

North Herts Museum Update : British Council Funded Trip to India



I returned last week from a British Council funded trip to India. The purpose of the trip was to build links with Museums in India, and most specifically those working with the Sikh Community.

The first stop was Hyderabad, where I was asked to give a talk on Sikhism in Britain at the Salar Jung Museum. The Museum comprised the personal collection of the Nizam of Hyderabad, and is of a comparable size to the Victoria and Albert Museum in London. The collections were far reaching, including works by Constable and the Veiled Rebecca by Giovanni. During the rest of my time in Hyderabad, I was the guest of the Sikh community and was taken to 3 Gurdwaras, historic Sikh sites and even a Sikh wedding, by members of the Hyderabad History Society, the Sikh Heritage Foundation and the architect of two of the Gurdwaras.

After a free day, exploring the Hindu temples of Warangal, I moved on to Delhi to meet the Curator of the Crafts Museum in Delhi, where we discussed video links between schools and museums in the UK and India. The Museum was an outdoor one, with buildings and craft demonstrations brought from all over India. I was able to meet some colleagues from around the world as visiting at the same time were delegates from "Strategic Transformations, Museums in the 21st Century", a major conference being held in Kolkotta.

I then moved by overnight train to Ludhiana in the Punjab, to meet the Curator of the Punjab Musuem of Rural Life, on the Punjab Agricultural University Campus. This museum was a fascinating record of a rapidly disappearing traditional rural lifestyle. Again we discussed possible future projects, for which this museum was ideal.

I then travelled to Amritsar, where the Golden Temple was every bit as beautiful and serene as I had expected it to be. I had a speaking engagement at the Guru Nanak Dev University, where I was made very welcome, and learnt about the new museum being planned on the Campus, as well as the work of the faculty in trying to locate Sikh artefacts worldwide, and the creation of a "master catalogue" as well as rescuing items from dubious or misguided conservation efforts (such as laminating 16th century documents!).

The final part of my trip was very kindly arranged by the university as well as the Guru Nank College in Chandigarh, and was a visit to Anandphur to see the stunning, purpose built Sikh "Virasat e Khalsa" heritage centre, as well as to a Nihang Sikh Gurdwara, where I got to meet the dignified and generous blue clad, warrior Sikhs.

Throughout the trip I was truly humbled by the incredible hospitality shown to me, which

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will stay with me forever. This trip has given me insights and contacts which will certainly be useful in future work with communities of North Hertfordshire and beyond.



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