The Royal Pavilion, Brighton and its connection to India and the First World War

Jody East, Creative Programme Curator, Royal Pavilion & Museums, Brighton & Hove
The Royal Pavilion as a military hospital for Indian soldiers
The Royal Pavilion Gardens
Kolkata
The Victoria Memorial Hall, Kolkata

City may see ‘a part of Brighton’

Kolkata: Victoria Memorial Hall and British Council will work collaboratively to develop temporary exhibitions using the collections of the Royal Pavilion & Museums, Brighton and Hove.

The decision was taken after Royal Pavilion curator Jody East met Victoria Memorial curator Joyanta Sengupta on Saturday for records and archival material for her research to mark 100 years of World War I.

“We have an extensive collection of photographs which show the Pavilion as a military hospital,” East said, adding: “I am so glad that my very short visit to Kolkata is over already. I feel I have barely touched the surface of this diverse city and there are so many more archives and experts I would like to see and meet. If a project develops with VMM, then possibly a small part of Brighton will soon be able to be seen in Kolkata.”

On a site visit a programme, proposed by the Arts Council of England and British Council, East was one of the few from mostly applicants from non-government museums across the world. She blew to Delhi on Sunday to look for documents at the Centre for Art and History of Research and United Service Institution of India. She will discuss her research for the Great War Centenary Commemoration Project and its links to research conducted by the Royal Pavilion.

Speaking to TOI after her visit to Victoria Memorial, she said: “The majestic building is awe-inspiring and the gardens are pieces of calm in the city. The premises are very beautifully looked after.” Before the meeting, East had time to look around the galleries and “enjoy being a visitor amongst hundreds of others.” She especially enjoyed the Calcutta Life galleries. “Whenever I visit museums in other places I am always fascinated by their local history galleries. I also visited the paintings gallery. The collection of Thomas and William Daniell’s paintings were of particular interest as it was their drawings of India that inspired the architects of the Royal Pavilion, the building I work with in Brighton, UK,” she said.

“I was also lucky enough to have a look at the conservation studio and talk to one of the paper conservators. He showed me some of the pictures he is currently working on restoring. Conservation is a vital part of the Royal Pavilion’s work so it is always interesting to meet colleagues doing a similar job,” East said.

She met Sengupta, who had looked into the VMM collections and confirmed that they do not hold any documents relating to the World War I period. “As a historian, however, he was interested in the history of the Royal Pavilion and shared some useful names of experts he had met relating to India and the World War I,” East said.

She also met Simran Sharmahary, education officer at the Indian Museum, and was taken around the museum, which will reopen on its 200th birthday on Sunday.
My talk in Chandigarh
The Haryana Academy of History and Culture, Gurgaon
Royal sanctuary

A pleasure palace in Brighton was converted into a hospital for the wounded Indian soldiers

BY JODY EAST

It was developed from a small farmhouse into an oriental, exotic, pleasure palace by King George IV between 1787 and 1823. Queen Victoria sold the palace to the Brighton Corporation in 1850, which has since used it for a range of activities, including public functions and a museum, before restoring it to its glory days as a regency palace called the Royal Pavilion. During World War I, it was turned into a military hospital for Indian soldiers.

Increasing pressure on hospitals in France and Belgium led to many temporary hospitals being established in the south of England. The Pavilion was one of three in Brighton, specifically for the Indian soldiers fighting on the western front. Although not the largest, it became the most famous. Even though it had not been in royal ownership for 64 years, the British authorities strongly encouraged the rumour that King George IV had personally given up his palace for the care of the wounded Indian troops. They believed this would encourage the support for the war in India.

The Pavilion was transformed. Khaki-coloured linoleum was installed over the floors and matching dado-boards were attached to the lower parts of the walls in the Banqueting and Music Rooms to protect the fragile painting behind. The rooms downstairs served as wards, while the rooms upstairs were for wounded Indian officers. An operating theatre was installed in the Great Kitchen and an x-ray department near the main entrance. Altogether, there were 724 beds.

The British went to great lengths to meet the requirements of men of different religions. Special areas were set aside for worship. A Sikh temple was set up on the lawn and an area in front of the Dome was set aside for Muslims to pray facing Mecca.

Although the wards were mixed, there were two water supplies in each ward. There were also segregated bath houses and latrines. Signs throughout the hospital were printed in Urdu, Gurmukhi and Hindi. The wounded were cared for by orders of the same caste or religion. The doctors were either Indian medical students studying in Britain or British doctors from the Indian Medical Service who had worked in India.

There were nine different kitchens to cater to specific dietary requirements. Each of these kitchens had caste cooks, with a high caste cook in charge. There was also provision for
British High Commission event, October 2014, Delhi
War Stories: Voices from the First World War exhibition
Brighton Marathon 2015, with the UK Punjab Heritage Association
For the past 100 years, the story of India’s role in the First World War has been largely forgotten, both within India and by the rest of the world.

The Royal Pavilion & Museums, Brighton & Hove is bringing to life the diverse voices and experiences of individuals from India who were affected by the conflict in this major one-day conference. Discover the personal thoughts expressed by soldiers in letters home from the Brighton military hospitals, listen to the astonishing sound recordings of soldiers in German prisoner of war camps and find out about extraordinary individuals such as Sophia Duleep Singh, Maharaja’s daughter; suffragette and nurse.

This international conference seeks to consider how Indian soldiers and their families have been represented in memory, literature, media and official record, and how they can or should be remembered and viewed a century on.

Speakers include:
- Rana Chinha, Centre for Armed Forces Historical Research, USI of India
- Adil Chinha, Centre for Armed Forces Historical Research, USI of India
- Anita Anand, broadcaster (Any Answers, BBC Radio 4) and author (Suffragette, Revolutionary)
- Dr Prabhjot Parmar, University of the Fraser Valley, Canada
- Dr Santanu Bas, Kings College in conversation with Kamila Shamsie, author (A God in Every Stone)
- The UK Punjab Heritage Association
- Dr Heike Liebau, Centre for Modern Oriental Studies, Berlin
- Kevin Bacon, the Royal Pavilion, Brighton & Hove
- Musical performance from Jasdeep Singh Rahal & Company

Tickets £60
Ticket includes a drinks reception at the Royal Pavilion after the conference, 6.45-7.45pm and free entry with audio guide to the Royal Pavilion on the days adjacent to the conference, Friday 20th and Sunday 22nd November. Lunch is not included but there are lots of lovely cafes and restaurants to choose from near the venue.
To book tickets please call 03000 290702 or online at http://bit.ly/1MzSExG