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# The Victoria and Albert Museum Bombay: a study in aspiration, cooperation and enervation

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The Victoria and Albert Museum and Victoria Gardens is a significant Colonial institution, which reflects the aspirations and failings of the Indian and British elites that controlled late nineteenth century Bombay. The Museum crystallises the responses of these individuals to changes in thinking in Britain and its Indian Empire. As time passed, and each decision was made, the Museum evolved, in reaction to changes in the current social, economic, and political events of Bombay, Britain, and the Empire. Furthermore, the effect of these decisions and the fluctuating changes in opinion were dramatically reflected in the development of the Museum due to the slow progress of the building over a decade from 1858 to 1872.



**Figure 1.** The V&A Museum (left). Photograph, Francis Frith, approximately 1870s. Web, Victoria and Albert Museum (London), 07/09/2012. <http://collections.vam.ac.uk>

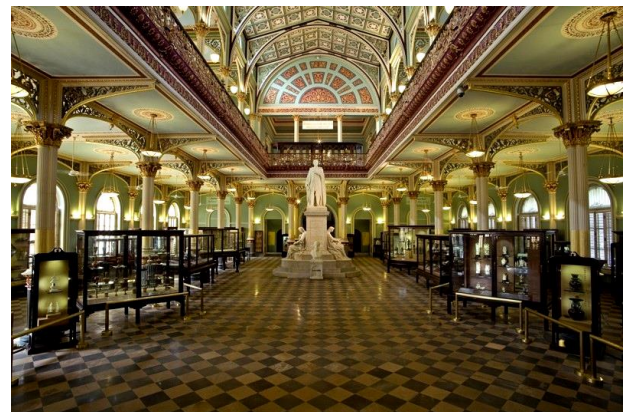


**Figure 2.** Dr Bhau Daji Lad Museum (V&A) (right). Photograph, Alexander Foster, 18/04/2012

### Introduction

The Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A) and Victoria Gardens is a beautiful gilded Colonial structure now lost in the heart of Bombay. With an important place in Bombay's past and a curious history, the institution reflects the response of Bombay people to external events both in Britain and wider India.<sup>1</sup> Each decision made in respect of the establishment of the Museum was the result of social, political, and economic reactions to the current climate within the city, the Empire, and Britain. Equally, the failure to expedite the opening of the Museum, which took over a decade to be completed from 1858 to 1872, created an extra dimension, allowing the institution to connect together a sequence of events into a continuous narrative. The theoretical discourses and subsequent reactions to the concepts of the Enlightenment, predominantly from the 1830s onwards, led to the dissemination of English education in India and the creation of the first museums. Identified primarily with the creation of the Great Exhibition in 1851 and subsequent exhibitions, there was a cultural shift towards industrial and manufactured arts in British education and the concept of museums, which had a profound effect on the formations of collections in the Central Museum of Bombay

that subsequently became part of the V&A. Due to the Indian Mutiny (10th May 1857-approximately 1859), an economic boom (approximately 1857-1865), and the effects of Enlightenment discourses, the native elite initiated the creation of the Museum and completed the Gardens by 1862.<sup>2</sup> After a recession in 1865, the interest shown by this group had dwindled, and the PWD (Public Works Department) took over responsibility, opening the Museum in 1872. The effect that these changes had on the Museum was substantial and can be identified within the form of the institution. From this web of events two questions arise concerning the Museum and Garden's formative history. Firstly, why did the native elite, who were so keen on the project, fail to retain an interest and, secondly, why would the PWD adopt a failing project which encumbered them for a further eight years?



**Figure 3.** Dr. Bhau Daji Lad Museum (V&A), interior (top). Photograph, approximately 2010. Web, CPP-Luxury.com, 07/09/2012. <<http://www.cpp-luxury.com>>

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<sup>1</sup> The South Kensington Museum, London was called the Victoria and Albert Museum only after 1899.

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<sup>2</sup> Indian nationalists call it 'India's First War of Independence'.

### *Museums at Home and in the Empire*

To understand the V&A Museum in Bombay, it is important to identify the origins of the concept of museums in Britain and the Empire, comparing the V&A with other examples. Identifying the trends in Europe is important because this was where museums originated and, throughout the nineteenth century, the time taken for information to move around the Empire was diminishing due to technological advances in transport.<sup>3</sup>

The concept of a museum, as opposed to a Cabinet of Curiosities, developed throughout the eighteenth century. To the envy of the British elite, Europe developed large prestigious museums, such as the Louvre (1789) and the Belvedere of Vienna (1781) which were designed to reflect their countries' rising economic and political power. Other than the Ashmolean Museum (1683), which can be considered the first public museum in Europe, such enterprises were not favoured by the British government.<sup>4</sup> In the nineteenth century the British elite became more active, collecting a variety of objects, and it became fashionable to donate these to new museums. The government slowly responded by taking a greater interest in these institutions, passing the Museum Act of 1845, officially recognising their social benefit. This government legislation allowed local authorities to raise a

halfpenny tax on towns with more than 10,000 occupants to fund a museum in the locality.<sup>5</sup> While the act had little immediate effect, it was landmark legislation that became one of many factors that helped shape the nature of British museums throughout the middle part of the century.

Museums in England started to focus on 'natural history' in the 1800s. The first institution to make significant advances towards becoming a fully functioning museum, in the modern sense, was the original British Museum, which housed Hans Sloane's natural history collection at Montagu House.<sup>6</sup> The funding for the maintenance of this institution was agreed by the government in 1753.<sup>7</sup> A natural history museum at this date differed from modern ones, due to an alteration in the definition of natural history. This was possibly as a result of developing evolutionary theories, such as Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species*, published in 1859. Presently natural history is associated with Biology and Taxidermy, but prior to the theory of 'natural selection', the term was more broadly defined in dictionaries to include other categories, such as minerals and gemstones.<sup>8</sup>

In India, the first museum was opened in Calcutta (1814) to house the collection of the

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<sup>5</sup> MacKenzie, 2009, p2

<sup>6</sup> The present British Museum is a different institution from the first British Museum which was divided among multiple institutions. Stearn, 1981, p11

<sup>7</sup> Stearn, 1981, p12

<sup>8</sup> Webster, 1866, p446

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<sup>3</sup> MacKenzie, 2009, p2

<sup>4</sup> Burton, 1999, p11



Asiatic Society of Bengal (1784).<sup>9</sup> The collection could be considered that of a natural history museum, but with an underlying interest in all things Oriental and exotic. However known as the Indian Museum, it became an imperial museum displaying, for example, collections of natural history objects with sculpture, including the Bharhut stupa railings.<sup>10</sup> The Indian Museum represented the aesthetics of the Empire and the British interest in Indian culture.

Museums in England and Britain's Empire, such as the Indian Museum in Calcutta, often struggled to remain open, frequently shutting due to a dependence on private funding and a lack of government investment.<sup>11</sup> This was also a significant problem in the formation of The Government Central Museum in Bombay. Proposed by Dr George Buist in 1847, it was to be Bombay's first museum.<sup>12</sup> Buist was very active, producing tracts on Agriculture and Ethnology, during the 1840s and 1850s. In 1848 the first museum committee was formed under the guidance of Lord John Elphinstone, later the Governor of Bombay (1853-1860).<sup>13</sup> As well as being editor of the *Bombay Times* and a member of a number of societies, Buist became the first curator of the museum in September

1855.<sup>14</sup> This museum was a collection without a permanent home, housed in the Mess Room of the Old Town Barracks.<sup>15</sup> To the annoyance of Buist, who believed it should have taken eight months, the Central Museum only officially opened in 1856, eight years later.<sup>16</sup> Unfortunately it only operated during Lord Canning's (Governor-General 1856-1858) visit to Bombay in 1856.<sup>17</sup> After closing, the museum reopened again in 1857, but soon shut because the barracks were required for the influx of soldiers entering India to put down the Indian Mutiny. In the rush to remove the exhibits, many objects were damaged, lost, or stolen, and the remnants of the collection was moved to the Town Hall, now The Asiatic Society Mumbai, whilst government funding was withheld indefinitely.<sup>18</sup> The Central Museum remained dormant, financially supported by Sir Jamsetjee Jeejeebhoy (1783 – 1859) a Parsi who gave his name to the School of Art in Bombay, and Jagannath Shankarshet (1803-1865), a renowned philanthropist, civic leader, and later the Chair of the Victoria Museum and Gardens Committee (figure 4).<sup>19</sup> It remained in this state until August 1858 when Dr George Birdwood (1832–1917)

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<sup>9</sup> Skelton, 1978, p297

<sup>10</sup> MacKenzie, 2009, p237

<sup>11</sup> MacKenzie, 2009, p236

<sup>12</sup> Buist, *The Bombay Times*, 13/07/1859, p445

<sup>13</sup> Fern, 1926, p3

<sup>14</sup> Buist, *The Bombay Times*, 13/07/1859, p445. *The Times of India*, 28/04/1880, p3

<sup>15</sup> Fern, 1926, p3

<sup>16</sup> Buist, *The Bombay Times*, 13/07/1859, p445. Fern, 1926, p3

<sup>17</sup> Fern, 1926, p3

<sup>18</sup> Fern, 1926, p3

<sup>19</sup> Birdwood, 1864, p48

became the museum's second curator (figure 4).<sup>20</sup>

On 18th December 1858 a meeting was held in the Town Hall to discuss the creation and objectives of the Victoria Museum and Gardens.<sup>21</sup> In 1862, at the cornerstone laying ceremony for the V&A, Shankarshet attributed the initial development of a Bombay museum to Buist.<sup>22</sup> This new Museum was, therefore, considered partly a reinvention of the Central Museum, absorbing the remains of its collection, whilst simultaneously creating a fresh new institution, with specific aims and directions, in an attempt to avoid repeating the previous museum's unfortunate history.<sup>23</sup> This institution was conceived of as a garden and museum which were therefore two parts of the same establishment. The Gardens are now separate, however, housing a zoo that was added in approximately 1888.<sup>24</sup>

The Museum has been known since 1975 as the Dr Bhau Daji Lad Museum, after the renowned Indian doctor. Changing the name was to distance the Museum from its Colonial origins. For the Indian authorities, they could have renamed it after three different founders: George Birdwood, Shankarshet, or Daji. Daji was a Hindu and also an exemplary scholar, therefore the best choice; his background in

keeping with the nationalist programme and the founding function of the Museum (figure 4). He was joint secretary of the Committee along with Birdwood, and was of great importance in the institution's creation.<sup>25</sup> William Tracey, the Municipality's Drainage Engineer, originally designed the two storey Museum and, aided by George Wilkins Terry, Superintendent of Jamsetjee Jeejeebhoy's School of Arts, he was the Victoria Gardens architect.<sup>26</sup> On Tracey's death, the project was taken over by architects Scott and McClelland, who made changes to the plans.<sup>27</sup> They redesigned the interior, removing the stone and plaster, updating it with a more fashionable ironwork structure that was easier and cheaper to construct.<sup>28</sup> One of the firm's architects, J. Campbell, also redesigned aspects of the Gardens.<sup>29</sup>

Originally it was hoped the site would be on the 'Esplanade between the Marine Battalion Lines and Colonel Swanson's cross roads', and between Church Gate to Bewdee Bazaar and the road to the officers' bungalows. Elphinstone agreed that a central location was paramount to the success of any institution and suggested an area 'occupied by the Marine Lines' and part of Back Bay for both

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<sup>20</sup> *The Bombay Times*, 25/08/1858, p1. *Journal of Indian Art*, 1900, p45 (Birdwood's Biography)

<sup>21</sup> *The Bombay Times*, 18/12/1858, p788

<sup>22</sup> Birdwood, 1864, p48

<sup>23</sup> Burns, 1918, p44

<sup>24</sup> D. M., *The Times of India*, 05/03/1888, p5

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<sup>25</sup> *The Bombay Times*, 24/12/1859, p819

<sup>26</sup> *Photographic Album of Bombay Views*, 1872. *UNESCO Asia Pacific Heritage Awards*, 2005

<sup>27</sup> *The Architect*, 12/03/1870, p124

<sup>28</sup> *The Engineer*, 16/08/1867, p128

<sup>29</sup> *The Bombay Builder*, 05/09/1865, p49

Elphinstone College and the V&A.<sup>30</sup> However, the final location was far from the centre, north of the Fort, on the Mount Estate in the expensive Byculla district. This location set the Museum among the great estates, just outside the Fort, on approximately 20.2 acres.<sup>31</sup> The Museum, situated at the front gate to the Gardens, is a rectangular Palladian structure, constructed in fine-grain Porebunder sandstone on the front and left sides which are visible from the main street.<sup>32</sup> On the other sides, cheaper material was used with only ‘the dressings’ being from Porebunder stone.<sup>33</sup> The iron interior was painted lavishly in blues, reds and brown with significant gilding.<sup>34</sup> The majority of the exhibits were on the ground floor, surrounding a white marble statue of Prince Albert, sculpted by Briton Matthew Noble (1818–1876) and donated by the Baghdadi Jewish banker, David Sassoon (1792–1864) (figure 2).<sup>35</sup> On the 30th January 1862, after a suggestion in December 1861, the Committee agreed to add ‘Albert’ to the Museum’s name to commemorate the life and achievements of the Prince Consort.<sup>36</sup>

### *Economic Museums*

The nature of the V&A in Bombay was different from museums in Britain and Calcutta. Never specifically associated with Indian aesthetics, it did not develop as an imperial museum like Calcutta’s Indian Museum, but nor was it a local museum until 1919.<sup>37</sup> In the first meeting it was described as ‘an Economic Museum, with Natural History and Pleasure Gardens’.<sup>38</sup> When it was founded, the Museum was expected to display a range of objects from across India, although the curator Dr George Birdwood (1832–1917) admitted the collection was only comprehensive of the Western Presidency (figure 4).<sup>39</sup> The Bombay collection was that of a natural history museum, but its focus was different from both the natural history collections of British institutions and the imperial museum of Calcutta (Appendix A). Unlike an imperial museum economic museums were, in Major-General William Cullen’s opinion, for the benefits of science, pleasure, and profit. The concept of this type of museum was founded on his ideas which he set out in a letter to the Madras Government which stated that a central museum, organising a network of district museums, would aid in the systematic collection of ‘economic products and

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<sup>30</sup> *The Bombay Times*, 24/12/1859, p819

<sup>31</sup> Birdwood, 1864, p47

<sup>32</sup> Porebunder stone was shipped at great expense from the coastal town now called Porbandar, in Gujarat. *The Architect*, 12/03/1870, p124

<sup>33</sup> *The Architect*, 12/03/1870, p124

<sup>34</sup> *The Times of India*, 04/05/1872, p2

<sup>35</sup> *The Times of India*, 03/05/1872, p2

<sup>36</sup> Birdwood, 1864, p32

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<sup>37</sup> *The Times of India*, 06/03/1919, p6

<sup>38</sup> *The Bombay Times*, 18/12/1858, p788

<sup>39</sup> Birdwood, 1862, p6

resources'.<sup>40</sup> An economic museum therefore exhibits natural history objects as raw materials alongside the manufactured products that they can create. In the V&A, the original arrangement of the collection was a range of industrial products and new materials with categories including metalware, agriculture, industry, and pottery (Appendix A) (figure 3).

To understand the V&A collection as an economic museum, the terms 'art' and 'science' must be understood in their contemporary sense before more recent interpretations. Indeed, civil servant Henry Cole (1808–1882) reflected in his memoirs how odd it was that sometime towards the end of his life 'art' had become solely to mean Fine Art.<sup>41</sup> 'Art' had originally derived from the Latin *ars* meaning skill and had been previously associated with practical ability and experience in any field.<sup>42</sup> For example, the Royal Society of Arts, founded in 1754, is still known formally as 'The Royal Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce'.<sup>43</sup> 'Science', from *scientia* meaning 'knowledge', was focused more on theory. The inclusion, therefore, of the London South Kensington Museum in the Department of Science and Art (1853) was logical whereas today it would seem illogical.<sup>44</sup> Equally, the

collection in the Museum in Bombay represents 'art', as in an ability to create objects which require sophisticated skills, and 'science' as the knowledge and understanding of how these items are made. The objects that were seen to create a 'local museum' in the 1900s were, therefore, originally for a different purpose which was later misinterpreted due to changes in the definitions of key words.

The Central Museum and the V&A were both part of a wider tradition of economic museums in the Raj. The first museum of economic geology had been founded in Calcutta by scientist Henry Piddington (1797–1858) in 1840. In 1843, the Madras Literary Society requested the reincarnation of the earlier 1827 Madras museum, as a 'Museum of Economic Geology' (Madras Central Museum). It was finally created in 1846 and exhibited collections of geological, mineralogical and chemical interest.<sup>45</sup> One year later, Buist suggested the need for a similar museum in Bombay. The use of the word 'central' in the name for the Bombay museum can also be seen as part of a developing tradition, copying the name from the Madras Central Museum. However, there is no indication that the Bombay Central Museum was ever intended to be at the centre of a network of smaller museums.

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<sup>40</sup> Nair, 2007, p63

<sup>41</sup> Burton, 1999, p10

<sup>42</sup> Oswald, 1844

<sup>43</sup> Burton, 1999, p10

<sup>44</sup> Burton, 1999, p10

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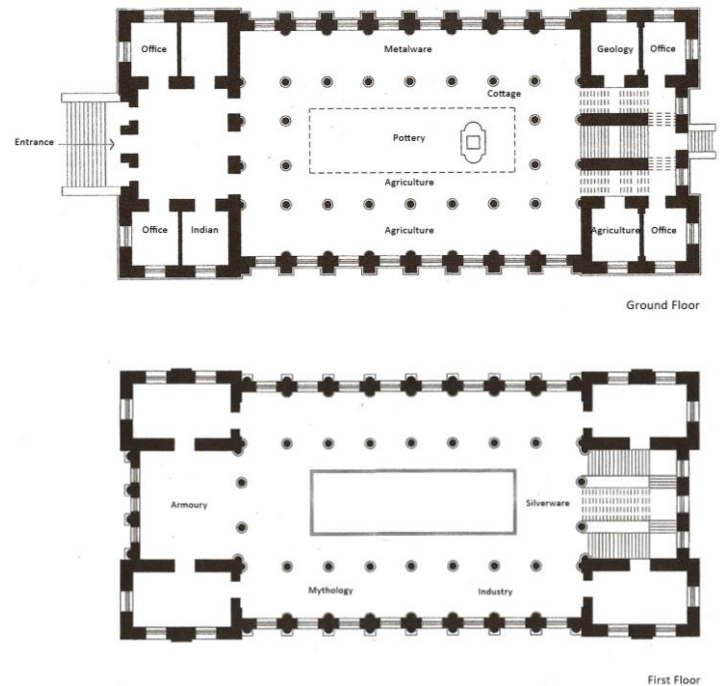
<sup>45</sup> Nair, 2007, p63



## Museums and the Civilising Mission

The Madras Literary Society requested the foundation of the Madras museum (1843) because they believed it would ‘encourage scientific enquiry and commerce, both of which it was claimed were at their lowest ebb’.<sup>46</sup> This demand for an economic museum in Madras was largely the result of the dominance of the cycle of civilisation theory and the concept of Enlightenment, most aptly represented in Thomas Cole’s work, known as *The Course of Empire* (1833-1836). His pictures depict the cycle of civilisation in five history paintings of the Hudson Valley: *The Savage State*, *The Arcadian or Pastoral State*, *The Consummation of Empire*, *The Destruction of Empire*, and *Desolation*.<sup>47</sup> Prior to the 1830s well known individuals, such as politician Edmund Burke (1729-1797), considered Indian civilisation as ‘little inferior to their own’ with ‘no need of reform’. An opinion, probably driven by a fear of Britain’s weak position on the Subcontinent, which led to a policy of ‘preservation’ in India, and a belief that both cultures were on the cusp of *The Consummation of Empire*.<sup>48</sup> As British industrialisation accelerated, and the economy benefitted from new technological and scientific innovations, it was widely considered

that Britain had entered the next stage of civilisation, *The Consummation of Empire*. People believed, however, that India’s



**Figure 4.** Plan of the V&A Museum based on a copy of the building layout from Messrs. Scott and McClelland between 1865 and 1872. Chopra, 2011, p226-227

civilisation had stagnated and relapsed before reaching this stage. The perceived cause was expressed most explicitly by historian James Mill (1773-1836), who wrote in *The History of British India* (1818) that Indians were governed by the laws of deities which had led to the decline of their civilisation.<sup>49</sup> Britain’s Enlightenment had been created through the industrial revolution, therefore one approach of ‘saving’ India was considered to be the education of the populace and the encouragement of their development, since

<sup>46</sup> Nair, 2007, p62

<sup>47</sup> It is difficult to say if these pictures were known in India or Britain but they aid in visualising the well known philosophy of the period.

<sup>48</sup> Metcalf, 1964, p7

<sup>49</sup> Mill, 1848, p179

they were believed to be incapable of progressing on their own. This has become known as the ‘civilising mission’.

One popular solution was to provide Indians with an English education which had aided Britain’s development, people assuming it would have the same potential in India. Whig politician and historian Thomas Babington Macaulay’s objective of creating persons who were ‘Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect’ was part of this concept of the ‘civilising mission’.<sup>50</sup> By 1845 English schools had been established in Bengal, Madras, and in Bombay where schools and colleges including Elphinstone High School (1822) and Grant Medical College (1845) were founded.<sup>51</sup> The education movement was also encouraged by a demand for English education among wealthy native families during the 1820s, many Indians believing the country could only improve through the ‘study of Western science and literature’.<sup>52</sup>

The creation of museums as centres of knowledge and research were an integral part of India’s educational development. Museums were considered to aid the development of an individual’s ‘second sight’, a theory of personal education as opposed to group learning in classrooms. This was a known

concept throughout the nineteenth century and was referred to in a number of literary works, such as R. B. Sanyal’s *Hours with Nature* (1896). Sanyal’s protagonist proclaims how, by entering a museum, he gains the ability of ‘second sight’.<sup>53</sup> Studying an everyday object in a museum setting, the character learns to analyse the item objectively and to see it more profoundly and from a new perspective.<sup>54</sup> He therefore proclaims that, for the first time, he sees a collection of seemingly different objects as a perfectly ordered and categorised list.<sup>55</sup> The economic museums of Madras and Bombay were part of this discourse with Daji at the 1858 meeting, stating that the V&A was ‘a book’, through which correct observation would educate the mind.<sup>56</sup>

The Museum was to be an institution which would aid individuals’ self-education, helping them to learn about the arts and sciences of India. As a symbol of this process, it could be argued that the use of a Palladian exterior signified the classical era of Enlightenment, and the high Victoriana iron structure can be seen as a celebration of Britain’s enlightenment.

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<sup>50</sup> Markovits, 2001, p54

<sup>51</sup> Metcalf, 1964, p23

<sup>52</sup> Metcalf, 1964, p20-21

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<sup>53</sup> Sanyal, 1896, p92

<sup>54</sup> Prakash, 1999, p49

<sup>55</sup> Sanyal, 1896, p92

<sup>56</sup> *The Bombay Times*, 08/12/1858, p788

### *The Age of Exhibition*

As in the development of early economic museums in India, the concept of displaying manufactured goods to educate people became increasingly popular in Europe. A manifestation of this idea, which defined the manner of representation in subsequent exhibitions, was the Great Exhibition of 1851. Joseph Paxton (1803-1865), gardener and architect, designed the first large scale iron and glass structure when he created the Crystal Palace.<sup>57</sup> Subsequent exhibitions in Europe, including Amsterdam's Crystal Palace begun in 1858, and Dublin's Palace of 1865, adopted a similar type of architecture. An iron and glass structure became a signifier of progress, industrial arts, exhibition, and, most of all, the splendour of the new age of engineering. This emerging tradition influenced the V&A in two ways; the architectural design of the structure, and the type of displays in the collection. Daji indicated, at the first meeting, that the V&A was to be a place where the Bombay people could see similar spectacles to those seen at the Great Exhibition.<sup>58</sup>

The V&A was redesigned with an iron frame interior after 1865 by Messrs. Scott and McClelland, an alteration partially due to an increasing fashion in South Asia for ready-made architecture which was less costly than working in stone. Iron structures could be

prepared in England, where skilled labour was plentiful and inexpensive, instead of India where it was scarce and costly, and then quickly raised on the building site by a native work force.<sup>59</sup> The interest in cost saving measures in the construction of the V&A was paramount when Bombay was hit by a significant recession in 1865. Furthermore, iron was appealing because it is fireproof and relatively weather and vermin resistant; a great asset in the severe Bombay climate.<sup>60</sup> However, the new interior was also a reflection of current European trends and, by 1865, the 'palace' design was well established. An iron structure, as well as being more economical, helped the Museum to be recognised as part of this exhibition movement.

There was growing concern in mid-nineteenth century Britain that decoration and ornamentation was in decline. It was felt that stylistic continuity and quality had deteriorated with industrialisation, and this might become the catalyst for the decline of English civilisation. In Henry Cole's opinion, ornament was the 'decoration of utility' and not 'the mere imitation of natural objects'.<sup>61</sup> Cole, who created and organised the Great Exhibition with its principle patron the Prince Consort, used the exhibition to advance his programme

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<sup>57</sup> Rolt, 1970, p149

<sup>58</sup> *The Bombay Times*, 18/12/1858, p788

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<sup>59</sup> *The Engineer*, 16/08/1867, p129

<sup>60</sup> *The Engineer*, 16/08/1867, p129

<sup>61</sup> Burton, 1999, p30

of ‘good taste’.<sup>62</sup> Using ‘second sight’ as the primary mechanism, he organised exhibits so that a comparison between the Orient and Europe was encouraged, highlighting the flaws and successes of both cultures. The Great Exhibition showcased Indian design as the epitome of good ornamentation and manufactured arts, while European exhibits focused on functionality, showcasing advancements developed through industrialisation.<sup>63</sup>

In 1852 the Museum of Manufactures was finally established in London, having been first suggested by the Board of Trade in 1846.<sup>64</sup> This proposition reflected the trend for the development of economic museums in India. When this museum became the South Kensington Museum in 1854, with Cole as its first curator, the inspiration for the institution was the Great Exhibition. This museum in Cole’s eyes was ‘not a repository for historic relics but a way of changing people’s tastes’.<sup>65</sup>

Birdwood was an influential figure in the mid to late nineteenth century, both in Bombay and London. Born at Belgaum, Karnataka, in 1832 he was sent to England for his education, first at Plymouth New Grammar School and then at Edinburgh University.<sup>66</sup> He returned to Bombay in 1856 and served as a naval surgeon

in the Persian expedition (1856-1857) before ‘holding the chairs first of anatomy and physiology and then of botany and material medica at Grant Medical College’ where Daji also worked.<sup>67</sup> As well as being one of the few in Bombay given the opportunity to see the Great Exhibition, he was the curator of the Central Museum from 1858, a secretary of the Victoria Museum and Gardens Committee, and the secretary of the Bombay Royal Asiatic Society.<sup>68</sup> In 1864 he was also given the honorary title of Sheriff of Bombay by Sir Bartle Frere (Governor 1862-1867) (figure 4).<sup>69</sup> After retiring to England in 1868 he became known as one of ‘the greatest champions of Indian decorative arts’ and had a profound impact on artists, including William Morris of the Arts and Crafts movement.<sup>70</sup>

Birdwood, differing from Cole, believed that industrialisation was causing the decline of Indian arts in India, as it had in Europe. For example, Birdwood thought that Indian carpet making, a quintessential Indian product that was admired at the Great Exhibition, was deteriorating because of ‘gaol manufacture and the introduction of aniline dyes’.<sup>71</sup> Birdwood also believed that sensationalist and

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<sup>62</sup> Rolt, 1970, p148

<sup>63</sup> Mitter, 1992, p224

<sup>64</sup> Skelton, 1978, p297

<sup>65</sup> Burton, 1999, p30. Skelton, 1978, p297

<sup>66</sup> *Journal of Indian Art*, 1900, p45

<sup>67</sup> Chirol, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*

<sup>68</sup> *The Times of India*, 09/06/1886, p7. Chirol, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*

<sup>69</sup> Chirol, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*

<sup>70</sup> Mitter, 1992, p236

<sup>71</sup> *The Times of India*, 09/06/1886, p7

nonsensical design was gripping the city and distorting the landscape.<sup>72</sup>

Architecture, which he considered to be the ‘chief of all arts’, demonstrates the problem he perceived.<sup>73</sup> In Bombay architectural styles were considered cluttered and confusing, being selected from a variety of European and Indian styles. Neo-Classical structures stood next to Gothic Revival and Espanic Mudejar examples, and many buildings exhibited multiple styles simultaneously. The city therefore represented the passion for rapidly changing impulsive fashions that were redolent of the industrial age. Birdwood thought traditional Indian design had a continuity that was beginning to be lost, as taste began to alter more quickly in India.

During the debate on the design of the Museum building, its relationship to the city was of great concern. The first issue was the government’s desire to make the building design the subject of a competition for architects in Britain.<sup>74</sup> However, the Committee believed that an English designed building would be unsuitable for displaying a collection in the Bombay climate. In response to these fears, H. Young, Chief Secretary to Government, stated that the Committee should describe the basic requirements for the architecture and then let it be developed by

Government officers. Adding to the debate, Elphinstone said the Museum should be in the vicinity of Elphinstone College in a complex that also comprised of a ‘Theatre, University Hall, the College Halls, the Library, the Chambers of the director of Public Instruction’, and possibly the High School. This idea would make the institution part of a greater complex stimulating the intellectual minds of students as well as solving the architectural problem by developing a uniform style for the city centre.<sup>75</sup> Although potentially favoured by Birdwood, the Committee decided that the institution should be distinct and separate from other organisations, therefore, the two secretaries elected to develop alternative architectural designs.

Daji’s design was in an elaborate oriental style with ‘a verandah of cypress pillars ... surmounted by a dome’. This, barring the cost, was more popular with the native gentlemen on the Committee, highlighting the preferred tastes of the Indian elite, which were also reflected in buildings such as David Sassoon’s library and the University. Birdwood’s drawings, however, were in the classical Doric style, supposedly based on ‘the temple of Apollo Epicurius on Mount Lycaenum’.<sup>76</sup> This design mirrored the purity of Greek architecture, invoking the sensibilities of early

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<sup>72</sup> Mitter, 1992, p236

<sup>73</sup> Mitter, 1992, p236

<sup>74</sup> *The Bombay Times*, 23/07/1859, p466

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<sup>75</sup> *The Bombay Times*, 24/12/1859, p819

<sup>76</sup> *The Bombay Times*, 23/07/1859, p466



Bombay buildings, including the Town Hall and the Mint. Birdwood's design was eventually chosen by the Committee, but only because it was cheaper to construct and, ironically, still afforded space for future decoration on the pediment and portico as funding later permitted.<sup>77</sup>

### *A College of Inquiry*

In a report to the Secretary of Government in Bombay on the 1st January 1864, Birdwood outlined his view on the purpose of the Museum. He said the institution would undertake 'original research in Indian and Eastern natural history' to assist in the 'economic progress of the country'.<sup>78</sup> Birdwood stated that the Museum would be 'a museum of Indian raw products, manufacture and arts' in which the curators would 'direct their original investigations in natural history so as to further the economic interests of the country'.<sup>79</sup>

Underpinning this, however, was the need to research how to save Indian design, while encouraging industrialisation. The J. J. Art School, like British design institutions such as the Government School of Design (1837), was also part of this process, having been founded in 1857 to teach the application of good design

on industrial products.<sup>80</sup> Daji, in 1871, also stated that the Museum was 'for illustrating the processes of important manufactures'.<sup>81</sup>



**Figure 5.** Sir Bartle Frere laying the cornerstone of the V&A Museum. Drawing. *The Illustrated London News*. London, 03/01/1863

Therefore, in effect the V&A, had evolved out of the Indian economic museum into a different entity based on the trend for exhibitions and Crystal Palaces. The 1862 collections, as detailed in Appendix A, demonstrate the broad scope of the institution, putting as much emphasis on manufactured products as on raw materials. The addition of a statue of Prince Albert inside the Museum, paid for by Sassoon, reiterated the Museum's purpose. The statue was not only installed because 'Albert' was added to the Museum's name, but because the Prince, as patron of the Great Exhibition, had become its figurehead. The sculpture beyond doubt signifies the relationship between the V&A and the Crystal Palace.

<sup>77</sup> *The Bombay Times*, 23/07/1859, p466

<sup>78</sup> Birdwood, 1864, p65

<sup>79</sup> Schrottky, *The Times of India*, 23/02/1875, p3

<sup>80</sup> The Government School of Design is now known as the Royal College of Art. McDermott, 2008, p200

<sup>81</sup> D. M., *The Times of India*, 05/03/1888, p5

The division between the Museum and the University was important in realising this aim and retaining an emphasis on practical research. Birdwood, in a letter written to the Registrar of Bombay University on the 14th September 1863, stated that he wanted the Museum to be a ‘College of Inquiry as distinguished from a College of Reading’.<sup>82</sup> Sir Bartle Frere, in his speech at the cornerstone laying ceremony in 1862, said that Birdwood had obtained a donation of Rs. 75,000 from a Parsi, Cursetjee Furdoonjee Paruck, for a ‘chair of economic science’ (figure 4).<sup>83</sup> Birdwood tried to block the government from giving the money to the University, arguing that the professorship should be separate from the University to encourage research and discourage teaching.<sup>84</sup> To this end, Birdwood also requested in the letter that the researcher should rotate between ‘experts in geology, botany, meteorology, chemistry, [and] zoology’ in order to encourage a rounded study.<sup>85</sup> While this view may have prevailed for a number of years, by 1888 the curatorship had been merged with the Biology professorship at Elphinstone College. The change in job profiles also reflects a steady decline in funding, the salary for the position was Rs. 500 a month by 1888 ‘of which Rs. 200 a month

represented the Curatorship’ and Rs. 300 corresponded to the professorship, indicating the relative importance of the two roles. Prior to this, in 1886, the curator’s salary was cut from Rs. 400 per month to Rs. 200, with half being directed to the J. J. School of Art.<sup>86</sup> The decline in financial support also indicated that, while Paruck was willing to give an initial grant, additional private funding to rejuvenate the institution was not forthcoming, and the Bombay government became the predominant source of money for the Museum.

#### *Why did the native elite desire a museum?*

The Bombay native elite was largely a product of colonial India, their wealth mostly amassed from trade with Europe and their education being increasingly English orientated due to the Enlightenment theory. Bombay, had no elite prior to the British, only existing as a swampy malarial backwater settled by some small villages among seven islands.<sup>87</sup> The elite were mostly migrants who had settled in Bombay after the British reversed Portuguese policies, including religious intolerance, in order to encourage trade in the 1660s.<sup>88</sup> A significant percentage of the most wealthy were Parsis, hailing from Gujarat, though originally descended from Zoroastrian Persians forced from their homeland by Islamic

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<sup>82</sup> Birdwood, 1864, p61

<sup>83</sup> Schrottky, *The Times of India*, 23/02/1875, p3. D. M., *The Times of India*, 05/031888, p5

<sup>84</sup> D. M., *The Times of India*, 05/031888, p5

<sup>85</sup> Schrottky, *The Times of India*, 23/02/1875, p3

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<sup>86</sup> D. M., *The Times of India*, 05/031888, p5

<sup>87</sup> Bombay A to Z, 1993, pvi

<sup>88</sup> Kruijtzter, 2009, p206

invaders in the mid to late tenth century. Also there was the substantial wealth of the Baghdadi Jewish banking family of the Sassoons and a mixture of Indians who were mainly British orientated, having moved from their homelands and resettled in the city. This native elite, as noted by Governor Elphinstone, were not influential outside of Bombay and their 'manner of life made it unlikely that they would have any particular interest in native culture for its own sake'.<sup>89</sup> They were, therefore, inevitably primarily interested in the city rather than Indic traditions or loyalties and, partly from pride in their common colonial history and city, automatically continued to support the British government.

The impetus for the Museum arose in 1858 and gathered pace throughout the early 1860s. It took Buist a decade from 1847 to create the Central Museum, but he failed to leave a functioning institution and there was little substantial input from the native elite. At the initial meeting to discuss the creation of the V&A Museum, The Bombay Times and Journal of Commerce specifically referred to fifteen Europeans and thirty-eight Indians (Appendix B). The idea of the V&A was credited to the native elite in the meeting, and a plan was adopted to pay for its construction and running expenses through private

subscription.<sup>90</sup> Likewise, dominating the list of subscribers to the 'Victoria Museum and Gardens' were Indians, principally Parsis.<sup>91</sup>

There was a tradition of private philanthropy in Bombay and, excluding large infrastructure works, many buildings were constructed through subscription and individual donations. It was widely acknowledged, both by the PWD and government, that city improvements were only actually possible with continued private support.<sup>92</sup> The Town Hall, suggested by Bombay judge Sir James MacKintosh, in 1811, is an early example of funding by subscription.<sup>93</sup> Public subscription was also used to fund other works, such as the Ice House in 1843 and the V&A in 1858.<sup>94</sup>

Educated Indians' first true opportunity to engage in English education occurred when the Bombay Literary Society, founded by MacKintosh in 1804, changed its name to the Asiatic Society and opened its doors to native gentlemen in 1829.<sup>95</sup> As English education became more prominent, further educational institutions were founded. The first of these were schools, such as Elphinstone High School (1822) funded by Sir Albert Sassoon.<sup>96</sup> The desire for other educational institutions

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<sup>90</sup> *The Bombay Times*, 18/12/1858, p788

<sup>91</sup> Birdwood, 1864, p33

<sup>92</sup> Chopra, 2011, p1

<sup>93</sup> Burns, 1918, p15

<sup>94</sup> Dwivedi, 1995, p36

<sup>95</sup> Dwivedi, 1995, p37

<sup>96</sup> Dwivedi, 1995, p101

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<sup>89</sup> Dwivedi, 1995, p51

increased as the effects of English education developed and, by the late 1850s, many more were founded, including the Bombay University (July 1857), J. J. School of Art (March 1857), and Elphinstone College (1856).

The Indian Mutiny began on the 10th May 1857, primarily in Meerut, where the Sepoy army rebelled against the authorities.<sup>97</sup> After as little as a month, Delhi and the north had fallen to the rebels, who also controlled parts of Lucknow and Kanpur.<sup>98</sup> The revolt shocked the world and the native elite in India scrambled to express their loyalty to Britain, quickly disassociating themselves from the rebels.

After the last Moghul Emperor Bahadur Shah II, was exiled from India in 1858 due to his unfortunate promotion to leader of the rebellion as its justification, the Indian elite begun to express their loyalty to Britain even more publically.<sup>99</sup>

While Bombay was not directly affected by the Mutiny, the elite used the first meeting for the Museum as a platform to express their loyalty to Britain. It is possible that the Museum would not have materialised, or at least not for a while, if it had not been for this event. Every speech at that meeting was heavily laden with words of endearment aimed at securing the relationship between the native elite and the British government. Key words



**Figure 6.** Lady Frere's Temple, Victoria Gardens. Drawing, in *The Bombay Builder*, 1865. Web, Google Books, 20/04/2012. <<http://books.google.co.uk>>

including 'loyalty', 'friendship', 'devotion' and 'union' are used repetitively to emphasise the Bombay elite's allegiance to Britain and Queen Victoria.<sup>100</sup> The meeting was viewed as a perfect and very public opportunity for the native elite to express gratitude to the British government. Conversely, the Governor John Elphinstone who had been supportive of the Central Museum, declined an invitation to chair the Victoria Museum and Gardens Committee.<sup>101</sup> This was because politicians in Britain and in the Empire perceived that the Mutiny was partly the result of the interfering reforms of Governor-General Dalhousie (1848-

<sup>97</sup> Moon, 1990, p688-689

<sup>98</sup> Dalrymple, 2009, p316

<sup>99</sup> Moon, 1990, p750

<sup>100</sup> *The Bombay Times*, 18/12/1858, p788

<sup>101</sup> *The Bombay Times*, 18/12/1858, p788



1856).<sup>102</sup> Incidentally, however, the local elite had no qualms about the destruction of the ‘Cooly village of Seedhol, Sindhoo, or Sindhool-parrs’ in the creation of the gardens.<sup>103</sup> Levelled by Birdwood, the village contained sacred sites that were disposed of without complaint. These included a natural lingam and yoni, which was disguised as a flowerbed ornament, ‘the takhat, platform ... of a Mahomedan faquir’ which was hidden behind creepers and converted into an idyllic hermitage, and some thirty-five sacred trees that were carried off in the night; a story being spun by their watchmen that ‘they were removed by the Gods of the trees themselves’.<sup>104</sup>

The creation of a museum was part of this movement of educational development. By being discussed a year after the Mutiny, however, it took on a political edge. The institution, could have retained the name of the ‘Central Museum’ relating it to the history of economic museums in India, however, it was decided from the outset that it would be known as the ‘Victoria Museum and Gardens’, deliberately invoking the name of the Queen.<sup>105</sup>

The architectural features in the Gardens can also be understood best within this context, because they were completed and opened by Lady Frere on the 19th November 1862 before

any government involvement in 1865. To commemorate the opening, Lady Frere’s Temple, consisting of a columned canopy covering a bust of Lady Frere, made by Noble, was revealed in the Gardens (figure 5).<sup>106</sup> The triumphal arch, sponsored by Rustomjee Jamsetjee, was a clear demonstration of his loyalty to Britain (figure 7). The arch, fronting the main gate to the Victoria Gardens, represented the glory of the Empire, a central roundel in the pediment depicting profile portraits of Victoria and Albert. It was originally designed by Tracey and later revised by Campbell and was also presented in approximately 1862.<sup>107</sup> Likewise, David Sassoon expressed his loyalty by donating Rs. 30,000 of the total Rs. 51,653 required for the construction of the clock tower (completed 1865) (figure 6). Sassoon also included a bust of himself on the clock tower, proclaiming his importance to the monument, and asserting his loyalty by encouraging an association between him and the Raj.<sup>108</sup>

The inclusion of the statue of Prince Albert inside the Museum is of interest in relation to the Indian Mutiny. The importance of unity between Europeans and Indians was a common theme in the first meeting, Shankarshet

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<sup>102</sup> Metcalf, 1964, p93

<sup>103</sup> *The Times of India*, 04/07/1901, p3

<sup>104</sup> *The Times of India*, 04/07/1901, p3

<sup>105</sup> *The Bombay Times*, 18/12/1858, p788

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<sup>106</sup> *The Bombay Builder*, 05/09/1865, p49

<sup>107</sup> *The Times of India*, 04/05/1872, p2

<sup>108</sup> Chopra, 2011, p221





**Figure 7.** David Sassoon's Clock Tower. Photograph, Alexander Foster, 18/04/2012

claiming, for example, that education will bring together these different peoples.<sup>109</sup> The Prince, when the Crystal Palace was opened, saw it as a place where the world could be united with international cooperation and friendly competition taking the place of war.<sup>110</sup> In memory of this opinion, the statue in the V&A is inscribed with English, Hebrew, Marathi, and Gujarathi representing the unity of Bombay; as the languages rest side by side so do the English, Jews, Indians, and Parsis of Bombay (figure 2). On the base are also female representations of art and science, suggesting

that through these, and therefore through the Museum, union is possible.

In European culture erecting statues was a form of 'hero-worship' that commemorated famous men and battles, immortalising faces and deeds within public spaces.<sup>111</sup> The native elite adopted this practice across the city, representing themselves and their heroes in stone in the public eye. In the Museum and Gardens, Sassoon is presented as the most well-known investor because of his two prominently placed donations and portrait busts.<sup>112</sup>

Philanthropy, as well as being a way of competing among the native elite, was also used to compete with the rising British industrialist elite which they saw as their social equals. They were both in similar industries, and were rising socially through mercantile success from relatively humble beginnings. J. N. Tata, founder of the Tata Group, spent a number of years in Lancashire learning about new cotton milling techniques and, on his return to Bombay, desired to use this knowledge to create the 'Manchester of the East'.<sup>113</sup> The elite understood that prosperous cities, not just capitals, also had many institutions including museums. Daji believed that the wealth of Bombay should be used to

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<sup>109</sup> *The Bombay Times*, 18/12/1858, p788

<sup>110</sup> Rappaport, 2001, p180

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<sup>111</sup> Chopra, 2011, p205

<sup>112</sup> Chopra, 2011, p221

<sup>113</sup> *The Times of India*, 20/05/1904, p5

elevate the city from a colonial backwater by bringing similar establishments to its shores.<sup>114</sup>

Even more than British industrialists, the native elite had a romantic notion of their status. They identified themselves as the British equivalents of the merchant princes of Venice; wealthy traders, with power, and a certain level of control.<sup>115</sup> It was believed that liberation of the mind, and not the modern idea of self-determination and self-rule, was the primary form of freedom.<sup>116</sup> The Museum was in this way part of a personal programme to develop the elite's status and its own mythic history which was lacking due to the recent creation of the city. Furthermore, knowing about the local resources would have given these merchants an edge over their competitors. Just as it had been found that cotton could be grown around Bombay, making the elite a fortune, other cash crops may potentially be grown after prior research. Knowledge was seen as a route to wealth and power.<sup>117</sup>

By 1865 more than 2 lakhs of rupees had been raised through subscription and the project was accelerating forwards due to a booming economy.<sup>118</sup> The cause of the boom period was the cotton market and the effect of the American Civil War.<sup>119</sup> Concern about the dependency on American cotton first arose in

1846 when the cotton crop failed in America.<sup>120</sup> Throughout the 1850s pressure increased on the cotton markets, and the English Cotton Supply Association asked India if it was capable of supplying the quantity needed if war should breakout in America. Importantly it was Buist who said it was possible.<sup>121</sup> The cotton market in Bombay expanded rapidly during the war and secured a large sector of the market as the Union, from 1861 to 1865, blockaded cotton export from the Confederacy to Europe. With high demand it became extremely easy for Bombay merchants to acquire credit against future cotton sales, encouraging speculation, some trading with upwards of £100,000 based on a 'capital of ten thousand pounds'.<sup>122</sup> Money was so easily made in cotton that the Southern Confederacy's nickname of 'King Cotton' was relocated to Bombay during this period and became particularly associated with the banker Premchand Roychand.<sup>123</sup> More than £81million entered Bombay from cotton and share speculation and by November 1864 thirty-one new banks had been created to cater for the demand.<sup>124</sup>

This explosion of wealth encouraged philanthropy, so the Victoria Gardens were

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<sup>114</sup> *The Bombay Times*, 18/12/1858, p788

<sup>115</sup> *The Bombay Times*, 18/12/1858, p788

<sup>116</sup> Prakash, 1999, p70

<sup>117</sup> Philip, 2004, p7

<sup>118</sup> *The Times of India*, 04/05/1872, p2

<sup>119</sup> *The London Review*, 27/10/1866, p454

<sup>120</sup> Dwivedi, 1995, p124

<sup>121</sup> Logan, *The Journal of Southern History*, 1958, p472-473

<sup>122</sup> *The London Review*, 27/10/1866, p454

<sup>123</sup> *The Times of India*, 04/05/1872, p2

<sup>124</sup> *The London Review*, 27/10/1866, p454. Dwivedi, 1995, p100

adorned with extra statues and the level of subscription for the Museum increased. However, when the Union lifted the blockade, the South was suddenly able to market the backlog of cotton that had remained unsold for the last four years. This flooded the market, forcing the price of cotton to plummet and ruining the trade in Bombay, leading to a financial crisis and a severe economic recession. By 1866 almost all the wealthiest in Bombay, including Premchand Roychand and Pestonjee Cursetjee Shroff, who owed excesses of £1,105,840, had to suspend payments. Rustomjee Jamsetjee, who built the Gardens triumphal arch, was also required to call in his creditors pending a similar type of announcement in 1866.<sup>125</sup>

With no more funds, the Museum project stopped and in 1865 the PWD took over.<sup>126</sup> No longer considered a private enterprise, the fervour of the initial years was never reignited and, even as the elite began to recover towards the latter part of the decade, they did not return to reinvest but moved on to other projects. For example, Roychand spent a total of 4 lakhs on the University and built the Rajabai clock tower between 1869 and 1878.<sup>127</sup> Sir Cowasji Jehangir Readymoney, who had given Rs. 1,000 in subscription to the Museum, built the Convocation Hall in 1878 instead of continuing

to invest in the V&A and David Sassoon began projects, including David Sassoon's Mechanic Institute and Library which were finished in 1870.<sup>128</sup>

#### *Why did the PWD adopt the project?*

The PWD took another seven years to complete the project with the Museum opening fourteen years after the first meeting took place. The government was always expected to organise the construction of the institution, as Daji indicated in a letter to H. Young on the 21st July 1859, but it was not expecting to financially support the project's completion without the native elite's help.<sup>129</sup> However, it was relatively common for a project begun with private subscription to be completed by the PWD. The Town Hall, for example, began through private subscription but was completed with government funding in 1833, twenty-two years after its inception.<sup>130</sup>

One possible advantage could have been due to a similar desire to Cullen's, who requested the creation of the Madras Central Museum. The adoption of the V&A Museum project would have been for perceived benefits, such as producing an inventory of a region's natural resources enabling one to know the wealth and potential of the area. As a mode of documenting wealth, it was clearly popular

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<sup>125</sup> *The London Review*, 27/10/1866, p453

<sup>126</sup> *The Architect*, 12/03/1870, p124

<sup>127</sup> Dwivedi, 1995, p100

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<sup>128</sup> Birdwood, 1864, p33. Dwivedi, 1995, p111 and 147

<sup>129</sup> *The Bombay Times*, 24/12/1859, p819

<sup>130</sup> Burns, 1918, p15

from at least as early as the 1700s; Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (published 1719) spent a large percentage of the book listing inventories of his wealth.<sup>131</sup> India was, to the East India Company, a vast resource that had not yet been fully exploited. When the British government took direct control of India in 1858, censuses and inventories of capital became a necessity for taxation and exploitation. Museums, such as the Madras Central Museum, the Bombay Central Museum, and subsequently the V&A, were seen as ideal institutions for the indexing of items, both organising and classifying objects.<sup>132</sup> As with the native elite, to know was to claim ownership, the Great Exhibition being an exemplar of the British government displaying items from across the Empire to demonstrate the extent of British rule.<sup>133</sup> Without knowledge, governing the Subcontinent would have been superficial and without substance. Displaying examples of resources in a government institution would have extended the idea of sovereignty. Moreover, the display of a region's wealth in a public space encouraged a comparison with similar spaces, allowing its relative prosperity to be quantified.

Understanding the resources a region was able to produce was vital in the pursuit of a

country's development. Analysis of the Bombay Presidency enabled Buist to identify the viability of cotton production. Whilst eventually leading to a disastrous recession, the boom period was a phenomenal success for Bombay and had helped the city progress from a relative Colonial backwater to one of the finest cities in India. Likewise, Birdwood's *Catalogue of the Economic Vegetable Products of the Bombay Presidency* (1862), originally intended as a catalogue of the V&A's collection, identified all the agricultural crops of the region and was so successful that before he left India it had been reprinted twice.<sup>134</sup> The work also formed the basis for future exhibitions in France and England, demonstrating the importance such research had on developing an international reputation.<sup>135</sup> The V&A, founded on the reputations and energy of both Buist and Birdwood, had the promise of being an excellent research institution which Bombay could use to improve its economy and develop stability.

Research was also of vital importance for tackling the growing problem of famine. In the days of the East India Company, particularly during the eighteenth and early nineteenth century, famine was considered an act of God; an unavoidable fact of life on the

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<sup>131</sup> Defoe, 1870

<sup>132</sup> Prakash, 1999, p21

<sup>133</sup> Prakash, 1999, p22

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<sup>134</sup> Birdwood, 1862, p5. *Journal of Indian Art*, 1900, p45

<sup>135</sup> *Journal of Indian Art*, 1900, p45

Subcontinent.<sup>136</sup> However, throughout the nineteenth century, it was increasingly believed that this problem could be solved through science.<sup>137</sup> Buist, fascinated by natural history, organised the first meteorological surveys in Bombay on the island of Colaba in 1842, as well as writing reports on possible agricultural improvements to help reduce the magnitude of the problem.<sup>138</sup> In Delhi and Agra during 1860s it was also found that famine management could be improved by transporting food to the affected areas by rail.<sup>139</sup> However, the famine in Orissa in 1865 was a catastrophe as rain in the area failed leading to widespread food shortages and approximately a million people died as a result.<sup>140</sup>

Cash crops, such as indigo and cotton, were considered to be a factor in causing widespread famines. These plantations diverted resources away from food production, often demanding fertile land which was appropriated from local peasants. In turn, unable to grow their own food or make an income, the peasants became dependent on the plantations. In Bombay, the cotton boom encouraged the planting of an increasing acreage at the expense of grain production. Much of the land around Nagpur and Aurangabad, both extremely fertile areas, was replanted with

cotton to meet rapidly rising demands. With Bombay's insular geographical position, it was dependent on resources from the local area north of it for food and water. However, as cash crops' acreage increased, the availability of fertile farm land decreased, making Bombay more dependent on distant resources. A general failure of monsoons in 1876 brought wide scale famine to India, including much of the Bombay Presidency. While Madras, Mysore, and Hyderabad fared badly, Bombay, under the leadership of Governor Sir Philip Wodehouse (1872–1877) minimised damage caused by the drought effectively and without significant expenditure.<sup>141</sup> It is unclear if the V&A was part of this success story, but it is possible that the PWD considered this institution as a potential aid in helping to solve this type of problem.

The Museum took a long time to build because of circumstances and bureaucracy. After the PWD took over, they surveyed the site and found that the foundations had sunk, resulting in the only two completed walls being 'out of plumb' and requiring demolition.<sup>142</sup> The PWD also decided to change the plans because the building now looked out of date and the architect had passed away. The lengthy process of approving plans was detailed by Birdwood in a complaint letter to the Times of India in 1868. According to him, plans first had to be

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<sup>136</sup> Moon, 1990, p805

<sup>137</sup> Prakash, 1999, p107

<sup>138</sup> Buist, 1842. *The Bombay Times*, 08/10/1845, p662

<sup>139</sup> Moon, 1990, p806

<sup>140</sup> Moon, 1990, p807

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<sup>141</sup> Moon, 1990, p841

<sup>142</sup> *Photographic Album of Bombay Views*, 1872



submitted to the Bombay government for approval, which, for the V&A, included the interior alterations. On approval, the documents were returned to the architects (Messrs Scott and McClelland) for details before being sent to the Executive Engineer for estimation. These plans, as with all buildings, would have exceeded the initial estimates and would therefore have been returned for revision and re-estimation by the engineer. Designs were finally posted to Calcutta to be forwarded to the Home Government for finalisation and then returned, permitting the work to begin. Birdwood exasperatedly stated that this process could take five years to be completed.<sup>143</sup> Indeed, the University and Elphinstone College took the government approximately seven years to construct.<sup>144</sup> While using iron interiors was cheaper, the plans had to be sent to England for quotations. The architects finally commissioned Messrs. P. D. Bennett and Company of Birmingham to produce the ironwork, but further delays occurred when the iron frames were lost at sea.<sup>145</sup>

By the time the Museum was finally opened by the Governor, Sir Seymour Fitzgerald (1867-1872) in 1872, the institution seems to have lost relevance.<sup>146</sup> From as early

as 1875 Eugene Schrottky, in a reader's letter to the editor, accused the Government of being uninterested in the Museum stating that, without continued private funding, the institution had become 'nothing but a magnificent godown, a gilded store-room, containing a meagre collection of curiosities'. While comments on the Museum's collections were occasionally complimentary, many Times of India articles, such as one from the 30th March 1892, gave the Museum a poor review, describing the collection as useless and unattractive. At this time, the then curator, in a letter to the Government dated the 4th March 1892, suggested that the Museum should be reconfigured into a Trades Museum, removing the taxidermy collections that had been gathered in the last decade. Despite the Museum's past history, 'Mr Marshall, the secretary of the Chamber of Commerce, informed Mr Cotton, President of the Municipal Corporation that the Committee of the Chamber do not advocate the establishment of a Trades Museum in Bombay'. They could not see the commercial benefit which thirty years earlier had prompted the creation of the institution. Some officials were quoted as saying 'the Curator of the "Victoria and Albert Museum" is going to teach the mercantile community the A B C of their own proper work'.<sup>147</sup> This indicates the lack of interest in

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<sup>143</sup> Dwivedi, 1995, p111

<sup>144</sup> *The Times of India*, 28/01/1874, p2

<sup>145</sup> *The Engineer*, 16/08/1867, p128. *The Architect*, 12/03/1870, p124

<sup>146</sup> Fern, 1926, p6

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<sup>147</sup> *The Times of India*, 30/03/1892, p4

the V&A Museum and how irrelevant the concept of an Economic Museum had become. According to *The Times of India*, the Municipal Corporation eventually agreed to pay Rs. 100 a month towards the upkeep of the Trades Museum.<sup>148</sup> However, this was clearly a token amount, representing the Corporation's support of the community and to curry favour with the government. It is also clear, by the lack of references to the Museum in subsequent Bombay government annual reports that it did not undertake significantly influential research.

### *Epitaph*

The V&A never achieved its ambition of becoming a research centre or a museum that housed a complete catalogue of India's natural history resources. The Gardens proved very popular, particularly among the Indian peasantry, but the Museum was often little seen.<sup>149</sup> If it was visited people usually went to see a 'Wonder House' where spectacle was sought rather than education by 'second sight'.<sup>150</sup>

Two factors predominantly sealed the fate of the Museum. Clearly there was consistently a lack of funding, resulting in the Museum often being closed and the curatorship being shared with a better paid professorship and, as a result, research was probably mostly

associated with the University. Secondly the demographics and land use of the city changed with the removal of the Fort during Bartle Frere's Governorship. The Fort wall's had restricted the growth of the city and therefore the wealthiest people lived outside in large estates around Byculla, while inside the walls the poor predominantly lived in cramped conditions. When the walls were removed, the city slowly opened out and it became more prestigious to live in the Fort area whilst the poorer housing moved outside the 'walls'. This meant that those most likely to see the Museum were no longer living in the vicinity. As time passed, more factories and mills were constructed in the area, making it a less appealing day out for the gentry. After the Victoria Terminus was constructed in 1887, tourists passing through the city would end their visit there by boarding a train to travel into India, thereby bypassing the Museum. The institution was finally redundant with the construction of the Prince of Wales Museum (1914).<sup>151</sup> As an imperial museum in the centre of the city between the docks and the Terminus, the Prince of Wales Museum's identity was recognisable and could be viewed and understood in the same context as museums in Britain and Calcutta. The V&A went through several rebranding exercises but all were largely unsuccessful; the main draw to

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<sup>148</sup> *The Times of India*, 30/03/1892, p4

<sup>149</sup> Chopra, 2011, p228

<sup>150</sup> Guha-Thakurta, 2004, p79

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<sup>151</sup> Dwivedi, 1995, p200

the site was the Gardens which continued to rise in popularity after a zoo was included in approximately 1888.

The modern structure is the result of a conservation project between ‘the Municipality of Mumbai, the Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage (INTACH), and the Jamnalal Bajaj Foundation’. This project, intriguingly, was the first case of private donation for the restoration of a public monument in the history of modern India, and the first private Indian investment on the Museum since 1865. Costing approximately \$454,545 to restore, the project began in December 1997, with a report from conservation architect Vikas Dilawari, and was completed in October 2004.<sup>152</sup>

### *Conclusion*

The V&A was founded as an economic museum in the unique climate of nineteenth century colonial Bombay. The institution emerged from an Indian tradition of economic museums combined with a trend for industrial expositions, begun by the Great Exhibition, and the development of the British natural history museum. Its aim was to be a centre of research and a place for independent learning. For Birdwood this also meant the protection of

Indian design and the development of industry that embraced, not destroyed, these valuable skills, as they were perceived to have done in Britain.

Despite never completely fulfilling their ambitions, different groups in the city took on the project as the social political and economic landscape developed. Buist was the first to try and create a museum in Bombay and, although it did not fully materialise, the Central Museum was the first stage required for the creation of the V&A. It outlined the challenges involved in creating an institution, the necessity of a purpose built structure, and provided the foundation for the V&A collection. The inception of the V&A was credited to the native elite, who, in 1858, needed to express their loyalty to Britain, distancing themselves from the Indian Mutiny. They adopted the idea of the Museum and Gardens because it was consistent with the tradition of philanthropic investment prevalent in the city, a preoccupation with educational centres in the late 1850s, and their position within the colonial framework. The cotton boom facilitated the initial stages of the project, enabling the creation of the Gardens to be expedited and completed in 1862. However, the construction of the Museum was hampered by the 1865 recession, private money disappearing, and the PWD taking over its development. The organisation probably took over because they expected the Museum to

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<sup>152</sup> UNESCO Asia Pacific Heritage Awards, 2005

help research and provide resources which would deliver economic and development benefits. Rising costs, bureaucracy, and numerous construction delays hindered the creation of the Museum until its opening in

1872. By this date policies and concerns had altered, the geography and demography of the city had changed, and the Museum never gained the support it needed to be successful. 🏛️

## Appendix A

*A list of the objects donated to the Museum for the 18 months ending on the 31st December 1863:*

Specimens from North Canara and fibres donated by Birdwood

Specimens of wood from Callian donated by N. A. Dalzell

Plumbago from Ceylon donated by Bartle Frere

Specimens, including botanical items, from Canara donated by Bartle Frere

Koftgaree inlaid items donated by Lieutenant Government of the Punjab

Carved sandalwood table from Koompta donated by Munguldas Nathoobhoy

Zanzibar dried fish donated by Colonel R. L. Playfair

Two matchlocks; one Arabian and one Kutch, one stone box with silver details from Hubba Hill, one silver model of a mausoleum, one carved ebony box, one sandalwood model of a Hindu temple, one model of a Burmese platform, three aprons, one lace scarf, and one bag donated by Rao of Citch

Plaster figures and specimens of grains, fibres, woods, etc. from the Russian Exhibition donated by G. W. Terry

Agra sandstone and black coral carving donated by W. Walker

A large snakeskin from Siam donated by Captain Winckler

(Birdwood, 1864, p59)

## Appendix B

*List of notables at the first meeting for the Museum in 1858.*

Europeans: A. Malet, Col. Birdwood, Lieut. Col. Pope, Rev. Dr Wilson, Dr Peet, Dr Birdwood, Prof. Sinclair, W. Crawford, R. Knight, W. F. Hunter, M. S. Campbell, R. Ryrie, E. Heycock, F. Hutchinson, F. Leggett, etc. (15)

Natives: Dr Carvalho, Dr Gomes, Dr Bhawoo Dajee, Dr Narayan Dajee, Dr Atmaram Pandurang, Cursetjee Jamsetjee, Sorabjee Jamsetjee, Jugunnath Sunkersett, Bomanjee Hormusjee Wadia, Venayeckrow Jugunnathjee, Venayeck Wasudewji, Dadabhoy Nowrojee, Nowrojee Furdonjee, Narayan Dinanathjee, Ramlall Thackorsedas, Jamsetjee Jeejeebhoy, Dhunjeebhoy Cursetjee, Cursetjee Furdoonjee, Munguldas Nathoobhoy, Vurjeevundas Madhaodas, Cursetjee Nassarwanjee Cama, Muncherjee Pestonjee Wadia, Mirza Alli Mahomed Khan, Framjee Nassarwanjee, Ardasir Cursetjee Dady, Hormusjee Cursetjee Dady, Furdonjee Hormusji, Nowroji Manockji Wadia, Raho Bahadur Bhaskur Damodar, Hajee Ismael Hajee Hubib, Candas Narrondas, Balajee Pandurung, Dosabhoy Sorabjee Moonshee, Edaljee Nusserwanjee, Ardasir Framjee, Pestonjee Jehangir, Culliandas Mohundas, Rev Dhunjeebhoy Nowrojee, etc. (38)

(The Bombay Times, 18/12/1858, p788)



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