems from a fatal crash in the 1970s, caused by a smoker putting his cigarette into the washroom bin. So maybe our plane was not that old after all.

I dozed for about three hours, then watched the new 'Man from U.N.C.L.E.' film. It was surprisingly good, bringing up memories of my childhood heroes, Illya Kuryakin and Napoleon Solo. I couldn't remember the girl though. I almost managed to remember that U.N.C.L.E stood for the United Network Command for Law and Enforcement, although initially 'Uncle' was intended to be just plain old Uncle Sam.

**Final Day 24.      Friday 26<sup>th</sup> February.      Home**

Even though we had six hours to wait for our connecting flight north to Leeds/Bradford Airport, this was not a problem. We spent the time having an English breakfast, then settled down to read and write up notes. It wasn't long to wait until beer o'clock, midday, and a proper English pint of bitter before walking to

Departures. In the bar we chatted to an Indian gentleman who was on his way to the USA. It was like we'd never left. In a few hours it would be back to real life, responsibilities and deadlines. But great to see our wives, eat other food than curries and breath that Yorkshire Air.

But my God was it cold.