

SAJID ABBAS visits the old Tollinton Market and its surroundings to see what changes seem to be in progress

Photo



Closed shops in the Market

Restoring Tollinton

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The old Tollinton Market and the area surrounding have been in the news again for some time now. The green patch east of the well known edifice of modern Lahore, has recently been dolled up, walkways lined with brick have been laid, gazebos made of iron have been fixed. There are other decorations made of metal to make the place pleasing to the eye.

The renovation was perhaps part of the activity going on in the neighbourhood, where building of a food bazaar was in progress. At the same time it was pleasing to learn that the authorities had taken steps to conserve the structure of the old Tollinton Market as an historical and ancient vestige of Lahore.

Work on renovation of the historic building seems to have commenced. One can see heaps of rubble along the walls, plaster peeled off, making the place ready for replastering.

The old Tollinton Market, located west of the crossing where the old and new Anarkali Bazaars meet the Mall is one of the oldest buildings of modern Lahore

that the English built after the occupation of Lahore and the Punjab in 1849. The building was made for the specific purpose of housing exhibits of the Punjab Exhibition, 1864, the first ever exhibition of its kind, known to be held in this part of the world.

Few people realise that the Punjab Exhibition of 1864 was not just an organised fair, it was, more or less, the place where the seeds of the idea of Pakistan were sown. It was more of an oblique declaration, made indirectly, that this part of the world was and is quite apart from the rest of the territory known as the South Asian Sub-Continent. It affirmed, in a way, the natural boundaries of our very own civilisation, the Indus Valley Civilisation.

One of the finest account of the show was given by the London Illustrated News. The exhibits represented the Punjab and the surrounding territories, an area comprising the present day Pakistan, including Kashmir and the hills right up to the borders of China in the north, the valley of the Ganges and Hundustan in the east and the bounds of the sands of Rajputana in the south.

Exhibits that were displayed were collected from all over the Punjab and adjoining territories. These included manuscripts, volumes of illuminated works, examples of calligraphy and paintings, costly ornaments and priceless jewels. Even a replica of the Koh-e-Noor was on show.

Other things that were exhibited, may hardly be of any significance today, but displayed the industry of this place and its people. There were samples of salt and minerals mined in the Salt Range. Products of the chemical and metal industry of those days. Then there were products and specialities of enterprises of the land, such as, textile and loom products, pashmina or finely woven cashmere shawls, carpets and rugs, zari or embroidery in thread of gold. There were scores of products representing the

industry in the country, articles of leather, copperware, silver ware, ornaments of gold.

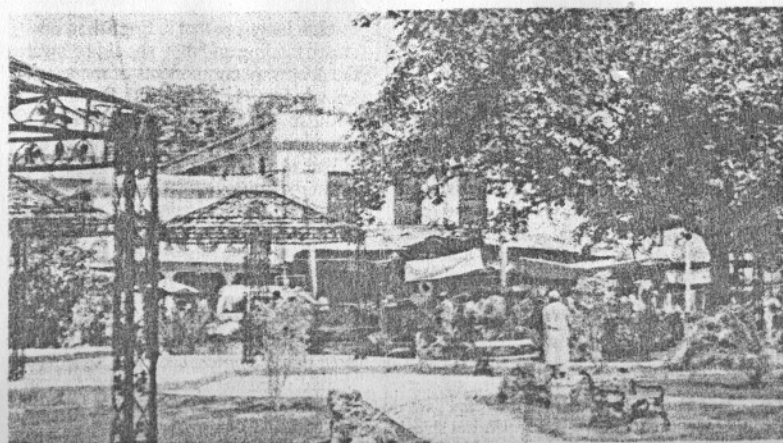
The plant and wild life of the country, too, was on show. Stuffed birds, reptiles and animals were there to be seen by visitors.

Nevertheless, there was a painful reminder, too. Till a decade and a half earlier Lahore had been a centre of production of arms and weapons, when it was occupied by the English, the arms industry was disbanded and the armourers dispersed. On display were arms and weapons that Lahore produced, such as carbines and rifles, muskets, jazails, long muzzled affairs fired from the shoulder, spears, javelins and swords, guns cast here including smoothbores and howitzers. Lighter pieces transportable by camel back and still lighter affairs, suitable for mountain warfare and towed by a man or a goat.

All that was displayed proved that this part of the world had a civilisation self-reliant and separate from other parts of the Sub-Continent.

At the time of building, the Punjab Exhibition House happened to be one of the finest structures to be constructed in Lahore. It had to be, after all, the exhibition showed the wonderful products and produce of the latest Jewel of the Empire. The structure was built as an oblong in the east west direction, sixty-six metres long, having an area of five hundred square metres or so. Light came in through skylights, in the northern and southern walls. There were two more large skylights, each three and a half metres high, in the oblong exhibition hall. The structure was surrounded by a two and a quarter metre wide veranda, some parts of which has successfully endured, to this day, despite many an unholy attempt to destroy. The entrance on the east carried the Insignia of the Sovereign, carved in wood. This has vanished by now.

It seems that within twenty years of building, the structure went through some changes and additions were made. The



Old Tollinton Market from the Artisans' park

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Renovation in progress

place was divided in three parts, a nine meter big hall was carved out in the middle. There were to be two large wings on the sides of a big hall, each wing about thirty one metres long and about eight metres across. Each wing was flanked by a long structure, a little less than five metres wide, both on the north and the south.

The part of the building in the west was exactly the same. In between there was the hall. The height was about eleven metres to the top of the gable. In 1920, the gable was removed by Sir Ganga Ram who was the Executive Engineer at that time and the structure got a flat roof, however other features, such as the veranda, the size, shape and number of ventilators remained as before.

Now one learns that shops are planned in the renovated premises that seems to be admirable, for, it could go to generate some income to maintain the premises and above all employ the tenants to exhibit a living heritage. One would suggest using the tenants as a living heritage be given a serious thought, for, their experience of so many years of association with the Tollinton Market can prove to be a useful asset for attracting tourists. ■