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A TRIP TO INDIA

by

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The following is an account of a trip my brother, Wor. Bro. Cedric Lonsdale and I made to India in February of this year. My brothers, sister and I were all born in India at a city in the South called Trichinopoly, where my father was Vice-principal of a well-known mission college --Bishop Reber College. Later on, in 1931, I returned to South India as an officer. In the old British Imperial Police and served in various pans of the South until India attained independence in 1947 when we left the service.

The trip was very much a journey down memory lane to satisfy a desire to see something of the country I had known so well and my brother wished to visit the land of our birth. On my part, there was also a very special desire to visit again the lodge in which I was Entered, Passed and Raised in 1944-45; Lodge Anchor of Rope, 1093 E.C. If some parts of this account sound somewhat trivial, I hope I shall be forgiven, but I have attempted to give, briefly, some items of general interest, and of places visited, and some observations about India.

We left Vancouver on February 9th, 1984, by Air Canada to Frankfurt and stayed at the Steinberg Hotel for a night and then on to Delhi the next afternoon by Pan Am arriving at the horrible hour of 3:45 a.m. and stayed at the Ryan Regency Hotel and then flew the same evening to Madras, about a three hour trip We were met at the airport by a very pleasant young North Indian gentleman and taken to his apartment where he and his wife insisted that we stay with them as long as we were in Madras. This gentleman, the Sales Manager of a computer software, is a younger brother of a North Indian doctor in Seattle, a great friend of my daughter and son-in-law in Vancouver. A phone call from Seattle to Madras arranged the pleasure of our stay in Madras.

The first few days in Madras were occupied in resting and then arranging air bookings to Delhi and London and return to Vancouver. We also booked a return air trip to Trichinopoly. The rest of the time was spent visiting places of interest in Madras and shopping. Madras has many places of much interest and one could spend far more time than we had available; even to explore the environs of the old Fort St. George District of East India Company days. One most interesting church is St. Mary's dating back to the 1600s and also the old Roman Catholic Church of San Thome which contains the tomb of St. Thomas. The Anglican Cathedral of St. George also deserves a more detailed visit
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One other day we hired a taxi and went out to a famous local centre called Mahabalipuram where there is a fine old Temple and some remarkable rock carvings which go back several hundred years. On the way we also stopped to visit an alligator farm, with many kinds of alligators from around the world including a few species of crocodiles. The farm area also contains a snake venom extraction depot and we were able to watch poison being taken from a cobra.

In Madras we also visited a large church school originally started in the seventeen and eighteen hundreds as a civil orphanage to look after children of abandoned Indian wives whose soldier lovers or husbands had perforce to return to England. In 1930's my father had been Principal of the school, so it was

interesting to visit the place again, where my wife and I stayed quite often during our courting days when I could get a few days' leave.

One special place on interest for me was to visit the Police Training College. The old college was situated in a place called Vellore in a remarkable old Fort dating from the days of Tippu Sahib and Ryder Mi, early rulers of much of South India and still in very good condition. I found out that there was a new Police College built in recent years in a suburb of Madras where senior officers and N.C.O.s are now trained. We were able to visit the College and were shown around with much pleasure. Unfortunately the Officer in charge was away. The Police Museum has been well organized and along with the Library is well used for instruction and study.

There was one other visit I wished to make and that was to the old training college in Vellore. We hired a taxi and went there the next day, and though much time was necessary to reach Vellore and return, it was most interesting to see the countryside and eventually to visit the old Fort where now all constable recruits are trained for the state of Tamil Nadu. Our reception was again most welcoming and we were shown all around. It was naturally something very special for me to see the place where I had once been Principal. Also, rather interestingly, there were two men still there who remembered me.

While in Madras visiting the cathedral, we had met the General Secretary of Synod of the Church of South India who very kindly made special arrangements for us to visit the Bishop Heber College in Trichinopoli. So having already booked flights, we flew down on the Sunday after our arrival in Madras. On arrival, at 6.40 a.m. we were met by two of the Professors with a car and whisked off to a very pleasant Hotel where a cabin had been booked for us. After a good wash etc. we went to the 8:a.m. service at St. John's Church, the church I remembered very well from my childhood. After the service, we returned to the hotel for breakfast and were then taken to the College and were met by the Principal and others and were taken to the main auditorium where some hundred or so young Indian students, boys and girls were assembled. After a speech of welcome, some of the students entertained us all with singing and dancing, and very well done performances they were. After the performances my brother and I were asked to address the students and afterward had a chance to mingle with the young people who were full of questions about Canada and our impressions of being in India. Later on we were taken on a tour of the campus and buildings and entertained to a very good lunch. We were finally able to return to the hotel and enjoy a rather brief but most welcome rest. Later on we were taken to the nearby town of Seringapatam to visit one of the oldest and most holy Temples in India, a place which should be visited if at all possible. In the evening we returned to Madras by plane after a most enjoyable but busy day.

The next day, Monday, we were able to visit Dist. Grand Lodge and were most kindly shown around by Wor Bro. Masilamani, W M of one of the Madras Lodges who happened to come to Dist.. Grand Lodge office that morning.

Monday evening we boarded the Nilgiri Express to travel to the foot of the Nilgiri hills and then up to the hill stations by car. The night journey by train was not particularly pleasant nor was it comfortable. Ordinary First Class coaches are available in the transcontinental trains but are much more expensive; but evidently not available on local trains. Arriving next morning at 7:30 a.m. at the rail terminus Mettupalayam, we were met by a Mr. Atkinson with an estate car and driven up to the small hill

station of Kotagiri, and to the tea estate owned by a Mr. Pandiaraj who was Wor Master of my Mother Lodge and entertained to breakfast and a much needed wash and clean up after the train journey. The tea estate is named 'Coursley' and was owned originally by the Staines Tea Company. The Staines family were relations of ours on my mother's side. Kotagiri, and in fact the other hill towns, brought back many memories not only of childhood, but of the two occasions I was Superintendent of the whole district, first when World War II broke out and again later in 1940 or so. The Wor. Master and Lodge had booked a very pleasant room for us at the old Coonoor Club a few miles from Kotagiri. We were very kindly visited during the morning by the Wor. Master elect and also by a Col Wright; a Past Master who invited us to lunch the next day. The rest of the day was enjoyed in resting after the train journey and travel up the mountain roads. The next day, Wednesday, Mr. Atkinson called for us in the morning with the car and driver and took us around Coonoor and later Outacamund, the headquarters of the Nilgiri District. Coonoor is now the headquarters of the Madras Regiment, and the Pasteur Institute. In nearby Wellington there is also the cordite factory which gave us many a headache during the war in making sure it was guarded safely. Some few miles out of Outacamund is a mountain called "Dodabeta" on the edge of the Hill range to the west. It is possible to drive to the top where a well arranged lookout with telescopes has been built. Our visit up the mountain was well worth the time to enjoy the 360° view over the hills and plains. Incidentally, during the monsoon period the mountain has a rainfall of some 300 inches a year. After returning to Outacarnund we toured the city and then made our way back to Wellington for lunch with Col. and Mrs. Wright.

This Wednesday was my personal highlight of the trip, - the Election meeting of my Mother Lodge. My brother and I arrived at Lodge soon after 5: p.m. and then after a social time, Lodge was opened at 6:30 p.m.. All business was in the first degree, and the representative of the Dist. Grand Master was received with full ceremony, and after he was seated and welcomed, Lodge was raised to the second and third degrees in full form each time and the Installation Ceremony proceeded. It was a most interesting ceremony as not only was everyone word perfect, but the various parts, though following the way we are accustomed to in B.C., are much shorter. At the end of the ceremony, before closing, I was able to present the Lodge with a copy of the History of Grand Lodge and also the Past Master's Jewel that had belonged to my cousin. He was Worshipful Master in 1931-32 and the Jewel was given me by his widow some years after his death. I continue to be grateful to him for rousing my interest in Free Masonry

Following closure of Lodge all members gathered for the Installation banquet. The banquet, a very happy and harmonious time, was really sumptuous and would greafly surprise most members of Lodges in our jurisdiction. There were regular waiters who served dishes to everyone present. and vegetarian and non-vegetarian food was provided. After this happy and most enjoyable evening, we finally got to bed well after midnight -- a long time it seemed since 5:00 p.m.

The next morning we were taken for a visit to the home of one of the younger Past Masters for an enjoyable time and a glass or two of good ale. In the afternoon, we were driven to Coursley Tea Estate for tea and we said good-bye to Past Master Pandiaraj, and went by car to the foot of the Nilgiris and boarded the night train for Madras. Our arrival in Madras next morning was very early, but fortunately our host was already up and about. This last day in Madras was spent getting some shopping done and then packing for our departure by air to Delhi. After saying good-bye to our host and his wife who accompanied us to the Madras airport, we must have spent the better part of an hour or more working our way through red tape of airport officialdom. Some day in the near future, there is hope for a new and more efficiently run airport in Madras and also at

Delhi.

An uneventful flight took us to Delhi by about 10:00 p.m. where the temperature was down to about 40°. Our host in Madras had arranged with his younger brother, who is a physician in Delhi, and his father, to take us to a good Indian hotel. We found the hotel to be very well appointed with all conveniences including two restaurants, one entirely vegetarian, and a good bar! We enjoyed our very few days in Delhi. Tours of Old and New Delhi were most interesting, especially being able to visit the tombs

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of Mahatma Ghandi and Jawaharlal Nehru, India's first Prime Minister. One day was spent visiting the old city of Agra and going through the Taj Mahal which indeed is a beautiful and most remarkable mausoleum.

The government sponsored shopping centre is the best place to go to in Delhi, where country crafts of all kinds are sold and the quality and correct price are guaranteed. The profits go to helping handicapped people

We flew to London on February 29th via Rome and Paris -- a long trip. The last few days in London and down to Somerset and Sussex were spent in being with family. Our visit in London to Grand Lodge, which perhaps many of you know, was a remarkable and fascinating experience. And so back in early March to Vancouver and home.