

Sixty Years of **INDIAN INDEPENDENCE**

Enticed by the celebrations of India's 60th year of independence, our specialists have researched their own connections to the colonial period and discovered quite a few treasures. Harsha Ogale, one of our specialists, introduces you to his colleagues' recollections.

Namaste!

As an Indian it is a proud moment for me to be celebrating our 60th anniversary of Independence, though ironic that I am doing it in Great Britain! In the last sixty years India has thrown off its colonial history and embraced modernity in every way to become the fastest growing nation in the world. Yet it remains a unique modernity, a country where elderly sadhus compete for space on roads with Toyotas, rickshaws, cows, people and dogs and where religion remains an integral part of life and high-powered offices make room for shrines dedicated to Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth.

Though the cities are home to high-rise offices and chauffeured cars, the countryside is another world, a land of bullock carts and bicycles, where farmers watch over their valuable crops while their wives cook in the open air and keep an eye on the children on their way to school. These two worlds create the modern India, the one we celebrated on 15th August to commemorate its independence from British rule and its birth as a sovereign nation on that day in 1947.

It's interesting to see that the grandparents and relations of some of my colleagues have had strong connections with India and have actually seen the India which I will never see. The photos that they have taken when they were there and which you can see here really amaze me, especially the one where you see Rajpath in Delhi totally deserted, an unknown occurrence in today's India! I'll let them recount their connections...

Beatrice Bowen: 01993 838 313

One of the staple meals of my childhood when my Dad was cooking was always Dal Bhat, a simple lentil curry reminiscent of the Subcontinent. This recipe has now been handed down to me from my paternal grandparents, who were both born in India, and spent much of their lives there. My grandmother was born in Amritsar, while my grandfather, John Bowen, was born in Bombay (now Mumbai), where his father was the Attorney General of Bombay State. As was common, they were both sent back (before they met) to England for their schooling, but my grandfather soon returned to India as an officer in the Indian Army, and later worked for the Indian Political Service. My grandmother returned to India to stay with her cousins as part of the "fishing fleet" – the term for the many young women who went out to India in search of a husband! One of her uncles with whom she stayed in this period was Sir John Thompson, who according to my own uncle was a "leading light in the old Indian Civil Service", and who is the gentleman with a leopard at his feet (see photograph) and whose family friends are pictured after a bird shooting session. After my grandmother and grandfather were married, they were posted to various parts of the Subcontinent (including Lahore, in what is now Pakistan), and later Persia (now Iran) where my grandfather was a district officer working with local administration, and as a result he learnt to speak many of the local languages. They left India at Independence in 1947, and went on to do various things, including living and working in southern Africa, but they seemed to view their time in India as the golden years which no other experience could come close to.



FACT FILE

A 14 night trip to north India and the Himalayan Foothills, including return flights, costs from £2,350 per person. This includes some gentle day walks in the hills and a few nights in a lakeside retreat with magnificent views of the distant mountains. Please call Harsha on 01993 838 306 for details.



- 1 Golden Temple, Amritsar
- 2 Rebecca's grandparents on their wedding day
- 3 Memories from the Bowen family



The Malan Family - Simla



Madame Colburne & Harrison



The Russells Bungalow
Rangson - Burma



Delhi Durbar



C. I. H. Mess.
Town end on 11/10/1914



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FACT FILE

A 14 night trip to India & Pakistan, including return flights, costs from £2,250 per person. This includes a raucous and memorable visit to the border closing ceremony at the Wagh crossing and the opportunity to sit back and marvel at the theatrical nature of the proceedings. Please call Graeme on 01993 838 308 for details.



Iona Laing: 01993 838 316

My fascination with India comes from two major influences. In the early 1820s a distant relation on my maternal side left the family Port business in Portugal with 500 shillings to set up a shipping company in Calcutta. Years later, my cousin Lesley's father, after being awarded the VC for his bravery in Iraq, joined the business in 1919. Although Lesley was born in Calcutta, as a young child she was taken to Darjeeling by her nanny to escape the heat. As the business grew they moved to Karachi, a four day train journey from Calcutta to Bombay followed by a trip by ship to Karachi.

In 1928 they saw the first ever airmail arrive, which took eight days from London, a journey which now takes eight hours. She also spoke about the caste system being so much more prevalent and Lesley was a member of the local Brownies known as the "Blue Birds". My paternal great uncle, Captain North, accompanied Mountbatten to Delhi and over some whisky, rather to his surprise, he was asked to lead a procession into

the Parliament buildings. The general in charge, unaware of the new instructions assumed Uncle North was causing trouble and ordered him out causing a great hullabaloo during this national occasion!

Rebecca Lancaster: 01993 838 318

My grandparents' house was a treasure trove of exciting and exotic artefacts – Samurai swords, Sri Lankan weaves, Persian rugs, and statues of Hindu gods. As a child I remember demanding the stories behind these unusual items and was regaled with tales of lives so far removed from my own that they inspired a need to find out more, hence my own travels to the Subcontinent! My granny's family were tea planters in Sri Lanka, though she was sent back to England for school at a young age. She soon returned and met my grandpa at a dance in Sri Lanka and after some time he proposed on a rickshaw in Darjeeling and they were married soon after at the Galle Face Hotel in Colombo. His family had been in India since the 19th century as Gurkhas in the British Army and



when my grandpa joined the Gurkhas his job took them back to India and to the foothills of the western Himalayas. Here they set up home and granny began her life as the wife of a Major – an itinerant profession that took them around the world and inspired in her a love of travel that she continued after having children, via an overland journey from London to Kathmandu. Despite living all over the world, it was their life in India that was most spoken about, and with most affection. Stories of peaches so ripe that the skins fell off at the lightest touch, trips down the Brahmaputra on river-boats and treks through rugged mountain valleys in Ladakh all stayed with them and made India the country they remembered with such fondness.

1 Rhotang Pass, 1920s

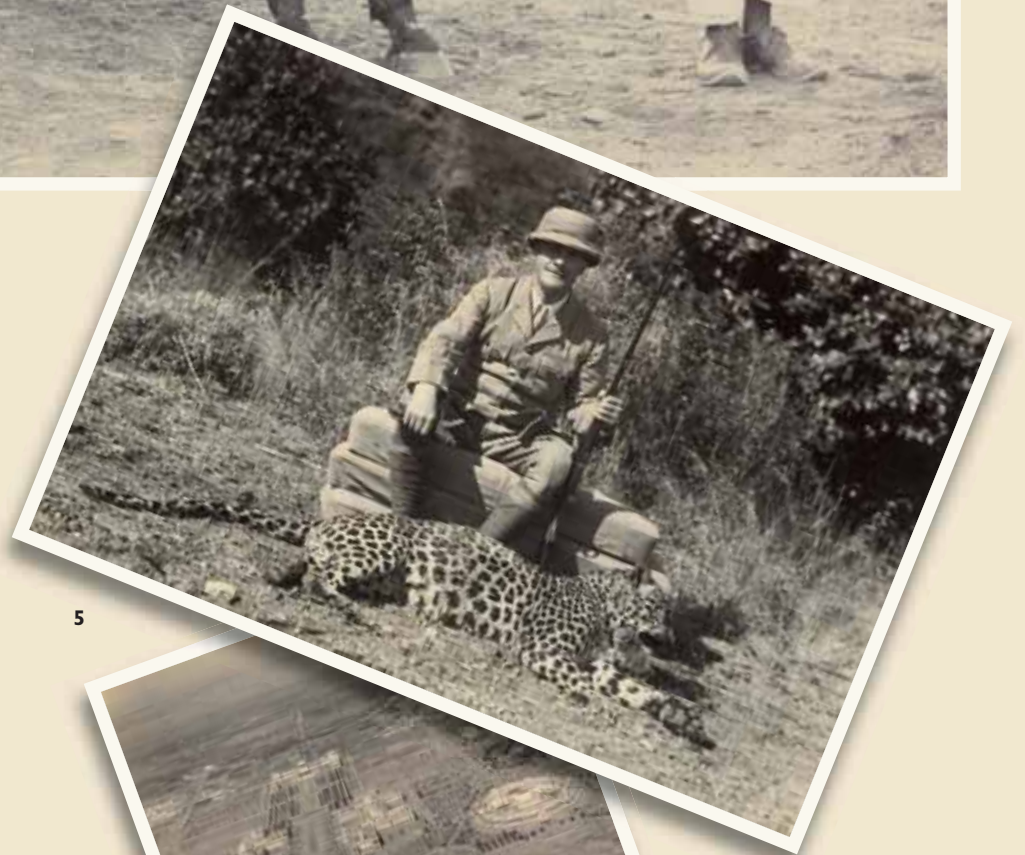
2 Brahmaputra river-boat, 1920s

3 Clare's grandmother and cot-bearers, Hyderabad

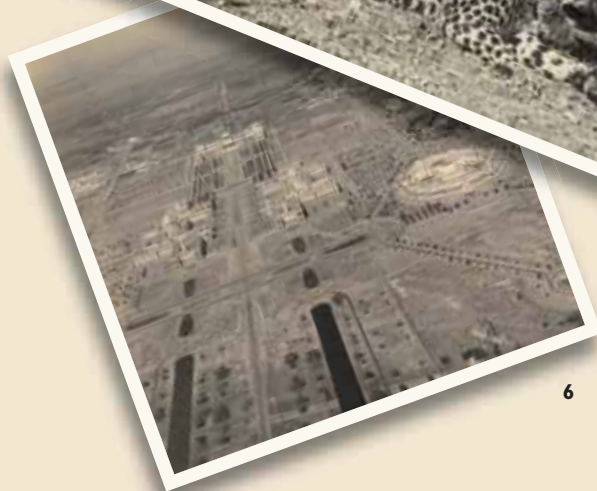
4 Clare's great-grandfather (right)

5 Beatrice's grandmother's uncle, Sir John Thompson

6 Aerial view of Imperial Government building, New Delhi



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FACT FILE

A 14 night trip to Calcutta and northeast India, including return flights, costs from £2,450 per person. This includes sightseeing in the former Raj capital and a few days in the cooler climes of Darjeeling amidst the tea plantations and relics of the faded colonial history. Please call Emma on 01993 838 307 for details.



- 1 Clare's great-grandfather (right)
- 2 Aerial view of the Taj Mahal, 1930s
- 3 Aerial view of Shimla, 1930s

Clare Lovelace: 01993 838 302

My family connections with the Indian Subcontinent date back to the beginning of the 20th century. My great grandfather moved to India in 1904 and carried out his duties as a 'chaplain to the troops' and parish priest for the most part of 20 years, until his retirement in 1925. In the early years, before he was married, he was based in the Diocese of Lahore (now part of Pakistan) but from the photographs and letters it is clear that he also spent a lot of time further north, around Kashmir and in the Himalayas. He returned to England a couple of times, due to illness and also to get married, and the accounts of these long boat journeys from Calcutta, in the far east of India, are fascinating. My grandmother was born in England in 1922 and was only four months old when her mother took her to India where they both settled with my great grandfather. They lived in Hyderabad, Sindh (today southern Pakistan) for three years. Other family photos show my great uncle as a young man in Assam – the Brahmaputra scenery, local dress and river ferries seem to have changed very little in the last 50 years!



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WEB PLUS

www.audley.co.uk/features/indianindependence
To view more images of India before its independence