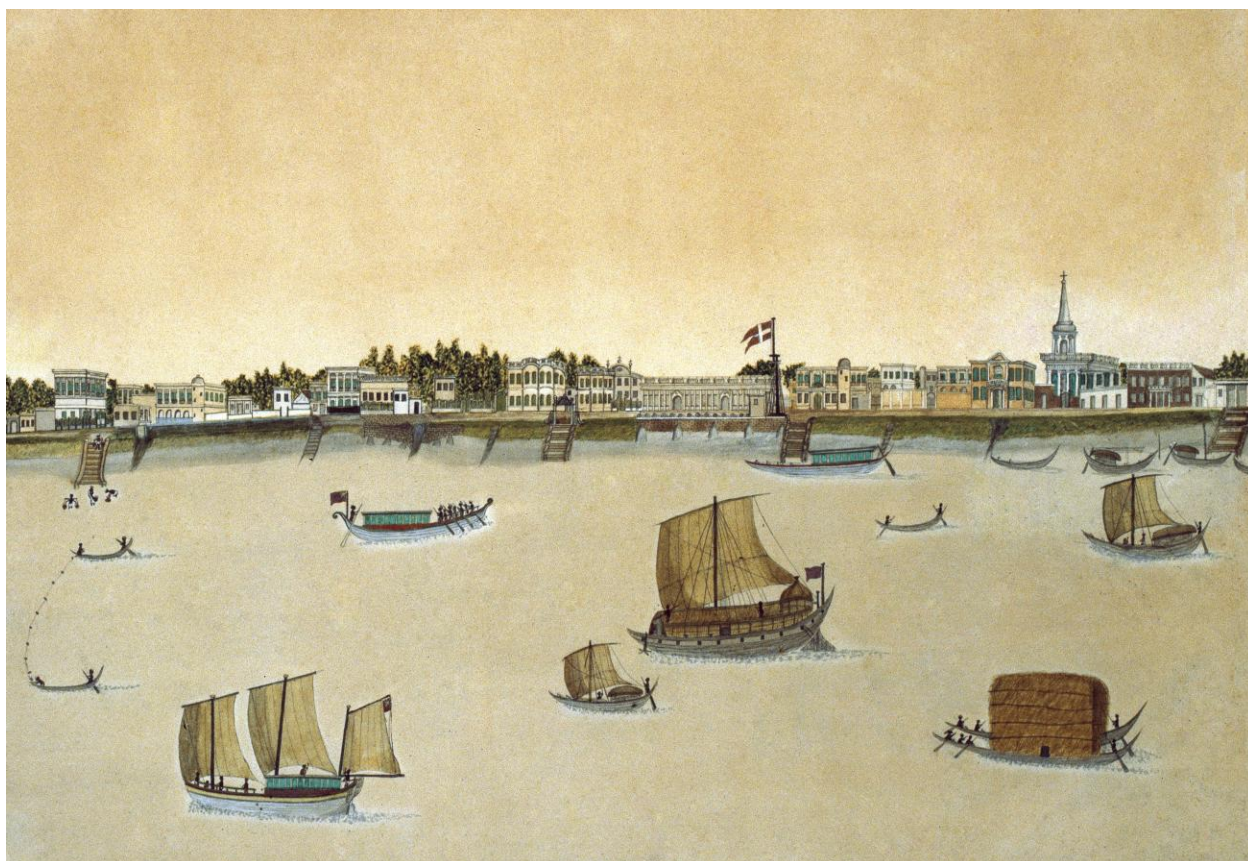


The Serampore Initiative

of the National Museum of Denmark



The Indian-Danish Heritage of Serampore

September 2011

Project Proposals

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The Serampore Initiative of the National Museum of Denmark for the preservation of the Indo-Danish cultural heritage in Serampore

Statement of significance

Serampore is a town of great heritage value in West Bengal because of the location at the bank of the Hooghly River, distributary of the holy Ganges River, and the specific history relating to the Indo Danish trading relations from 1755 to 1845. The urban plan and built heritage from this period still create an important backdrop to the modern urban development providing a unique historic identity to the town.

Statement of concern

The National Museum of Denmark is concerned about the secluded Indo-Danish heritage of Serampore and keen to investigate and document the common history and further to contribute to the conservation of the built heritage for the future generations in close cooperation with the concerned Indian partners.

Statement of intent

The scope of the Serampore Initiative by the National Museum of Denmark is pursuant to the municipal vision as it is framed in the “Goals and Objective of Vision 2025” emphasizing on the intentions of “conserving natural reserve and heritage”.

The municipal Environmental Management Plan includes twelve prioritized development objectives, among which especially three issues are of relevance to heritage : i) increase the percentage of open space and green cover; ii) conserve and restore historic and heritage buildings; and iii) develop specific river front projects for improvement of the environment.

Statement on Modalities

The Serampore Initiative of the National Museum of Denmark envisages to establish a close cooperation with the main stakeholders in Serampore and suggests to form a working committee including representatives of Serampore Municipality; West Bengal Heritage Commission; and the Department for Urban Development and Town and Country Planning and Department of Municipal Affairs of the Government of West Bengal.

Introduction

In 1755 the Danish Asiatic Company was granted the right to establish a trading post at Serampore (Srirampur) at the Hoogly River in West Bengal, about 25 kms north of Kolkata. The settlement was given the official Danish name of Frederiksnagore, though in daily use Serampore was maintained. The place remained on Danish hands until 1845, when the territory was ceded to the British, together with the other Danish trading post in India, Tranquebar (Tarangambadi) in Tamil Nadu.

Apart from its role as a commercial settlement, Serampore became an important centre of education. The Baptist mission produced and disseminated printed translations of the Bible in many Asian languages. Subsequently Serampore College, which was built under the protection of the Danish King Frederik 6, ranks among the oldest institutions in Asia with the right to confer academic degrees. Serampore College still operates today, with some of its faculties being affiliated to the University of Calcutta.

Several landmarks originating from the Danish period are immediately identifiable: The Government House (1771), the Lutheran St. Olav's Church (1806) and Serampore College (1823). Many other historic buildings and structures remain, but they are only partially preserved or in complete ruin and may not be immediately recognisable.

The Serampore Initiative by the National Museum of Denmark seems to be very timely indeed, as restoration of the former Danish Government House is already in progress at the initiative of the West Bengal Heritage Commission. However, other parts of the rich heritage are under eminent threat from lack of maintenance and urban development pressures. New constructions rising to 4 or 5 stories in reinforced concrete have become a main feature of the new townscape, and in the process of urban transformation precious heritage buildings are falling into ruin, possibly awaiting demolition.

In this process of modernisation there is an imminent risk that important buildings and heritage values are being irrevocably lost even before they are being identified and appreciated.

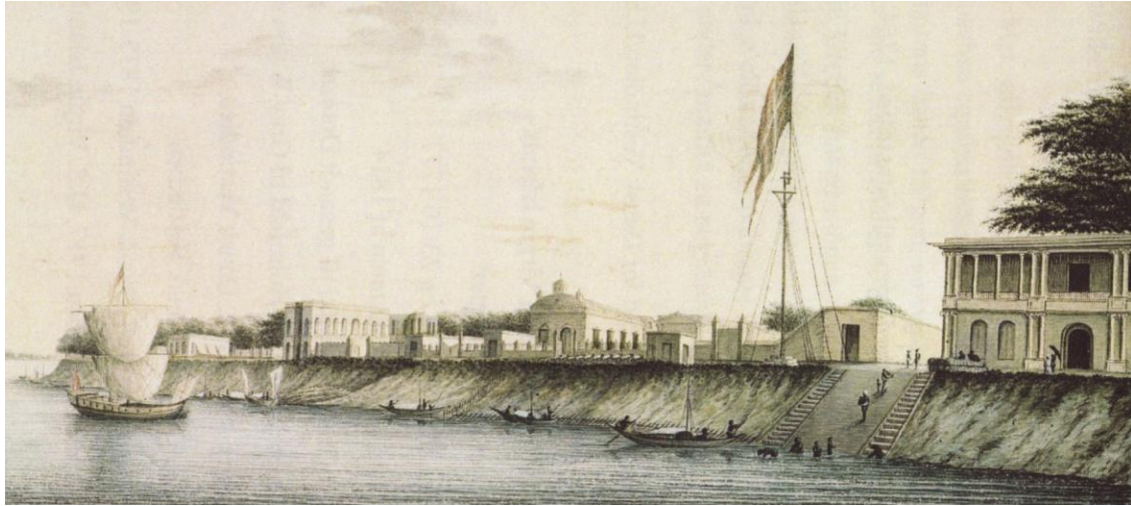
The aim of this project outline is to list a number of potential projects of restoration, renovation and surveying in Serampore's historic centre that the Serampore Initiative of the National Museum could help to carry out in cooperation with the concerned state and municipal authorities. The individual buildings and areas presented here should be seen in a wider context of all the important heritage buildings of Serampore, as identified by the Serampore Initiatives pre-study (2009) and presented in the report *Indo-Danish Heritage Buildings of Serampore* (2010).

Topography and urban development

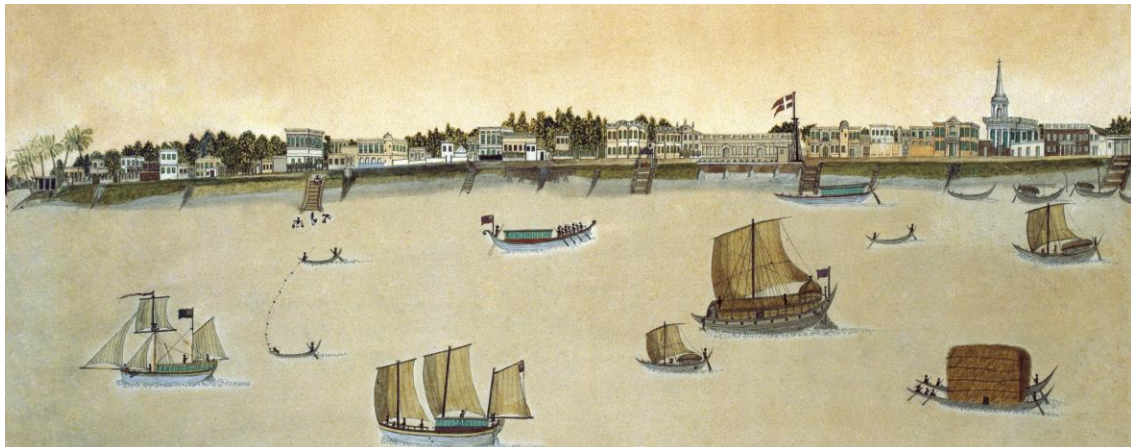
The early sketches and paintings originating from the Danish occupation in Serampore are depicting the silhouette of the town with the St. Olav Church as the most significant landmark and a long row of whitewashed buildings facing on to the river. Obviously the settlement pattern was oriented towards the river as the main line of seawards communication, but also in appreciation of the aesthetic and recreational qualities of the open vistas to the river and beyond.

For the most of the 19th century there was a quest for the picturesque and a shared aesthetic attitude with a preference for the neo-classical architectural style among the

Europeans. A contemporary traveller along the Hooghly in 1803 describes the buildings: “they were in themselves picturesque being white, with expensive porticoes to the south, and the windows closed by Venetian blinds painted green”



Serampore seen from Hooghly river. Drawn 1790 by Peter Anker (section only/ The Ethnographic Museum, Oslo).



Frederiksnagore (Serampore), a Danish town in Bengal, seen from Hooghly river. Drawn 1810 by J. Hammer. Coloured. (Mus. no. 261: 49/ section only/ The Danish Maritime Museum, Elsinore).

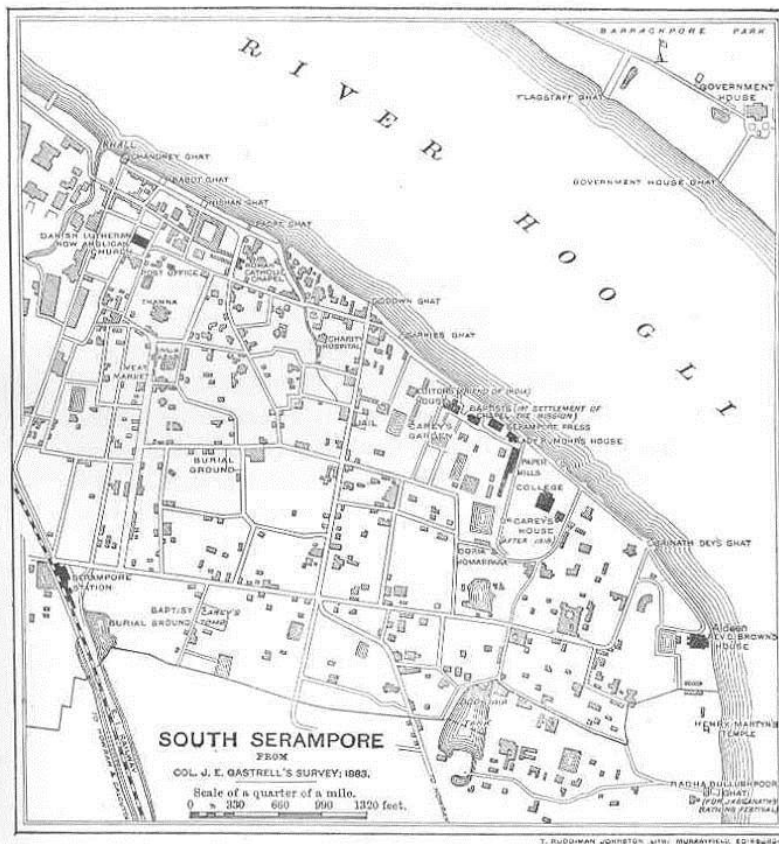
The appearance of the town has changed in the meantime. The long row of white painted mansions with open porches situated in green environment and facing on to the river have disappeared in favour of new apartment buildings built close to the river. However, a few historic buildings are still to be seen along the riverfront and many more can be identified in various parts of the town. Especially the many *ghats* (ramps and steps leading down to the river) constructed in red bricks are still a characteristic feature of the Indian architecture, which also appears at the early pictures of the Danish settlement.

The development of the town can be followed in some detail from four historic maps originating from 1827, 1841, 1860 and 1883. In a sequence of chronology the maps are presented in the following pages providing information on the topography and changing building patterns.

1841: "River Hoogly, Bandel to Garden Reach", Topographical map by Charles Joseph. (Section only, The Danish Maritime Museum, Elsinore)



1860: "The Town and Environs of Serampore, District Hooghly", Surveyor General of India. (section only, the Carey Library, Serampore).



1883: "South Serampore" plan according to Col. J.E.Gastrell's Survey (British Library?)

On the basis of the analysis of the townscape three distinct heritage precincts can be identified representing the original organisation of the early settlement in the 18th century:



1. To the east the Serampore College and related activities represented the academic and religious segment of the township;
2. The Danish administrative and commercial area was established in the centre with the Danish compound as the seat of the government and St. Olav Church as the most significant landmark;
3. The Indian landlords were residing in the western part of Serampore in large building complexes. Originally surrounded by open fields the remaining residences of the extended families are situated to the west of the "Danish Canal". Only a few of the buildings are preserved within the densely build up residential quarters.

The majority of the Indian population was settled further away from the river and the vernacular habitation of that time is hardly discernable today.

This organisation of the town remained largely intact until the railway connection from Kolkata to Howrah was constructed in 1854 resulting in a marked shift of orientation away from the river towards the new railway station. Subsequently new commercial activities developed in that area.

During the late 19th century industrial development was initiated by the establishment of the first Jute Mill in 1866 at the site of the former Botanical Garden next to the College resulting in a further segregation of the town from the river bank.

Between 1866 and 1915, six more jute mills were established within the Hooghly District. The local landlords, *thikadars* and mill-owners made arrangements for the habitation of the labour force around the factories. Due to the arrival of migrant workers, the population in Serampore increased from 24,440 to 44,451 between 1872 and 1901.

Along with the Jute mills, many other subsidiary factories were established in rural areas within the fringes of the town. This growth of the town has changed the original historic

townscape, but the main street pattern remains and the scale of the town has maintained a pleasing harmony. However, the finely moulded urban structure is a most vulnerable asset that requires special attention, if it is to be maintained in a future urban development.

A program for civic uplifting aiming at the improvement of living conditions is closely linked to the betterment of the amenities in the town and concern for the historic identity of the place. In this respect the river Hooghly and the surviving evidence of the Danish history provide an exceptional rich potential for Serampore.

Municipal Development Planning

The Bengal Municipal Act 1998 requires that the municipalities prepare adequate Development Plans to guide future development. The draft plan for Serampore provides detailed analysis of the current situation and outlines the future planning objectives.

The rate of population growth is very high, creating an immense pressure on infrastructure services and housing requirements of the area. The majority of the population is in the low income range, posing an immense demand on the municipality for the creation of more opportunities of earning increase and improvement of general living standards.

The challenges of providing adequate social infrastructure of a reasonable standard regarding health, education and decent housing are eminent, but also issues relating to heritage conservation, creation of recreational open space as well as preservation of the aesthetic quality of the landscape are being addressed in the plan.

The twelve prioritized Development Objectives for the Environmental Management Plan include the following three issues pertaining to heritage:

- Increase in the percentage of open spaces and green cover.
- Conservation and restoration of historic and heritage buildings.
- Development of the river bank through river front development projects.

At the municipal level the Plan recognizes that “the Heritage Conservation Committee is functioning proper, but the unavailability of fund is a major hindrance”.

The scope of the Serampore Initiative by the National Museum of Denmark is considered pursuant to the overall municipal vision as it is framed in the perspective of Goals and Objective of Vision 2025, which is explicitly mentioning the intentions of “conserving natural reserve and heritage (national, local and regional), and providing sufficient space for housing and social infrastructure for the anticipated and allocated population in the future”.

Heritage Management Strategy

At the state government level the West Bengal Heritage Commission has taken the initiative to start the restoration of the former Danish Government House. The restoration of this building could form part of a more comprehensive effort for preserving the unique heritage originating from the Danish, the British and the Indian periods, and upgrading the heritage buildings together with the likewise historically significant industrial

buildings in a fruitful coexistence with the contemporary architecture, together making up the townscape of a modern city with deep historic roots.

A successful management strategy for preserving and integrating the Indian-Danish heritage into a future urban development can best be adopted through a joint cooperation between public and private parties with a vested interest in the future development, and by hearing all involved stakeholders about priorities and preferred modes of cooperation.

It is hoped that this initiative can help to facilitate the process and lead to a further Danish involvement in a joint cooperation initiative for heritage preservation in Serampore.

Development of cultural tourism

The Indian- Danish heritage constitutes a considerable asset for the development of cultural tourism. Two independent studies of the potential for tourism development along the Hooghly River have been conducted in recent years as summarised below. The Danish Serampore Initiative is supportive of both these proposals:

Europe on the Ganges.

The study is carried out by INTACH, The Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage, on behalf of the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India. It describes the heritage assets at seven sites along the Hooghly River from Kolkata to Bandel.

Ganga heritage river cruise circuit

The study is initiated by West Bengal Tourist Development Corporation Ltd., with the aim to develop tourism related infrastructure, including jetty and riverfront beautification for exploiting the tourism potential of 12 identified destinations along the Hooghly River. The upstream river circuit is covering a distance of 260 km stretching from Kolkata (Millenium Park Jetty) to Murshidabad (Outram Jetty).

The firm WEBCON (West Bengal Consultancy Organisation Ltd) was appointed to conduct the study that is carried out by an interdisciplinary study team included tourism - and management professionals, engineers and architects.

The following results are anticipated:

1. Increased revenue generation for the operators, local business community, local artisans and self-employed at the destination.
2. Increased job opportunities within transport, guiding, food and handicrafts sales.
3. Increased awareness among local people arising out of interaction with foreign and domestic tourists.

These studies form a sound basis for subsequent planning of cultural tourism, which will be attractive to local as well as to international visitors. Marketed internationally the Indian-European heritage along the Hooghly River could become an attraction on line with the Darjeeling Railway, the Sunderban National Park and other well-known tourist destinations in West Bengal.

Project Proposals

The project proposals are centred on the preservation and enhancement of the former Indian-Danish heritage originating from the period 1755 to 1845. The aim is to enhance the specific historic identity of Serampore, but also to improve the aesthetic and recreational qualities of the town, which are so closely relating to the Hooghly River.

In a longer perspective the scope of the immediate restoration efforts may be extended to include heritage values relating to the subsequent British and industrial development.

The following proposals for restoration and urban improvement schemes are based on the survey carried out in 2009. The list of project proposals provides an overview of initiatives that may help to preserve the remains of the Indian-Danish heritage as an integrated part of the urban environment.

So far the individual proposals have not been discussed with the relevant Indian authorities, but the catalogue of possible initiatives is put forward for a closer scrutiny and subject to discussions among stakeholders about priorities and possible funding.

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1. St. Olav Church

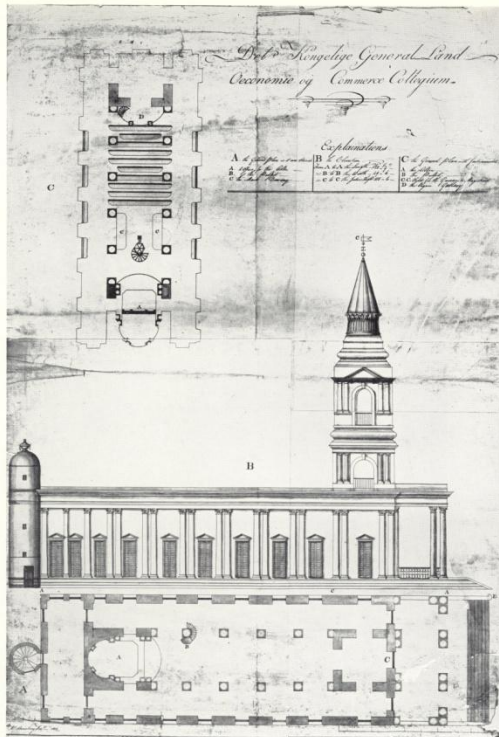
The Construction of St. Olav Church was initiated in 1800 and the nave was completed in 1806. Subsequently the portico and the bell tower were completed in 1821.

Many of the churches in the time of the British in India were inspired from St. Martin-in-the-Fields in London, including St. Olav in Serampore, as well as St. John's and St. Andrew's in Kolkata. The church became the major landmark of Serampore appearing at all the early depictions of the town. The steeple still contributes to the town silhouette, especially when arriving by boat or viewed from the opposite side of the river.

The church belongs to the West Bengal Church under the administration of the Kolkata Diocese. Day-to-day maintenance is carried out by the Serampore College. The congregation is mainly from the College, but presently the church is not in daily use, as the roof construction is in a precarious condition and has started to collapse.

Restoration works may include:

- Restoration of external facades
- Restoration of roof
- Repair and painting of doors and windows
- Restoration of the interior
- Landscaping of church ground



14. St. Olav's Church, Serampore.
(Architectural drawing by 'Lt.
Armstrong, 1806'.)

15. St. Olav's Church, Serampore.
1800-1821. Detail of the portico and
the steeple.





Present view of main gate to the Government Compound



Aquatint of the main gate with the King Frederik 6's monogram (British Library)



Current condition of wall surrounding the former Danish Compound towards the Church Street



The southern gateway building of the compound obscured by vendor stalls

2. The Government Compound

The surroundings of the Government House within the protecting wall have maintained the former importance as the administrative centre of Serampore due to the continued use for administrative purposes by the Serampore Sub Division and the Court. The continued importance and prestige of the site is further testified by the construction of the new Court Building.

The brick wall surrounding the former Danish Compound was originally erected on the initiative by Ole Bie in 1780. The total length is approximately 600 m. The western part along Church Street is apparently preserved to its full height, but is also the part in the worst condition. To the other sides the wall is lower and hardly visible due to the many stalls along the exterior perimeter of the compound.

A new temporary storehouse in cement blocks and with corrugated iron roofing has been erected at the back of the former Government House. This building blocks the access to the southern gateway that forms part of the old wall. Relocating the storehouse and restoring the southern gateway would have a specific bearing on the Governor's House and its immediate surroundings.

Restoration works may include:

- Restoration of the wall, including top capping, plastering and lime washing of the whole wall
- Restoration of the northern gateway building and the guard's house.
- Demolition and relocation of the temporary storehouse
- Restoration of the southern gateway building and adoption for new use.
- Landscaping of the whole of the compound, incl. brick pavement of the access roads and environmental improvements as an open space for recreation and public events, including cleaning of the water tank and restoration of the brick seating arrangement.



1960



2009

3. The former Danish Government House

The former Danish government house was built in several stages, but the original façade from the 1770s still exists. The building showing traits from the Danish, the English and the Indian periods, represents a long and fascinating history of governance. Most recently the building was used as court house, but in 1999 it was condemned after the collapse of part of the roof.

In 2008 the West Bengal Heritage Commission started restoring the building. The first phase of work included the structural parts (walling and roofing). The second phase including floors and joinery repairs (doors and windows) was started in 2011.

Regarding the future use of the building after completion there seems to be consensus that the historic building will serve cultural functions for the general public.

Additional work may include:

- Documentation of the building history
- Organising of a stakeholder workshop to discuss the future use of the building, e.g. as museum or culture house
- Establishing a small public museum in part of the building, presenting the local history in 2-3 exhibition rooms.



Photo of the church from the 1930s with an open square in front allowing a free view to the church



Traffic congestion at St. Olav's Square



Historic house at the corner of St. Olav's Square disfigured by later additions.

4. The square in front of St. Olav's Church

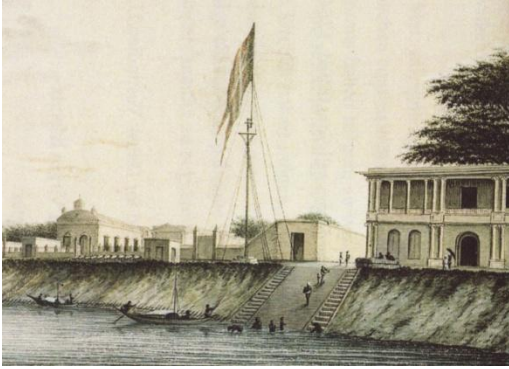
Situated between Nisan Ghat and the Government Compound, the funnel-shaped square in front of St. Olav's church formed the central space of the town during the time of the Danish.

It is likely that the layout was planned in conjunction with the construction of the church, as the open space provides a full view of the church. The perspective view was further emphasized by an alignment of trees to each side of the square as it appears from early photographs and plans.

Today the square is taken up by Serampore's busy bus terminal and by an enclosed memorial ground immediately in front of the church, possibly dating from the 1930s. The Danish salute cannons have been placed by the water basin on the memorial ground. The high fence and tall trees, together with the general urban development now blur the former view of the church.

Renovation works may include:

- Relocation of the bus terminal to the planned location near the train station.
- Landscaping of the square as a centre of the historic town, including the felling of the trees in the middle of the square, and planting of new trees along both sides of the square.
- Modification of the form and high fence of the memorial ground, possibly moving the saluting cannons back to the original position at the river bank.



Section of painting 1790 by Peter Anker showing the Nisan Ghat and neighboring buildings



The ruined building next to Nisan Ghat which appears on the painting by Peter Anker 1790.



The southern part of the building is occupied by the police forces.

5. Buildings along the western side of Nisan Ghat Lane.

The most prominent go-down of the Danish period was located immediately on the river front as it appears from the early maps and drawings. The building has disappeared in favour of the present SDO residence, which is located in the middle of a large garden surrounded by a modern wall. A series of wall paintings from the 1990s depict sceneries of Serampore's history providing a popular reading of past events that form the specific identity of the place.

Next to the SDO residence is a ruined mansion located along Nisan Ghat Lane between N.N. Roy Street and Mahatma Ghandi Road. Restoring the building would re-establish a prominent example of the original buildings fronting on to the river. The building was previously an importance for the perception of the access from the river to the Danish compound, as it appears from the 1790 painting by Peter Anker.

The northern part of the complex is originally built in two stories with an open portico facing on to the river. This part of the building is however in ruin and "not for use by order of P.W.D. ".

The southern part of the building is partially in ruin and the remaining part including the courtyard is occupied by The West Bengal Emergency Police under the District Magistrate.

The whole structure needs a careful survey and the preparation of a detailed project proposal before decisions can be taken about a possible future use. Once restored this building could however be an extraordinary example of the fine houses and atmosphere of Serampore around 1800.

Restoration works may include:

- Surveying and restoring the ruined mansion at Nisan Ghat Lane between N.N. Roy Street and Mahatma Ghandi Road.
- Restoration of the mural paintings at the wall surrounding the SDO compound.



River bank to the west of Nisan Ghat Lane



The Indian pavilion at the end of Nisan Ghat Lane



River bank to the east of Nisan Ghat Lane



The fence and seating arrangement

6. Landscaping of the river bank area.

The many ghats along the stretch of the river in the historical town centre provide a specific quality to the environment, serving both a practical function and evoking an aesthetically appealing sense of the close relationship to the river.

The Nisan Ghat Lane provides the direct connection between the river and the former Danish Compound. The significance of the landing place was emphasised by a battery of saluting cannons used for ceremonial purposes, a flagstaff and a guard's house.

The ghat still exists, whereas the other installations have disappeared in favour of a new pavilion and a modern arrangement with concrete seating and tables. The whole stretch of land makes up the foremost recreational amenity area along the river for the whole of Serampore. However, the constructions are in disrepair and the area lack regular up-keep.

Restoration and environmental improvements may include:

- Renovation of the Indian Pavilion and related Nisan Ghat.
- Reinstatement of the saluting cannon positions and flagstaff.
- Landscaping and improvement of the existing recreational facilities.
- Restoration of Bamboo Ghat.
- Restoration of Padre Ghat.



7. The Danish Cemetery

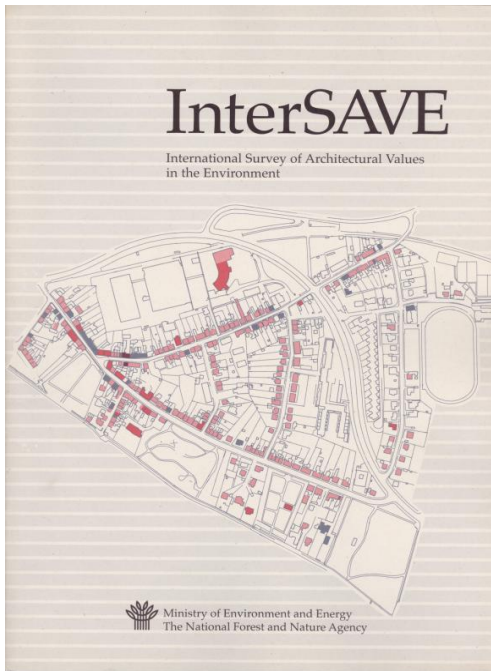
The Danish cemetery is listed as a Protected Monument under the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act of 1958 and is maintained by the Archaeological Survey of India.

The Danish cemetery in Serampore was reserved for Protestants and adjoining to it, separated by a low wall, was the burial ground of the Roman Catholics. In the early period the ground was only fenced by a living hedge, which was replaced by a brick wall in the 1770s. A total of 33 burial places can at present be immediately identified of which 16 seem to be listed by number. The three most notable commemorative epitaphs are of Factor Casper Top and the two Governors of the Danish possessions in Bengal, Ole (Olave) Bie and Jacob Krefting.

The site is protected by a surrounding wall and the iron gate at the entrance is only open by appointment. Recently new trees have been planted and the site is kept neat and clean. Almost all the masonry tombs have been renovated by the use of cement plaster and only few original details and ornaments have been preserved.

Restoration works may include:

- Restoring the grave monuments with hydraulic lime plaster, in order to preserve them for the future



Danish Survey of Architectural Values in the Environment (SAVE)



Southern Goswami family courtyard house



8. Survey of architectural values and conservation planning.

A systematic reconnaissance and registration of Serampore's heritage is required to obtain information on the remaining historic buildings worthy of preservation. A comprehensive survey should aim at identifying not only formerly Danish buildings, but also heritage relating to later historic periods during the time of the British and after independence, for example the Goswami Rasbari, as well as the industrial heritage of factory buildings and worker's quarters.

Inspiration for this type of building registration can be drawn from similar Indian studies or from the Danish Survey of Architectural Values in the Environment (SAVE) a national survey to document and restore heritage buildings in all of Denmark's municipalities.

The next step forward to preserve Serampore's heritage would be to declare the historic town centre a Heritage Zone and place the buildings under formal protection under the West Bengal Heritage Act.

Survey and documentation work may include:

- A comprehensive field survey to be carried out by a team of Indian and Danish heritage specialists, and including archival sources in Denmark. The survey will provide necessary information and a conceptual framework for defining an overall conservation strategy for Serampore
- Survey training programme for Indian and Danish students of architecture and young architects. The training as heritage surveyors includes the ability to recognise and evaluate heritage components and values, and the use of electronic tools for mapping and organising information.