

THE STORY  
OF  
GOVERNMENT HOUSE

*by*

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## Preface

In Government House Library is an admirable work in two large volumes by Marquis Curzon of Kedleston called BRITISH GOVERNMENT IN INDIA—THE STORY OF THE VICEROYS AND GOVERNMENT HOUSES published in 1925 by Cassell and Company.

It is the result of indefatigable original researches made by Lord Curzon during his Viceroyalty (1899-1905) and also afterwards, partly out of love of the great office he held, and partly out of love for Government House, Calcutta, which was modelled on his ancestral home Kedleston Hall. He states that it was the similarity between the two houses that first turned his attention, when a boy, to India and planted in him the ambition, from an early age, to pass from a Kedleston in Derbyshire to a Kedleston in Bengal. His ambition was fulfilled and he repaid the debt by writing the history of the house and its inmates. When he died in 1925 he was still engaged in correcting the proofs and preparing the Index.

1805 and had very different ideas had at once ordered the building of Wellesley's new Palace to be stopped and the uncompleted building was finally pulled down and the materials disposed of—probably partly, in enlarging the present house—by Lord Hastings (1813-1823).

To turn to the circumstances which led up to the creation of Barrackpore House and Park.

A British cantonment had been founded at Barrackpore (whence the name) in 1775 and bungalows for Europeans soon sprang up round it. In 1785 Government bought 70 acres of land and two bungalows for the occupation of the Commander-in-Chief which were destined to form the nucleus of the present Park and House.

On 31st December, 1800, Wellesley wrote to Sir Alured Clark, the Commander-in-Chief, announcing that he intended to resume the Commander-in-Chief's Barrackpore residence for the use of the Governor General and that other suitable arrangements would be made for the Commander-in-Chief. In accordance with this decision the transfer was made on 1st February, 1801, the Commander-in-Chief being given a

house allowance of Rs. 500 per month in lieu, and Wellesley started to occupy the house almost at once. He was content with it for the next three years, though he immediately set about enlarging and improving the Park, and it was not till the beginning of 1804 when the new Government House in Calcutta had been open for a year and so ceased to pre-occupy his mind that he be-thought himself of building a new palace at Barrackpore. He therefore began to find the same sort of fault with his Barrackpore House as he had found with the Council House and Buckingham House in Calcutta and said that it was unsafe and must be pulled down and a fresh house built.

He accordingly had it demolished and started to build an enormous palace estimated to cost £50,000 (a comparison of this with the estimate of £66,000 for Government House, Calcutta, will give some idea of the kind of house Wellesley would have put up if he had stayed on) and even dallied with the idea of constructing a straight avenue to connect the two Government Houses! The expense of this, which would have had to be driven through a thickly populated part of

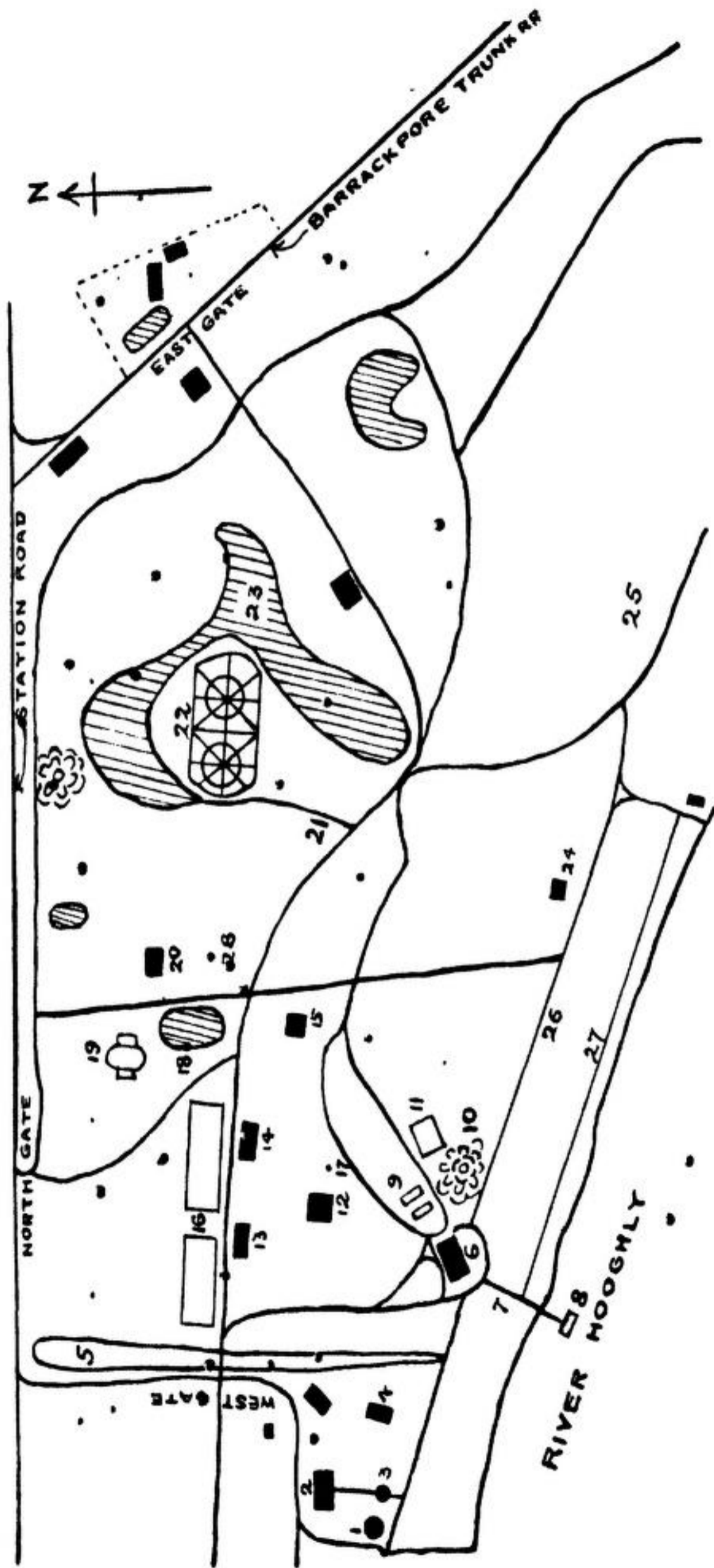


with a coachman's bungalow; the beautiful balustraded bridge over the Moti Jheel just to the North of the house; an aviary for large birds; a bungalow for the Band and a kitchen and servants' quarters which still exist. He also constructed the existing road from Calcutta as the first section of the Grand Trunk Road and had it planted on either side with trees, it being opened to the public the day before he handed over charge to Cornwallis. Along this road is a series of tall masonry towers, one of which is close to the Flagstaff to the North of the house. Lord Curzon states that they were semaphore stations for the Governor General's use and would have been continued to Bombay had the electric telegraph not been introduced. They may have been used for signalling but official records prove that they were built by Colonel Everest in 1830 for the great Trigonometrical Survey and formed the finishing base connecting Bengal with the rest of India and the starting point for Bengal.

Wellesley also established a menagerie in the North-East corner of the Park which continued to exist for 75 years until the Zoological Gardens at Calcutta were opened by Edward VII as Prince of Wales in 1876.

# PARK AT BARRACKPORE.

Scale 800' = 1"



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|-------------------------|-------------------------------|--|
| 1. Semaphore Tower.     | 16. Lady Jackson Rose Garden. | 23. Serpentine Jheel.                              |
| 2. Flagstaff Bungalow.  | 17. Myall King's Grave.       | 24. Lady Canning's Tomb.                           |
| 3. Flagstaff.           | 18. Aviary Tank.              | 25. Site of Wellesley's proposed Government House. |
| 4. Temple of Fame.      | 19. Fern House (Old Aviary).  | 26. Lord Ellenborough Road.                        |
| 5. Moti Jheel.          | 20. Seed House.               | 27. Site of Lord Elgin's Road and Bamboo Tunnel.   |
| 6. Government House.    | 21. Mahogany Avenue.          | 28. Minto Fountain.                                |
| 7. Bamboo Tunnel.       | 22. Curzon-Minto Rosery.      |  |
| 8. Landing Ghat.        |                               |  |
| 9. Lady Lytton Borders  |                               |  |
| 10. Banyan Tree.        |                               |  |
| 11. Tennis Court.       |                               |  |
| 12. Kitchens.           |                               |  |
| 13. Bungalow No. 1.     |                               |  |
| 14. Bungalow No. 2.     |                               |  |
| 15. Honeycomb Bungalow. |                               |  |

A portion of the ménagerie buildings still stands and is used as malis' quarters, but the menagerie still lives, in the way things do live in India, by names given to things connected with it. The Lily Tank is often known as the Aviary Tank, there being little doubt that the conservatory on its bank with its broken Gothic arches has been made out of what was once an aviary started by Lord Auckland (1835-1842) who used some sham ruins for the purpose. Another tank is still called the Deer Tank, memories of days when there were deer in the Park, days which Lord Lytton (1922-1927) tried to bring back by bringing half-a-dozen deer from Barisal and putting them in an enclosure near Lord Minto's Temple of Fame. Yet another is known as the Rhinoceros Tank while memories of Lord Wellesley's aviary are preserved by the *butstee* opposite the North-East corner of the Park known as Chiriakhana. The Governor General's elephants used to be kept at Barrackpore and to this day the place across the Grand Trunk Road to the North North-East of the Park is known as Hatikhana, although the last of the elephants was sold in Lord Elgin's time.