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From dog-killing files to Moses Somake's mosque design, KMC unfolds Kurrachee's history



HANDLE WITH CARE: The materials are de-fumigated, brushed off with special cloths and ironed after a special tape is used to piece them together. The discoveries were made in 2002 from the clock tower. PHOTO: ASIF RAHMAN/EXPRESS

Each day the restorers make amazing discoveries about the people and the city

• SAAD RAHMAN

During the month of March 1902, the Kurrachee Municipal Corporation killed 60 dogs. This fact was notoriously recorded in a Dog File, which maintains the number and the location where the animals were killed month after month throughout the year.

This volume of incomparability is part of the thousands of documents dating to 1902 that were accidentally discovered in 2002 in cache from the clock tower of the Karachi Municipal Corporation (KMC) building located on H.A. Jaffri Road. Since then, records from the Yasmeen-e-Khalid Heritage Foundation have been working to preserve the little-known papers.

"We come across something magnificent every day," said Faiza Latif, who is in charge of the archive restoration programme. "The process is long - from taking out the docu-

mets, sorting them out and cleaning them, but in the end, it's all worth it."

She and other people involved in the project come across rare architectural drawings, road layouts and data every day. One of her assistants found a hand-made sketch of a cinema building. No one knew for sure if it was ever built.

"Some time in 1902, a citizen wrote to the KMC complaining that an oil-fired stove lamp in front of his house was lit up for two continuous days," Latif said. "Do you know what he wrote in the end of the letter? 'Who will pay the bill?' she laughs.

There is a dungeon where the British used to keep prisoners. While most of the doors have been sealed, one steel door at L1 leads to the room.

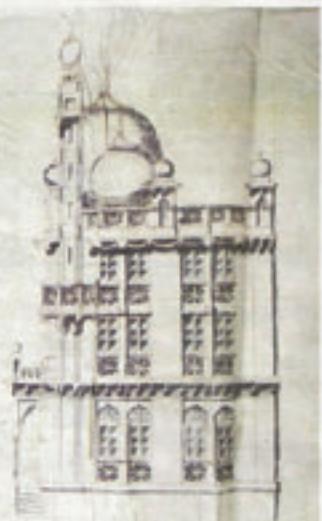
It is long haul for the team. The stack of papers was too much for anyone to handle and no one took interest at



A letter to the chief officer and chief engineer from Moses Somake & Co dated August 27, 1915 attached with the five sheets of plans for the proposed Willington Place in Kurrachee. The plans were signed by Moses, Conacher & Son. COURTESY: YASMEEN-E-KHALID HERITAGE FOUNDATION

the time, said Hassan Imran Shahid, a senior KMC official. But then, Hassan Jali, who was the naib nazim at the time, took an interest.

The KMC building has secrets of its own. There is a dungeon where the British used to keep prisoners. While most of the doors have been sealed, one



The plan of the mosque by Moses Somake.

Among the discoveries so far is a sketch of a mosque designed by Jewish architect Moses Somake. He completed the design on March 13, 1917.

The old city area but could not find anyone who knew where Khaja Lane used to be. "Now, I am 75 years old and trust me there is no Khaja Lane," said a man running a tea shop on Manzoor-e-Rashid Road.

A small road off Major Road is still called Khaja Gali. There were four mosques in the vicinity but residents said they have all been built in the past 30 to 40 years. Mohammad Hashmi, who has a bazaar in the area, said he was unaware of the building. "It could be Adam Masjid. But the dome I see in the sketch is not there."

However, Adam Mosque of the Dewoodi Bohra community, is said to have been built in 1957. It is completely different from the sketch as well. People at the Shibli康麻尼耶中心 were unable to help. Perhaps as the team continues to sift through Karachi's history some detail will surface somewhere.