



Putting the spotlight on philately and postal heritage



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Published: 23rd March 2021 05:33 AM | Last Updated: 23rd March 2021 05:33 AM

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The walk on Saturday was curated by Nam Veedu Nam Oor Nam Kadhai

By Express News Service

CHENNAI: The postal history of the city can be traced back to a little over three centuries ago when in 1712, Governor Harrison started a Company Postal Service to carry mails to Bengal. During the colonial era, the mails used to be carried by dak runners, who brought important news from places far and wide. With time, they were replaced by other messengers; soon several receiving post offices were set up and the city's postal service not only expanded into a systemic structure — with postal rules, laws and authority in place — but also became closely tied to the city's complex political history and cultural fabric.

On Saturday, around 20 philatelists, students, post crossers and heritage enthusiasts gathered at the General Post Office (GPO) on Beach Road, to trace, understand and initiate themselves with the city's postal history through a Living Heritage Experience Trail curated by Nam Veedu Nam Oor Nam Kadhai (NVNONK). The walk was led by architect-artist Srishti Prabhakar and architect-heritage enthusiast Aafreen.



As we stood under the shade of the 130-year-old, red-painted Indo-Saracenic building, we couldn't help but notice the majestic 125-foot edifice glisten under the morning sun rays. Constructed by British architect Robert Chisholm, the structure formatively featured Kerala roof-influenced crowns that were primarily influenced by his building assignments in Travancore, noted Aafreen, as we were guided into the sprawling post office, following protocols.



Seated in a corner at the age-old site, a staff member, who has been making visitors cognisant of the importance of its services said, "Despite the advent of tech-based applications, letters and postcards and usage of these services haven't seen a decline and they never will. However, with children becoming more inclined towards instant gratification and the virtual world, it's in our hands to preserve our postal heritage and inculcate the habit of writing and sending letters and postcards."

But, over the past few years and especially during the pandemic, she pointed out that many have started coming forward to send handwritten postcards. "Senior

citizens continue to use these services to stay in touch with their kin. With postal services also adapting to changing times and improving their trackability, the process has only become more seamless," she said.

After a quick tour of the structure, we headed to our next stop the Anna Road Head Post Office-Philatelic Bureau on Anna Salai, located about eight kilometres from the GPO. The quaint, red-white heritage building, formerly an electric theatre and the first cinema house of south India, was bought by the Posts and Telegraphs Department in the 1900s.

“When we talk about preservation and conservation of heritage buildings, a main aspect is to not put them into disuse. So, after the electric theatre was shut down, and later when there was a petition to raze it down. There were agitations among the heritage community and historian Theodore Baskaran was vital in developing and restoring it into the now thriving philately bureau,” shared Srishti.

The trail was laced with tidbits on cancellations, special postal covers, stamps and swaps by post crosser and professor T Jaisakthivel from the University of Madras and Mohana from the Bureau. “It’s been our aim to make people more aware of philately and postal services and we have continued our work through the pandemic, through virtual webinars. Once we tide through the pandemic, we hope to conduct more offline sessions,” added Mohana.

For details, visit Instagram page @ namvedu_ namaoor_ namkadhai

