

From The Pages of History

Heritage Museum At IOG (Gifford Museum)

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Many museums have artistic paintings, jewels and old weapons. Here is the museum which has ancient specimens and surgical instruments and such a museum is at the Institute of Obstetrics and Gynecology (Gifford School Museum).

The Gifford school museum is situated at Institute of Obstetrics and Gynecology at Egmore. This Government maternity hospital was started near Egmore railway station in 1844 and it was later shifted to this location. The new hospital started in 1881 and the architecture was so interesting as it was shaped like a female pelvis. All the work was done under the guidance of GG Gifford and the museum is in a block named after him.¹ Few years later major expansion took place and all old buildings were converted into various blocks, however this old block was left untouched-Gifford school was established in 1911 and here is one of the oldest museums in India, which actually became custodian to the heritage building itself. It is considered as a special and sacred space - where specimens were kept over a century and half intact for generations to see and learn from (Fig 1). Gifford school has three main portions. The front portion is the lobby which leads to the museum, the rear portion houses an auditorium with a gallery type class room (Fig 2), where we take tutorial classes for undergraduate students even today and is also used for conducting examinations.

In 2010, when Dr. Radhabai Prabhu took over as Director, when she was remounting the specimens, she stumbled across large boxes kept in a small room under gallery class. Surprisingly, the boxes revealed weird looking instruments (Fig 3) in large numbers. It was very difficult to identify the instruments. She made extensive internet search and she was able to identify some of the instruments and still most of the instruments could not be labelled.^{2,3} Today,

the museum possesses around 200 ancient Obstetrics & Gynecology instruments from 16th century and around 200 rare specimens (Fig 4). This Gifford school is a 'Heritage Site', as declared by the heritage conservation committee. I had a great opportunity to visit the museum when Dr. Radhabai Prabhu invited us. I wish all medical students and medical fraternity could visit this place.



Fig 2 : Classroom(gallery type)



Fig 3 : Instruments at Gifford school



Fig 4 : Display at the museum



Fig 1 : Rare Pathology specimens

References

- 1) www.sid_thewanderer.com/2016/07/museum-of-chennai-gifford-school-iog.html.
- 2) www.mmc.tn.gov.in/Department/IOG/ins_IOG.html.
- 3) https://sriramv.wordpress.com/government_hospital-for-women-and-children-egmore.