

FRIENDS OF SERAMPORE

Serampore College (and University), India

Founded by Carey, Marshman and Ward, 1818

www.seramporecollege.org

Secretaries Edward & Rosemary Williams

12 Penny Lane, Guarford, Malvern, WR13 6PG

Tel: 01684 569291 E-mail: EandRWilliams@btinternet.com

Website: friendsofserampore.org.uk

July 2008

Dear Friends,

In our last letter we wrote, "For your prayers, we would add one other matter of which we become aware from time to time. The cost of the Theology department is met in the main, and rightly so, by the churches of India - but this results in salaries substantially lower than in the rest of the College, where University Grants Commission of India rates apply. The contrast can make great demands on the Christian grace of those concerned, and can be a source of tension."

A little after this, before knowing what we had said, the Principal wrote:

*We plan to revise theology department staff salaries, which revision is overdue. We will have to spend a few lakhs [i.e. a few thousand pounds] more from the coming year beginning from 1st April 2008. **We will trust God and His people to help us pay the staff the new salaries.***

And then in May he wrote: *We are having three new teachers in Theology. We recently raised staff salaries and our financial position is not at all sound now.*

So prayers have been answered - but now can we add to our financial support? A little bit more for some of you, but could you also consider making this a substantially larger part of your giving "to Christ and his Church"?

The Principal's first e-mail went on:

*We have **Palm Sunday programme** when the local Bengali congregation and the theology community in Serampore College will take a joint procession starting from the campus, going to Battala junction and then going by the road to Carey Road, and coming to the meditation ground (the spot where Krishna Pal was baptized) and then having a joint open air bilingual service there. On Good Friday, we will have a service of our own. Seven persons will speak on the seven words of Jesus from the Cross, according to the local tradition. Sufficient warning has been given by the Lecturer in-charge Chapel and Worship that each speaker is expected to confine him/herself to 5-to-7 minutes. Easter Sunday service will be held at the Carey Library. Graduation service is scheduled for 12th April.*

The latter e-mail mentioned a very special and well-deserved event:

***"The Felicitation of Mr Sunil Kumar Chatterjee** took place on 7th April, when a good crowd gathered at the Carey Library and Research Centre. The Master Dr K Rajaratnam presented Citation and Memento to him. ASC and Theology Departments were well represented and the students gave very good items in songs".*

Most of you who have ever been to the College will know Sunil but to me (Edward) in particular he was special, as the Demonstrator in the Physics Department who above all others helped me become at home there. He had been a student in the department, went on to work in industry, but suffered a serious accident to his right hand after which the College offered him employment - the rest, as they say is history. It is significant that, as a Hindu, he should be "a devotee of Carey".

MR. SUNIL KUMAR CHATTERJEE

The Council of Serampore College hereby place on record their appreciation of the long and devoted service you have rendered to Serampore College which has earned honour and respect for yourself and for the institution you have served.

It is noted that the inspiration which you have drawn, while still a young man, from the life and work of William Carey, the great missionary who founded this historic institution of learning, has made you a devotee of his.

Your writings on the life and work of Carey and his associates have made great contributions in keeping alive their memories and examples, and in making known the name and work of Serampore College to the present generation all over the world.

The role that you play as the Consultant of Carey Library and Research Centre has endeared you to the staff and students of the College, and to the users of the rich resources of the Centre and to the many visitors from all places.

Your humility, friendliness and accessibility to all who come in contact with you, and your generosity in sharing with anyone, of the rich resource of information and insight about Serampore missionaries and their work, of which you are an inexhaustible mine, will continue to earn fond and sweet memories from all those who have become your close associates and friends.

The exam results in the Senate Report for 2007 indicate the scale and importance of "Serampore College (University)":

Diploma in Clinical Pastoral Counselling	33	Master of Theology	87
Diploma in Christian Studies	26	Doctor of Ministry	10
Bachelor of Christian Studies	89	Doctor of Theology	7
Bachelor of Theology	296	also Doctor of Divinity (Honoris Causa)	4
Bachelor of Divinity	615		

Total: 1167

Since 1911, the total number who have qualified at Bachelor level (plus LTh, now discontinued) is 23,899 - what a contribution to the life of the church in India!

The legal status of Serampore as University has recently come under the spotlight. The Registrar, Ravi Tiwari, describes what has happened:

... somewhere in the past, the name of Serampore College, not only as the first University but also the only Theological University in India, was deleted from the records and history of education in India. This, in turn, also removed the name of Serampore College (University) from the list of universities published by the International Association of Universities in cooperation with UNESCO. It is unfortunate that for a long time we, in Serampore, did not take note of this. This was the beginning of problems for Serampore graduates. One was the complexity for our students to get admission in foreign universities, the second was the denial of visas by foreign governments to graduates in theology. Some face the denial of job opportunities in armed forces and elsewhere. Some Indian universities have denied admissions for higher education to Serampore graduates in theology. In the context of this, the old issues were again brought into focus.

Many new universities are being established through the process of law by the state and central governments. The number of universities and degree granting institutions are increasing in number, making it difficult for the University Grants Commission to control the quality of education in this country... Further, new categories of 'universities' have evolved, such as deemed universities, self-financing universities, central universities, state universities, institutions of national importance etc.... In this changed scenario, as its nature, history and character is quite different from any other Indian university, Serampore has approached the UGC, and is waiting for its response.

It would seem very likely that the deletion from the records (above) was an innocent misunderstanding due to Serampore never conferring degrees in the usual subjects of mainstream education in India.

Friends of Serampore member, **John Hudson**, whose father was on the staff of Serampore for many years, got involved in the same debate in another context, and has written an article for us which you will find below as an appendix. In the course of email correspondence about this, he wrote the following, which gives a fascinating insight into the original concept for the College:

What has fascinated me as a result of my studies of the 18th and 19th centuries are the changes that occurred at the turn of the 19th century. In the eighteenth century you had social entrepreneurs like Jonas Hanway and the members of the Russian Company initiating social projects that were way ahead of their time; you had Erasmus Darwin, whose theory of evolution said that life started in warm pools, which was still being taught less than 20 years ago; and you had the Serampore trio whose approach, in a whole range of areas including economics, female education and journalism, was as progressive as anything else in the world at that time.

It is in that context that you have to place their mission to teach 'eastern philosophy and western science.' I would argue that their concept of a university based around arts and science was another aspect of their progressive 18th century ideas, which were to be submerged in the first part of the 19th century and then revived later in the century - along with social welfare and evolution!

Another 'son of BMS missionaries' is **Ronald Ellis**, a graphic designer whose uncle and father were successive superintendents of the Baptist Mission Press in Calcutta (now Kolkata!) in the 1960s. During the early years of the Serampore mission this was run by "the Junior Brethren" in Calcutta as a parallel enterprise, but eventually the Serampore Press closed and all its work was transferred to Calcutta - we well remember seeing the sign, 'Printers in Forty Languages'!

Ronald visited Serampore and Calcutta during April. As a labour of love, he has now set up a website, www.virtualserampore.org, with a series of slide shows using the highest quality visual software to portray both Serampore and Calcutta mission sites. All the pictures in this letter are from this. Do have a look - it is fascinating. *The Baptist Times* ran a two-page spread on it. Ronald hopes very much that this will bring in new support for Friends.

There we leave you. As a reminder, if you wish to add to your financial support, please send to us at the address given in the heading, making cheques payable to Friends of Serampore - unless you have made a Gift Aid declaration for gifts of £40 or more in which case please contact us first.

Do hold the College in your prayers, especially in their financial need, and consider again whether you may be part of the answer to such prayers.

<u>INCOME FOR 2007</u>		
Balances b/f on 1 Jan 2007:		207.45
Donations and subscriptions:	3599.00	
Anon, for Theology Dept.	<u>4000.00</u>	7599.00
Gift Aid refunds received		720.00
Bank interest		1.86
		<u>8528.31</u>
<u>EXPENDITURE FOR 2007</u>		
Journal subscriptions		138.21
To Ser.Coll.: Support of staff member	2000.00	
For Theology Dept.	<u>1000.00</u>	3000.00
ditto, anon. donation		4000.00
Donation earmarked for Scholarship		641.00
Expenses: Newsletters, postages, travel, transmission charges, etc		114.67
Balances c/f on 31 Dec 2007:		<u>634.43</u>
		<u>8528.31</u>

Please ask if you would like to see a copy of the more detailed inspected accounts.

John Hudson writes: As there was some debate in Wikipedia during 2007 and then an article on the Ekklesia website in June 2008 making some rather ill-founded statements about the College's legal situation, it seemed worth checking the facts.

The College is governed by the Serampore College Act 1918, 'An Act to supplement, and in certain matters to supersede, the Royal Charter of Incorporation and the statutes and Regulations of the Serampore College'. This has been amended on several occasions since, including by the Indian Government - in other words, the powers held by the College, including the power to grant degrees in theology, have been approved by the Indian Government.

At the time the 1918 Act was passed, the College was at a low ebb and the authorities saw fit to include Clause 13:

13. If, at any time, the Council shall intend to grant degrees in any branch or branches of knowledge and science other than theology, such degrees shall be confined to students who shall have received regular instruction at the Serampore College; and before the Council proceeds to grant such degrees, it shall satisfy [the State Government] as to the adequacy -

- (1) of the establishment and equipment of the College;
- (2) of the academic standard to be maintained; and
- (3) of the financial provision made therefor:

Provided that the said Government, on ceasing to be so satisfied, may withdraw [its] approval of the granting of such degrees.

This was an entirely reasonable clause to include; unless a university has the resources to be able to assess degrees including sufficiently well qualified staff and the administration to support the assessment, it should not be able to grant degrees in a subject. In 1918 it did not have those resources beyond theology.

However - though it is standard in English Law that numerous bodies are given some powers which they may exercise anyway, and other powers which they may exercise subject to conditions - this clause appears to have led to the misunderstanding that powers granted under the Danish Charter had been withdrawn. In fact no powers were withdrawn, as the use of the words 'shall intend to' shows; only their exercise was made conditional on certain, very reasonable, conditions being met.

In practice the College decided to affiliate to Calcutta University for degrees other than theology and, apart from a period in the 1960s when it was compulsorily transferred to the newly-formed local Burdwan University, that remains the position. The College is in fact about a tenth the size of an English university and it would take an inordinate amount of resources to establish the administration of degrees in subjects outside theology. In the case of theology it has a network of affiliated colleges on which it can call for expertise in assessing candidates for degrees. In the same way, Calcutta University has long called on staff at Serampore for similar assistance in non-theological subjects.

So, with the approval of the Indian Government, Serampore retains all its powers to grant degrees but has chosen not exercise some of them for very good reasons related to resources.

Sunil Chatterjee, whose
"Felicitation" is
described in this letter



Graduation
Service
2008



History exam
in main Hall

