Scotland in Kolkata: Transnational heritage, cultural diplomacy and city image

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Abstract

In 2008, sixty-one years after India’s independence from British rule, Scottish heritage professionals began an ambitious project to revive a neglected cemetery in Kolkata (formerly Calcutta) with the backing of both the Scottish and West Bengal governments. As the final resting place of an estimated 2,000 Scots who lived and worked in Kolkata during the British colonial period, the cemetery was deemed of significant cultural and historical importance to Scotland. Shortly after work was begun on the conservation of the cemetery, Scotland and West Bengal took a further step to foster a stronger heritage relationship, signing a Protocol of Co-operation which was intended to facilitate Scottish involvement in additional conservation projects in Kolkata.

This paper will discuss Scotland’s on-going interests in Kolkata, and will highlight the role these heritage projects play in the broader political and/or diplomatic interests held by Scotland. In taking this approach this paper will also discuss the willingness of Indian authorities to be involved in such projects as part of a broader agenda to promote the city as a global attraction. This paper will argue that in recent years the ambitions of Scotland and Kolkata have aligned, and this has ultimately facilitated a heritage partnership based on a mutual desire for recognition of the Scottish nation and the West Bengal city as modern, enlightened entities.

Introduction

In 2008 G. M. Kapur, the chair of the Kolkata chapter of the Indian National Trust for Arts and Cultural Heritage (INTACH), suggested that it was not the British or English who had laid the Indian city of Kolkata’s foundations, but the Scots. ‘They were hardy people from the highlands,’ Kapur noted, and ‘post independence, when the relatives of those buried here left the country the graves fell on bad times with no one to tend them’ (Kumar 2008). Though Kapur was referring to the precarious status of a specific heritage site in Kolkata, the Scottish Cemetery, the underlying sentiment of his comment can be applied to many other sites in Kolkata that also have connections with a Scottish past. The former ‘Second City of the British Empire’ was a hub for Scottish expatriates in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and several Scottish individuals left tangible marks in the fabric of the city that can still be seen today. For decades after India’s independence, however, Kolkata’s heritage was poorly protected and drastically under-funded. The communist Left Front government (1977-2011) of West Bengal prioritised rural programmes over urban development, and with high levels of poverty throughout the state the issue of heritage conservation was disregarded by many as an unnecessary luxury. A discernible heritage conservation movement did not take hold in Kolkata until the final years of the twentieth century, by which time the expatriate communities that might have maintained the colonial-era
It is with these limitations in mind that Scotland’s heritage engagements in Kolkata will be considered here first from the angle of Scotland’s broader political agenda and diplomatic programme since 2008. This analysis will be followed by a brief assessment of the emergence of the heritage tourism sector within Kolkata, as local authorities’ acceptance of Scottish involvement is informed by their ambition to use colonial-era heritage to their city’s advantage. While it would certainly be possible to use the Scotland-Kolkata heritage engagements as evidence for a broader analysis of colonial-era heritage management in the postcolonial period, this is not the intent of the present study. Instead this paper will consider the selection, conservation and promotion of heritage sites in a bilateral setting, where careful management of historical and contemporary narratives of identity are necessary in order for the heritage

heritage had dissipated, and buildings were being demolished or irreparably renovated at an alarming rate. The devolution of the Scottish Government (1999) and subsequent blooming of international Scottish enterprises and partnerships occurred at just the right moment, it would seem, as it coincided with the awakening of Kolkata’s heritage movement and an acceptance amongst West Bengal and Kolkata authorities that international involvement in local heritage conservation and tourism might be beneficial. Scotland can (and has) used this perception to its advantage, instigating several conservation projects and agreements with the city since 2008, as well as other cultural programmes that, for brevity’s sake, will not be discussed here (for instance the 2009 year-long Scotland-Kolkata Connections festival that included Scotland being chosen as the feature country at the annual Kolkata Book Fair).

That the Scotland-Kolkata relationship exists at all raises a number of questions about recent attitudes to the British colonial period in India, and to the conservation of heritage from this period. What is of particular interest to this study, however, is what the existence of the Scotland-Kolkata relationship and its subsequent heritage engagements might tell us about Scotland and Kolkata in recent times. Why is Scotland’s historic presence in Kolkata so important to modern Scotland, and why is heritage being used as a foundation for a diplomatic relationship? Why have sites in Kolkata such as the Scottish Cemetery, the Roxburgh Building and Duff College been prioritised for Scottish-initiated conservation programmes, and what do the plans for these projects tell us about the Scotland-Kolkata relationship? What do these projects tell us about Kolkata’s future as a heritage tourism hub, and about potential shifts in perception of the city’s image? This paper goes some way to addressing these issues, as well as identifying further avenues for future investigation.

The management of colonial-era heritage in the postcolonial period is an area of research that is both incredibly broad yet necessarily nuanced, as no single colonial experience is the same as the next. Colonial-era heritage may have significance to nations external to the nation within which the heritage is located, but the significance attributed may vary dramatically depending on the role the nations played in the colonial relationship, and this significance may undergo change as the relationship between nations evolves in the postcolonial period. This ‘polyvalency’ of interpretations and identities, to borrow a term from Proudfoot and Roche (2005: 201-02), makes it difficult to incorporate every angle and opinion of colonial-era heritage in a study on the topic, even when the scope is narrowed down, as in this paper, to Scotland’s recent engagements in a single Indian city, Kolkata. Attempting to include multiple views becomes even more challenging when authorities and heritage practitioners resist providing their opinions on the topic, perhaps as a result of the potential political sensitivities of the issue at hand or because the employment conditions of individuals restrict their ability to comment. This is certainly true of the present study, as repeated attempts to make contact through various means with Indian, West Bengali and Kolkatan authorities regarding the Scottish heritage engagements in Kolkata have been largely unsuccessful, and information was instead garnered from local and national press coverage, local heritage authorities’ websites and a small array of publically accessible heritage district plans and tourism campaigns, for a period roughly extending over the past decade. While the silence of Indian authorities cannot definitively be claimed as political (many of the people contacted simply did not respond at all, thus giving no indication of the reasons for their silences), it is certainly possible that a range of local, national and postcolonial political factors had an influence.

It is with these limitations in mind that Scotland’s heritage engagements in Kolkata will be considered here first from the angle of Scotland’s broader political agenda and diplomatic programme since 2008. This analysis will be followed by a brief assessment of the emergence of the heritage tourism sector within Kolkata, as local authorities’ acceptance of Scottish involvement is informed by their ambition to use colonial-era heritage to their city’s advantage. While it would certainly be possible to use the Scotland-Kolkata heritage engagements as evidence for a broader analysis of colonial-era heritage management in the postcolonial period, this is not the intent of the present study. Instead this paper will consider the selection, conservation and promotion of heritage sites in a bilateral setting, where careful management of historical and contemporary narratives of identity are necessary in order for the heritage
engagements to be successful. By highlighting the political and economic contexts that such narratives of identity exist within, this paper will examine the diplomatic motivations behind bilateral heritage engagements, as well as some of the local conditions that enable these programmes to take place.

Scotland, Kolkata and the UK: Then and now

The existence of Scotland’s relationship with Kolkata is a historical by-product of the involvements of Scotland and India with another entity, Britain. From the outset, Scotland’s historical relationship with Kolkata would not have been possible were it not for Scotland’s Treaty of Union with England in 1707. Prior to Union Scotland had shared its monarch with England since the Union of Crowns in 1603, but had retained an independent parliament. Scotland’s 1707 partnership with England established the Kingdom of Great Britain (the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland after 1801), and this in turn allowed Scottish citizens access to the ports of England’s East India Company (EIC), including the trading post at Kolkata (then known as Calcutta, but referred to throughout this article with the modern spelling unless the entity in question has retained the previous spelling). Indeed it was the Union of 1707 that facilitated the subsequent dispersal of the Scottish diaspora to North America, South Africa and the Antipodes, and which allowed Scottish merchants to build trade networks throughout south-east Asia.

Many Scots were willing perpetrators of British colonisation in India, and as Kolkata served as the British imperial capital of India until 1911 large numbers of Scots settled in the city from the mid-eighteenth century on. Kolkata became an even more popular destination for British military personnel and government administrators (or ‘writers’) as control of the Indian territories changed hands from the EIC to direct British control in 1858. Many of these positions were taken up by Scots, and their dominance in official roles in Kolkata was often remarked upon in India and at home in Scotland (McGilvary 1990: 30; Cain 1986: 7, 11). The diversity of European pursuits on the subcontinent gradually grew beyond trade, governance and the armed forces to accommodate peripheral ambitions. Botanists, antiquarians, missionaries, teachers, industrial entrepreneurs and manufacturing workers began to settle in India, and in a concentrated cluster in Kolkata, as the British colonial period wore on. It was in these sectors that many Scots made their mark.

In 1997, three hundred years after the Treaty of Union bound Scotland and England together, the Scottish public voted to reinstate their Parliament in a process known as devolution, and the Scottish Government was established in 1999. Though it retained membership within the UK, devolution afforded Scotland greater diplomatic freedoms than it had previously. The Scottish Government was not given the privilege of managing its own foreign affairs, but it was given the right to pursue global partnerships in areas such as tourism, education and culture. With these new freedoms in mind, the devolved Scottish authorities tapped in to the global network that Scotland had developed as a result of its involvement in the British Empire, forming international partnerships, encouraging increases in trade and tourism and raising Scotland’s national profile.

The Scottish Government, which has been under the leadership of the pro-independence Scottish National Party (SNP) since 2007, has been clear in its ambitions for Scotland to increase its presence on the global stage (Scottish Government 2012). With an independence referendum set for September 2014, it does not seem too farfetched to suggest that the Government is courting international success in a range of cultural and diplomatic projects in the hope that it might inspire greater domestic support for an independent Scotland. This political context must be borne in mind as we take a closer look at the Scotland-Kolkata relationship, as the heritage engagements in Kolkata coincide with the SNP’s rise to power in Scotland as well as the emergence of the independence campaign that has culminated in the 2014 referendum.

Promoting a Modern Scotland and a Modern Kolkata

The contemporary relationship between Scotland and Kolkata may at first glance appear to be a minor diplomatic arrangement that has been forged by historic coincidence, but it is a relationship that may have far-reaching consequences for both parties, and is also indicative
of broader ambitions. The Scottish Government has viewed the Kolkata heritage engagements as contributing to its broader strategy for diplomatic relations with India since the first project was initiated in 2008 (Scottish Government 2009a). Scotland’s intentions were formalised in 2009, when a Protocol of Co-operation concerning the recognition and conservation of shared heritage was signed by the Scottish Government and the Government of the State of West Bengal (of which Kolkata is the capital). The stated aim of this Protocol was to ‘foster the recording, understanding and preservation of that cultural heritage and the promotion of access to it’ (Scottish Government 2009b). The implicit expectation of this Protocol, however, was that it would help Scotland to ‘build relations in science and trade’ throughout India and the world. It was these kinds of cultural engagements, Michael Russell (Minister for Culture, External Affairs and the Constitution) noted at the time, ‘that make Scotland visible abroad’ (Nelson 2009: 34). This is an important point, as Russell’s acknowledgement of the promotional value of the Scotland-West Bengal partnership aligns with the rhetoric embedded within other projects of a similar nature that the Scottish Government has initiated in recent years, including the Scottish Ten digital scanning initiative that has documented sites in India, China, Japan, the U.S. and Australia (Scottish Government 2013; Historic Scotland 2014). It is clear that the coupling of cultural heritage with technological expertise has been one of the Scottish Government’s favoured approaches to international engagement in recent times, perhaps because these initiatives are relatively affordable while also being high-impact in terms of press coverage and diplomatic relations.

The heritage sites in Kolkata that have received Scottish attention are significant for several reasons. As well as having historical importance, this heritage rationalises Scotland’s current diplomatic relations with Kolkata, relations which may in turn lead to economic growth and make Scotland more visible on the international stage. These heritage sites, located as they are in a city that lacks resources and skills in the heritage sector, provide the Scots with an opportunity to demonstrate the charitable application of technological expertise in the heritage sector, expertise which the Scottish Government is keen to promote on the global stage. With careful site selection and interpretation the heritage in Kolkata can avoid the usual Scottish stereotypes typified by tartan, bagpipes and Highland romance, and can bypass negative associations with the exploitation and subjugation experienced in India during the British colonial period. Instead, these carefully selected sites in Kolkata can evoke Scottish Enlightenment-era notions of humanitarianism, universal education and scientific discovery. By engaging with its heritage in Kolkata, Scotland can promote a specific version of its national identity, an identity that blends the achievements of past Scots with the ambitions that present Scots might have for the future. This agenda compliments the image that Kolkata wishes to present in the twenty-first century, it would seem, fitting well with the efforts made by local authorities over the past few years to modernise the city’s reputation with urban infrastructure improvements, heritage districts, commercial enterprise and tourism campaigns. Kolkatans have begun to acknowledge the commercial value of their colonial past, and in doing so they appear to have negotiated new ways of perceiving this history: as G. M. Kapur noted in 2003, ‘this city is as much ours as it was theirs,’ as ‘we built it with our sweat, our labour. It’s not colonial history we’re preserving but the space. The aesthetics are very important’ (Marcelo 2003: 18). It is arguable, then, that the Scottish desire to preserve the past and the Kolkatan desire to modernise in the present and future have overlapped sufficiently to facilitate a partnership that might otherwise seem an unlikely match.

The Scottish Cemetery

The Scottish Cemetery project certainly supports the hypothesis of conserving heritage in order to promote these modern identities. Founded in central Kolkata in the 1820s after the congregation of the nearby Kirk (church) of St Andrews protested about the lack of a Scottish Presbyterian burial ground in the city, the Scottish Cemetery remained in use until the mid-twentieth century (Addyman 2009). As the Cemetery’s associated congregation dwindled after India’s independence from Britain in 1947, so too did visitors to the Cemetery. This, as Chadha noted in 2006, is not an unusual fate for colonial-era cemeteries, which often experience a ‘double death’ as the empires that created them fade from existence (2006: 340). The Scottish
Cemetery had been given heritage designation by Kolkata authorities in the early 2000s, but little had been done to maintain the headstones and perimeter walls for over fifty years, and as such the six acres of burial ground became ruined and overgrown (Addyman 2009: 31). The Cemetery’s dilapidated state was one of the reasons local heritage authorities brought it to the attention of James Simpson, a Scottish conservation architect, who visited Kolkata in 2007 (Vickers 2011: 16). Despite the Cemetery’s poor condition Simpson was able to discern numerous headstones with Scottish surnames. Subsequent surveys provide estimates that these headstones mark close to 2,000 Scottish burials (Kolkata Scottish Heritage Trust 2013b). Concerned by the Cemetery’s condition and heeding local heritage authorities’ requests for assistance, Simpson returned to Scotland and founded the charitable Kolkata Scottish Heritage Trust (KSHT) for the purpose of conserving what he referred to as ‘a little piece of Scotland in Bengal’ (Drainey 2011).

The KSHT had several early successes. Simpson invited Lord Charles Bruce, a descendant of two Viceroy’s of India, to be the Trust’s chair, and together they proceeded to gain the support of the Scottish Government. In Kolkata the KSHT forged partnerships with the local branch of INTACH and local conservation architects, and the approval of the city council and the State of West Bengal’s Heritage Commission was secured (Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland 2008; Addyman 2009: 37). All of the key interested parties, Scottish and Indian alike, appeared amenable to the Cemetery’s long-term protection, and press coverage of the project was significant in both countries. This bilateral support was critical as the KSHT expected the conservation programme would cost at least £500,000 and it was hoped these funds would come from public donations as well as from Scottish and Indian authorities (Drainey 2011). When the first phase of work began in late 2009 after the site had been cleared (see Figure 1), it was with the combined efforts of staff from the Royal Commission for Ancient and Historic Monuments Scotland (RCAHMS), the Highland Council (Scotland) and the Kolkata chapter of INTACH, as well as staff from James Simpson’s architectural firm, Simpson & Brown. The Scottish Government facilitated the involvement of RCAHMS staff in this first phase of work and a survey of the site was undertaken (Vickers 2011: 16).

The widespread support for the Cemetery project occurred, in part, because of the attractiveness of the KSHT’s plans to all parties involved. It was not a project that looked solely to the past, but instead used this past to provide opportunities for the future. The KSHT’s 2008 plan proposed that the Cemetery’s gravestones would be documented and conserved over the course of a few years, the landscape would be converted into a ‘green lung’ for the use of the surrounding neighbourhoods, and a conservation training centre specialising in lime would be established to educate locals in conservation techniques (Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland 2008). The concept of a green lung in an overcrowded city, the KSHT stated, was one that the Scottish sociologist Patrick Geddes was famed for suggesting for the improvement of urban living standards in the nineteenth century (Vickers 2011: 16). The Cemetery’s conservation training centre, meanwhile, would be linked with the Scottish Lime Centre in Scotland (Kolkata Scottish Heritage Trust 2013a). The Cemetery project therefore aimed to combine science and philosophy with technical expertise and the sharing of knowledge: values that are associated with the original Scottish Enlightenment period and which the Scottish Government has been pursuing for Scotland to be identified with once again. The KSHT had ambitions for the Cemetery project beyond the promotion of Scottish values, however: it was hoped that the project would inspire other

Figure 1: The Scottish Cemetery in Kolkata is now undergoing conservation, and much of the overgrowth has been removed. (Source: Amy Clarke)
conservation projects in the area and perhaps save other colonial-era structures (Gilchrist 2008: 40; Niyogi 2008). This would be a favourable outcome not just for the KSHT, but also for local heritage authorities affected by poor funding and resources, and for the burgeoning West Bengal heritage tourism industry seeking additional sites to promote to visitors.

On a wider political scale the Cemetery project also had its benefits for Scotland: it would serve as proof that Scotland no longer felt the need to hide behind the banner of the ‘United Kingdom’ in order to engage on an international level. Moreover, it would show that Scotland felt no need to shy away from its colonial-era history in India, as the contributions and sacrifices Scots had made in locations like Kolkata were documented in the headstones of the Scottish Cemetery, a site that even the local Indian authorities thought was significant.

The graves of tea planters, traders and government administrators sit alongside the graves of women and children, their surnames indicating strong links with Scottish regions such as Fife and Sutherland. Some of those buried in the Cemetery are known to history: James Wilson, for instance, introduced income taxation to India; but the majority of the Scots interred in the grounds lived lives unremarkable to all but those they had left behind. Their deaths were also unremarkable: many had died as a result of cholera, dysentery or malaria, perhaps whilst working in a jute processing plant across the Hooghly River in Howrah or contracted whilst on military service (Vickers 2011: 16). Though they may have been in Kolkata as a result of British colonialism and its associated pursuits, these Scots could be seen as victims of colonialism, not victors. After visiting in 2009, Scottish Culture Minister Michael Russell suggested that the Cemetery was a location ‘redolent of our shared heritage, […] a place of individual stories and a tribute to the individual passion of those in Kolkata’ who were working to ensure the site’s survival for the future (Russell 2009). The underlying sentiment in Russell’s comment is clear: the heritage of the Scottish Cemetery is not one Scotland is ashamed of, as it is a ‘shared’ heritage that warrants a shared approach to its conservation.

**Roxburgh Building and Duff College**

There was a synergy between the KSHT’s proposed heritage work in Kolkata and the Scottish Government’s growing international ambitions, and within a year of the work beginning at the Scottish Cemetery in 2008, the Scottish Government entered into the aforementioned Protocol of Co-operation with the State Government of West Bengal. It was made clear at the time the agreement was signed in 2009 that the Scottish and West Bengal Governments intended to initiate more projects beyond the work already underway at the Cemetery. Scottish officials and members of the KSHT identified Duff College and the Roxburgh Building as priorities for attention since both lay abandoned and in a state of advanced decay (Nelson 2009: 34). The selection of these buildings is interesting, as the KSHT was aware of other sites in Kolkata with significant Scottish connections that needed assistance (Nag 2009). One cannot help but wonder whether some of the other sites, such as the Scottish-founded and owned jute mills along Kolkata’s Hooghly River, were deemed to be unpalatable reminders of labour exploitation and the subjugation of India under the British. Duff College and the Roxburgh Building, on the other hand, stand as symbols of the positive contributions of two Scots, William Roxburgh (1751-1815) and Alexander Duff (1806-1878), during the colonial period. The scientific and educational associations embedded within these buildings could also be interpreted as markers of the development of Kolkata as a modern, enlightened city.

The histories of the Roxburgh Building and Duff College have much in common. The Roxburgh Building, situated in the former Calcutta Botanic Garden (now the Indian Botanic Garden), was constructed as a family residence, herbarium and library for William Roxburgh in the 1790s. A trained medical doctor and employee of the EIC, Roxburgh was the first paid superintendent of the Garden and during his time in the role he oversaw the research and publication of *Flora Indica*, a detailed guide to the subcontinent’s flora (Das 2008). While in Kolkata Roxburgh also undertook research in plant fibres, as well as in the acclimatisation of many species that were subsequently spread throughout the British Empire, including tea and jute (Robinson 2008: xvii). Roxburgh’s residence was the location at which much of this research was undertaken, and the Building remained the property of the Garden after Roxburgh’s death. It was subsequently used for storage of botanical drawings and research data. By the late 1970s the Building had been
abandoned, and it has sat empty in the grounds of the Garden ever since (Das 2008), as seen in Figure 2. Like his Kolkata residence, Roxburgh’s profile has faded with time: he was eulogised as ‘the Father of Indian botany’ but his achievements are now little known outside horticultural circles (Robinson 2008: 217). Since the 1990s local authorities in Kolkata have made periodic attempts to have the Roxburgh Building conserved and repurposed into a tourist hub or library and thus it is clear the local heritage sector sees value in the structure, though no work has yet been undertaken.

It has been a similar story for Alexander Duff’s College building, which was one of several structures the Scottish Presbyterian missionary and teacher used to run the Scottish Church College, which he founded in 1830. Duff was the Church of Scotland’s first official missionary to India, as previously the EIC had limited missionary access to their territories to those affiliated with the Church of England (Blaikie 2004). Duff’s presence in Kolkata was therefore partly motivated by the need to stake a claim in India for Scottish Presbyterianism. Duff’s school expanded quickly and by 1840 it had moved twice, eventually growing to include an orphanage and a school for girls (Blaikie 2004). Construction began on the building known as Duff College in 1843 and was completed in 1857, with donations from elsewhere in India as well as from Scotland, England and America providing funds for the development (Hector 1893: 33; Blaikie 2004). The College continued with the curriculum Duff had established in the 1830s, providing English language education as well as teaching numerous subjects in the arts, sciences and humanities. The students that attended were from a wide range of castes and backgrounds, and many went on to gain employment with the colonial government or as teachers themselves (Blaikie 2004). By the 1920s the Duff College building had become surplus to the requirements of the Scottish Church College, however, and it was sold to the local police authorities and converted into Jorabagan Police Station (Sen & Abraham 2008: 7). Here the building’s history takes a macabre turn, as it is claimed parts of the structure were converted into torture cells that were used to hold political campaigners protesting Britain’s rule in India. The building continued to be used as a police station after India’s independence, but was eventually declared unsafe by council authorities in 1988 and abandoned (Old Jorabagan PS to turn into tourism hub 2011). It has sat in this state ever since, becoming increasingly overgrown with vines and trees amidst a busy street in central Kolkata.

While it is easy to rationalise the Roxburgh Building for Scottish conservation, it is interesting that Duff College was chosen by Scottish and West Bengal authorities for inclusion in the 2009 Protocol programme given the building’s later history. Rather than avoiding the issue,
the Scottish Government noted that conserving Duff College would help to ‘remind Indians of the role that Scots played in educating and inspiring some of the sub-continent’s leading independence campaigners,’ many of whom had been educated at the College (Nelson 2009: 34). Scottish authorities did not, however, acknowledge the claim that many of these ‘Scots-educated’ independence campaigners were subsequently held in custody within the very same building that the Scottish Government was interested in conserving. This is a clear example of the politicisation of the Scotland-Kolkata heritage relationship: while the Duff College building spent a significant portion of its life as a police station, this part of the narrative has been swept aside in order to revive the building’s original association with Scotland, and just as importantly, with the education of Kolkatans who went on to lead the independence campaign.

**Scotland and Kolkata: The future**

Almost five years have passed since the 2009 Protocol was signed and first mention was made of Scottish involvement in the conservation of the Roxburgh Building and Duff College, and yet no work has taken place at these sites, or any others with Scottish connections, except the Scottish Cemetery. By early 2012 the Cemetery project had progressed to the second phase of works, with restoration of its nineteenth-century gatehouse and reconstruction of the Cemetery’s walls and pathways underway with the assistance of a local architect, Neeta Das (Kolkata Scottish Heritage Trust 2013b). In August 2013 the Kolkata chapter of INTACH led a scanning and restoration project that documented the burial register for the Cemetery, and work is also underway to open the affiliated Lime Conservation Training Centre (Kolkata Scottish Heritage Trust 2013a & 2013b). It would appear the impetus for this progress has largely come from the work of the KSHT and the local partnerships the KSHT has made in Kolkata. While the KSHT had support from the Scottish Government directly before and after the 2009 Protocol signing, this official involvement has since petered out. It remains to be seen what this will mean for Scotland’s heritage engagements in Kolkata in the long-term, though at present it seems most likely that any future projects will follow a similar format to that of the Scottish Cemetery: a privately-initiated, charitably-funded enterprise with the endorsement of Scottish and Indian authorities. This in itself is interesting, as it contrasts with the observations made by Ashish Chadha in 2006 about South Park Street Cemetery, also from the colonial period and situated in Kolkata. Chadha suggested that colonial cemeteries such as those in Kolkata were prone to decay as a result of ambivalence: these cemeteries cannot be wiped out altogether as they are sites of personal mourning, but they conflict with the postcolonial sense of nation and thus are not attractive sites for government-led conservation schemes (2006: 349). While this may have been the case with South Park Street Cemetery, it appears that the Scottish Cemetery has now emerged from a phase of ambivalent ‘management’ (or lack thereof). It remains to be seen how the Scottish Cemetery will survive in the long term, but the recent conservation efforts suggest there may be opportunities for similar cemeteries elsewhere to rekindle local and global interest.

In the absence of the Scottish Government’s support it has fallen to local and state authorities to keep the possibility of conservation for sites such as Duff College and the Roxburgh Building alive. In early 2011 the West Bengal State Tourism Development Corporation announced plans to convert Duff College into a tourism hub complete with seminar space and a library, but this project did not involve any Scottish stakeholders and it has not progressed past the planning stage (*Old Jorabagan PS to turn into tourism hub* 2011). It is a similar story with the Roxburgh Building, which lies empty despite recent investigations by the Calcutta High Court into its ongoing care (*Court orders makeover for Botanic Garden* 2012). Neither structure has been publically acknowledged by Scottish authorities since 2009, despite a visit to Kolkata by Scottish Minister Michael Russell in late 2011 (*Vickers 2011: 16*). In a 2012 interview, Russell suggested that in recent years providing sufficient funding for heritage within Scotland had become challenging, let alone providing resources for those international sites which Scotland had previously identified for engagement (Russell 2012). A 2012 enquiry with Fiona Hyslop (Cabinet Secretary for Culture and External Affairs) was met with a less forthcoming response. While my enquiry requested information on any post-2009 developments in the Scottish Government’s
official relationship with Kolkata, Hyslop’s response only made reference to work that had been undertaken at the Scottish Cemetery before the 2009 Protocol had even been signed (Hyslop 2012). The plans Scotland and Kolkata had made for a heritage partnership have, it would appear, stalled with no official explanation, and this raises further questions about the feasibility of heritage initiatives as part of a cultural diplomacy strategy.

It is possible that the Scottish Government has already achieved the desired outcomes of the transnational heritage engagements in Kolkata. It would seem that demonstrating the intention to conserve was just as important, if not more important, than the actual process of conservation, as it is the intention to conserve that has emphasised the transnational diplomatic relationship. The Scottish Cemetery project and the signing of the 2009 Protocol received ample press coverage in Scotland (and the rest of the UK) and India, and this allowed the Scottish Government to make remarks about the ‘strong links’ between Scotland and Kolkata that were manifest in the ‘evidence of Scottish settlement and Scottish influence’ in the Indian city (Scottish Government 2009a). Despite this initial coverage, there has been no follow-up in the press regarding the failure of any projects to eventuate out of the 2009 Protocol, though periodic mention is made in the press of the progress at the Scottish Cemetery. What we can learn from this, it would seem, is that the expression of good intentions by the Scots, and the reciprocation of this intent by the West Bengal and Kolkatan authorities, was newsworthy on its own. The subsequent lack of progress is hardly the point, as the Scotland-Kolkata relationship has received sufficient positive publicity in both nations, and thus the transnational relationship has been effective. This relationship has, in turn, validated the identities expressed by the heritage sites that the Scots selected for attention. When interpreted a certain way, the Scottish-Kolkatan past typifies scientific and educational endeavour, and this is a past that is captured in heritage sites that Scottish and Kolkatan authorities have agreed are significant and worthy of conservation. What some may view as a failed or indefinitely stalled heritage programme, is, when viewed from another angle, a remarkably successful diplomatic manoeuvre indeed.

The heritage sector in Kolkata has continued to develop despite the waning interest of Scottish authorities, and this growth is largely the result of patronage by the West Bengal State Government’s Tourism Department. The election of the Trinamool Congress in 2011 appears to have fuelled this sector’s growth significantly, as one of the Congress’ campaign promises was to redevelop Kolkata’s heritage districts in order to raise the city’s image to that of London or Venice (Gupta 2013). The heritage tourism sector in Kolkata had humble beginnings, with a privately-run heritage-themed walk around pockets of Kolkata in 2001 led by a local conservation architect (Chatterji 2001: 44). Over the past four years, however, this sector has expanded into a publically-funded industry that now includes heritage river cruises between Kolkata and Patna; a light-and-sound illumination programme of several colonial-era buildings in the city; eleven tourism hubs being redeveloped in colonial-era heritage structures (Paul 2013), and the promotion of West Bengal’s heritage attractions at several major international tourism conventions. The Kolkata Municipal Corporation has also played a part in this growth, with the installation of information boards outside of heritage structures and the organisation of heritage walks throughout the city. The increased attention appears to have fostered developments within the heritage sector proper, as the West Bengal Heritage Commission’s legislative powers have recently been increased after years of campaigning (Chakraborti 2014), and the State Government has recently announced plans to restore 166 heritage structures around West Bengal, including Kolkata (Press Trust of India 2014). It is clear that Kolkata will continue to develop and market its heritage regardless of Scottish involvement, and that the city’s image is now willingly (if not somewhat cynically) being linked with the colonial past. What remains to be seen is how the relationship between local and touristic perceptions of the city’s heritage image will develop in the future: will more of Kolkata’s colonial remnants emerge from states of ambivalent decay, and if so, which community (local or international, conservationist or commercial) will lead the charge?
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