

INDIAN INSTITUTE

INTRODUCTION

In 1875 Sir Monier Williams, Boden Professor of Sanskrit, launched a public appeal for money, artefacts and books in order to establish the Indian Institute in Oxford. Monier Williams proposed that the Institute should form 'a centre of union, intercourse, inquiry and instruction for all engaged in Indian Studies'. It was to contain lecture and reading rooms, a library and a museum. The teachers were to be paid by the University or by separate endowments. In the future he hoped that 'it might combine appliances for the promotion of Semitic studies... so as to become a nucleus of development for a complete Oriental School at Oxford'. (*Proposal for founding of an Indian Institute in Oxford*, 1875, Bodleian ref GA Oxon c.33(112))

On behalf of the University, Monier Williams purchased the piece of land situated at the junction of Catte Street and Holywell Street from Merton College in three lots in 1882, 1893 and 1894. One of the conditions set out in the Agreement for the sale and purchase of the sites was that the site be 'appropriated and set apart for the erection of an Indian Institute and no other purpose' (NW 16/5a, 6, 9 & 13).

Although Monier Williams set the project in motion by his own initiative, the University supported his action. He raised £26,000 through public subscription and this money formed the capital for the Indian Institute Endowment Fund. He also secured an annual grant from both the India Office and the Burma Office. However, this was not sufficient to allow the Institute to function independently. Consequently, the University took over the management of the Institute in 1884 and appointed a panel of Curators to oversee it. The Institute received an annual grant from the University Chest and *ad hoc* grants when necessary.

In 1927 the Institute Library was placed under the control and administration of the Curators of the Bodleian Library under a statute framed by the Commissioners appointed under the provisions of the Oxford & Cambridge Universities Act, 1923. The Curators of the Institute continued to manage the Museum of Eastern Art and the fabric of the building. They also had to make an annual payment to the Curators of the Bodleian for the general purposes of the Library.

As well as providing means for study of the languages and laws of India, the Institute provided the premises for the training of Indian Civil Service candidates until the onset of war in 1939. When India attained independence in 1947, the Civil Service schemes were abolished completely. At the same time, both the India Office and the Burma Office ceased to make their annual payment.

With the abolition of the Civil Service training and the end of the teaching of Indian vernacular languages at this time, the need for the Institute began to decline. The Curators found themselves in increasing financial difficulty as many of the rooms not occupied by the Library or the Museum stood unused. A suggestion put forward by the Hebdomadal Council in 1954 proposed the eventual merger of the Indian Institute with the Oriental Institute in a location which was at that time undecided.

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In the meantime a change of use order was sought in order to overturn the conditions imposed by Merton. The order was made by the Chancery Division of the High Court of Justice on 19 July 1956 (NW 16/13/17)

In February 1955, it was decided by the Hebdomadal Council that University Registry staff should be moved from the heavily congested Clarendon Building to rooms in the Institute as soon as possible (HC 1/1/234 p405).

In April 1961 the contents of the Museum of Eastern Art were transferred to the Ashmolean Museum where they formed the basis of the newly formed Department of Eastern Art. By this time, all teaching in Indian Studies was taking place in the Oriental Institute. Some of the space created by these departures was filled by the University Chest.

In 1962 the Curators of the Indian Institute were abolished and the Library became a department of the Bodleian (HC 1/1/242 p471). A Committee for the Indian Institute Library was established in place of the Curators. Until this date it had continued to function in part as a lending library under the terms set out in the agreements concerning the collections bequeathed by Monier Williams and Reverend Solomon Caesar Malan which formed a major part of the Library holdings. The agreements were overturned and Bodleian access policy was enforced. The holdings of the Institute Library were transferred to their site in the New Bodleian in 1968.

During the next decade there was a great deal of competition for allocation of accommodation in the former Institute building. The prime contenders were the Bodleian Library, Hertford College and the University Offices. Following extensive surveys and debate the building was deemed unsuitable for the uses proposed by each party. The completion of the University Offices in Wellington Square in 1975 facilitated the removal of the Chest and Registry. A proposal in Council that the building be given over to the Modern History Faculty was approved by Congregation on 4 June 1974.

Compiled 1995

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- IN 1/1-3 Minutes of the Curators of the Indian Institute. 1884-1962
1. 1884-1905
 2. 1905-29
 3. 1929-62
- IN 2 Draft minutes of the Curators. 1884-90
- IN 3 Minutes of the Library Committee. 1915-22
- IN 4 Cash book. 1888-1900
- IN 5/1-3 Cash analysis books. 1913-28 and 1939-49
1. 1913-27*
 2. 1921-8
 3. 1939-49
- * 1921-7, details of petty cash account and salaries only. See also IN 6.
- IN 6 Petty cash and salaries book (see also IN 5/1). 1900-21
- IN 7 Detailed analysis book of annual expenditure. 1885-1901
- IN 8/1-2 Scrapbooks, presented to the Institute by Professor Monier Williams, containing letters from donors wishing to contribute books, artefacts or money toward the establishment of the Institute. 1878-91
1. 1878-87
 2. 1884-91
- IN 9/1-3 Visitors books. 1885-97 and 1909-34
1. 1885-9
 2. 1889-97
 3. 1909-34