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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 treated after a special tape is used to place them together. The discoveries were made in 2002 from the clock tower. PHOTO: ADAM ELKAYEM

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

BY SAAD HANAN
KARACHI

During the month of March 1994, the Karachi Municipality killed its dogs. This fact was meticulously recorded in a dog file, which maintains the number and the location where the animals were killed month after month throughout the year.

This vestige of bureaucracy is part of the thousands of documents dating to city that were accidentally discovered in 2002 in sacks from the clock tower of the Karachi Municipal Corporation (KMC) building located on M.A. Jinnah Road. Since then, restorers from the Yasmin Lari-led Heritage Foundation have been working to preserve the delicate papers.

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

ments, writing 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 knows for sure if it was ever built.

"Some time in 1960, a citizen wrote to the KMC complaining that an oil-fired street lamp in front of his house was lit up for two continuous days," Lari said. "Do you know what he wrote in the end of the letter? 'Who will pay the bill?' also happened."

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

It is long haul for the team. The heap 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 Kharokh. The plans were signed by Messrs. Conjeev & Sons. COURTESY: ADAM ELKAYEM

the time, said Hassan Inayat Siddiqui, a senior KMC official. But then, Nazim Jallo, who was the sub-nizam 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

steel door still leads to the room. "We spend it up a few years back, hoping to find treasure or something," said another KMC official.

Among the interesting discoveries so far is a sketch of a mosque designed by Jewish architect Moses Somake. He completed the design on March 13, 1917. "We are trying to locate the place," said Siddiqui.

The mosque, if it was ever built, was located on plots 1 and 2 on Khoja Lane in Market Quarters, which happens to be the area behind the KMC building. The Express Tribune visited

the old city area but could not find anyone who knew where Khoja Lane used to be. "Son, I am 75 years old and trust me there is no Khoja Lane," said a man running a tea shop on Nizamuddin Road.

A small road off Nizamuddin Road is still called Khoja Cal. There were few mosques in the vicinity but residents said they have all been built in the past 30 to 40 years. Muhammad Hashim, who has a bookstore 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 Masjid of the Dawoodi Bohra community, is said to have been built in 1917. It is completely different from the sketch as well. People at the Khori Community Centre were unable to help. Perhaps as the team continues to sift through Karachi's history some detail will surface somewhere.