



A WALK IN TIME DOWN WALKER LANE

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A narrow street, just a couple of hundred meters long, in quaint neighbourhood of Richmond Town in Bangalore, carries the name Walker Lane. Although many question why Bangalore still preserves these colonial vestiges, they actually open up an interesting window into colonial history. A block away from Walker Lane is O'Shaughnessy Road and having 'discovered' that this was named after none other than William Brooke O'Shaughnessy, the man responsible for, amongst many other things, the invention of intravenous electrolyte replacement therapy, laying the first telegraph line across India during the rule of the East India Company and his researches on *ganja* (marijuana), it was quite obvious that Walker too must have served the Company and been a prominent person when the British set up the cantonment in Bangalore.



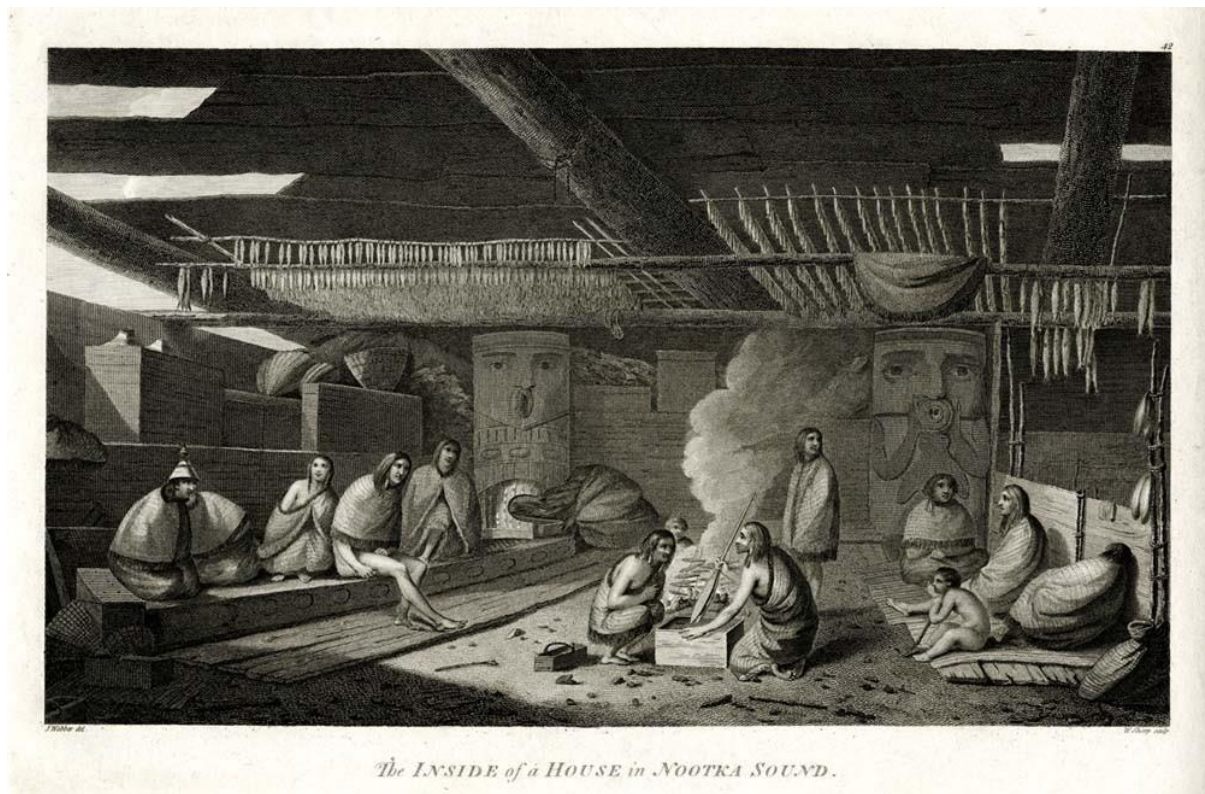
Walker Lane

It wasn't difficult to trace Walker. Born in Scotland in 1765, Alexander Walker arrived in Bombay at the age of 15 and was appointed as cadet in the army of the East India Company. Two years later he was enlisted in the Bombay field force as ensign, the junior-most rank of a commissioned officer in the armed forces. At the age of 17 he was facing the armies of Hyder Ali, *de facto* ruler of erstwhile Mysore, in the Second Anglo-Mysore war that began in 1780. After several skirmishes at different locations in the Carnatic, Walker was in the thick of battle at the fort of Mangalore. When Hyder Ali died in 1782, his son, Tipu Sultan, launched an attack on Mangalore and retook the fort in 1784 in which the severely injured Walker was taken as hostage. Reported to having been tortured and humiliated in custody, Walker was presented with an award of Rs.2000 by the Company upon his release.



Mangalore Fort in 1783

Walker's life takes an interesting turn at this juncture. Those familiar with the Netflix serial, *Taboo*, may recall the interesting name, Nootka Sound. While the story of James Delaney is entirely fictional, Nootka Sound isn't. Geographically, a sound is a long inlet of water between two land masses in the ocean. Nootka island is located in the Pacific Ocean on the west coast of Vancouver Island in Canada. In 1785, Walker was selected to command the military part of an expedition to Nootka Sound that would establish the trade in furs with China and Japan. Although Walker returned to India in 1788, Nootka Sound would become the point of conflict that almost sparked a war between the British and Spanish.



Nootka Sound

In one of the most decisive battles of the Third Anglo-Mysore wars, Walker fought under Colonel Hartley to defeat Hussein Ali Khan Sahib in what came to be known as the Battle of Calicut or the Battle of Tiruangani. While the East India Company's forces totalled to just about 1500, the army of the Sultanate of Mysore had a strength of more than 9000 soldiers. Walker continued to fight other battles in the Third War, which culminated in the Treaty of Seringapatnam in 1792 under which Tipu lost the coastal districts of his kingdom and had to also handover his two sons to the Company as hostages.



Tipu's Sons as Hostages

Peace was short lived and within the span of six years, the British and Tipu Sultan were once again engaged in the Fourth War of Mysore. From the first Battle of Seedaseer to the final capture of Seringapatnam and the killing of Tipu Sultan, Walker was part of the Bombay army in the thick of action.



Fall of Tipu

From South India, Walker was deputed by Sir Arthur Wellesley (Duke of Wellington) in 1800 to Gujarat to bring factional conflicts in to the Maratha states under control. He was appointed Resident in the Court of the Gaikwads after a few clashes in the field. Holding the rank of Major, Walker was thereafter deputed to Kathiawar along India's west coast where he not only engaged in military operations but is also said to have suppressed the practice of female infanticide in the region. In 1809, the state of his health required him to return home. However, he was recalled by Lord Minto to bring stability to Kathiawar that had erupted upon his departure. Overruling medical advice, Walker returned to the Kachchh and restored peace. He finally left India in 1812 at the age of 47.

In 1822, Walker was appointed as to the Government of St. Helena, an island in the Atlantic Ocean off the west coast of Africa, in the rank of Brigadier General. After six years in service, he returned to Scotland and died in 1831 at the age of 66.



Portrait of Walker

Stepping out from the time machine that had transported us half way around the planet and on a journey through the Company's history during the period in which it was engaged in aggressive territorial expansion, we walked a few feet, only to find ourselves on Langford Road.

Langford?

Now, who was that?