



## **WHITEFIELD – ITS EVOLUTION**

DIPANKAR KHASNABISH

**FOUNDATION TO AID INDUSTRIAL RECOVERY  
BANGALORE**

[www.thefairindia.org](http://www.thefairindia.org)  
[mail.fairindia@gmail.com](mailto:mail.fairindia@gmail.com)

2024-25

# **WHITEFIELD – ITS EVOLUTION**

**DIPANKAR KHASNABISH**

Whitefield is a suburb of Bengaluru. Known for its global companies, high-end residential apartments, and upmarket commercial spaces, it is also known for its congestion, traffic snarls, and other challenges. It is an area that grew fast, and in many ways has become one of the crown jewels of the rise of India's IT Industry. But what is its history, and specifically the source of an English-sounding name?

Whitfield has many fables about the source of the name. Some say it was because of white sand covering the fields, some others say it is because it is an erstwhile residential layout of the Whites (British).

In reality, the place is named after David Emmanuel Starkenburgh White of Madras. Mr. White (1832-89) was the founder of the Anglo-Indian and Domiciled European (AIDE) Association of South India. A successful professional, Mr. White was close to the Indian National Congress, and a friend of Allan Octavian Hume. He wanted a place that would serve as a self-contained settlement of Eurasians and Anglo-Indians, with agriculture as the primary mode of sustenance.



Source: <https://maddy06.blogspot.com/2023/04/white-and-whitefield.html>

Anglo Indians are offsprings of British men and Indian women and have always been in between two identities. British found them easy to deploy in sensitive positions including the army, and got their loyalty

during the 1857 Sepoy Mutiny. But as the ambivalence of their identity took root, and leaders like David White started campaigning for home-bred ICS and Indian judges for trying the Europeans, the opportunities for the community dried down.

David White and other leaders felt that community land ownership would provide basic sustenance through farming even in the worst of circumstances. In 1881, the association wrote to The Maharaja of Mysore Chamarajendra Wodeyar X for the allotment of land near Bengaluru. The draw was a significant European population in the city (being a garrison town). Also, Kolar Gold Fields was a significant employer of the community and of course the weather.

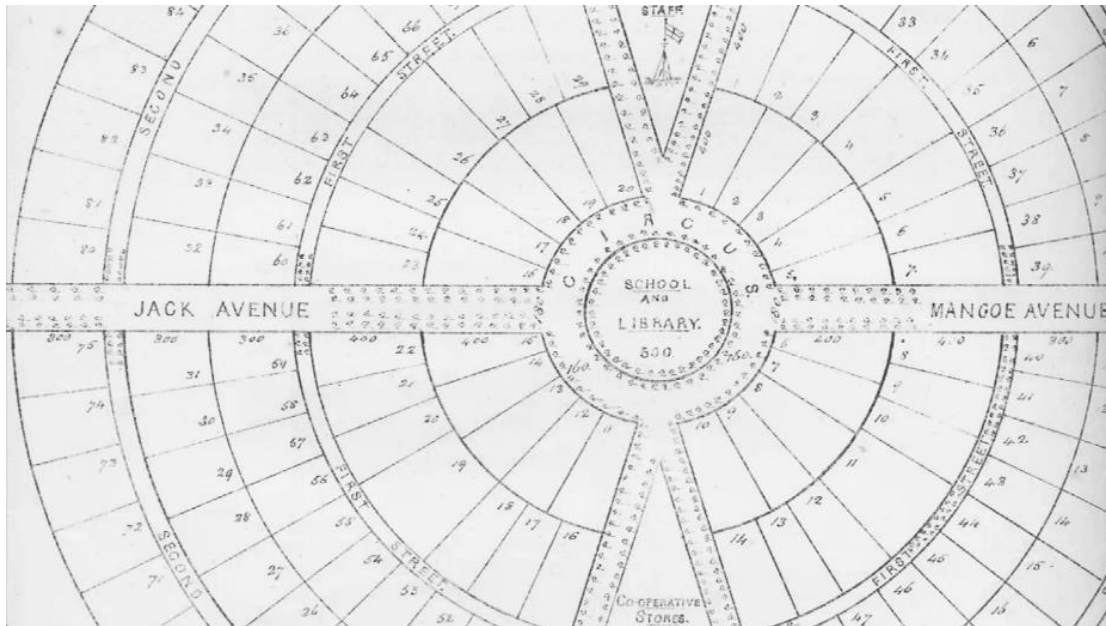
The association worked with Dewan Rangacharlu, and in April 1882 five sites totaling 3,900 acres were approved. Final allocation was Glen Gordon - 527 acres, Haldwell Green - 757 acres (in Srigantha Kaval on the Magadi road) and Whitefield - 542 acres, Sausmond - 926 acres, value being approximately INR 1/acre. However, only Whitefield (previously villages of Nellurhalli, Nagondahalli, and Hagadur) took off as a settlement.

The core idea of the Whitefield layout was an integrated settlement. It was planned with a Circle in the middle (the Whitefield Circle of 6.4 acres still exists), and then four concentric circles with 90 homes (of which two were completed initially).

This has to follow smaller plots on the inside, with increasingly larger plots on the outside which will house common areas like the club, inn, church, etc. The center space will hold the school and the library.



Source: From current Google Maps.



Original plan.

Source: <https://maddy06.blogspot.com/2023/04/white-and-whitefield.html>

Incidentally, the circular layout remains a relative novelty in India even today (Chandni Chowk in Delhi notwithstanding). Some speculate it was inspired by the Garden City movement, but there is no evidence. But whatever may be the inspiration, the settlement perspired hard to scale.

It faced challenges from early on, especially from an agricultural perspective. The Eurasians and Anglo-Indians were not conversant with farming. Add to that the water scarcity in the area.

Transport was a challenge – the nearest railway station was Kadugodi (now Whitefield). It is two miles away, and the only transport from the station to Whitefield was a bullock cart. For that one has to communicate to Ms. Rose White, widow of David White. Also, post sundown no Indians were to stay in the area. For quite a while the families who believed and relocated did not scale beyond around 20.

Soon, a few early residents made Bengaluru city their residence, with Whitefield being a weekend gate away. Also, the foreigners and Anglo Indians working in Kolar Gold Fields set up residence here (Kolar being an hour's drive then), but they were not agriculturalists.



Whitefield did not scale as a colony of the Anglo Indians. But common facilities came up:



Memorial Church



Whitefield Club



The General Store



Waverly Inn

Source: Various publications as appended, present-day status

There are urban legends of Winston Churchill visiting Waverly Inn during his stint in Bangalore, and even his solicitation of Rose Hamilton, daughter of the Inn owner James Hamilton. However, there is no historical evidence to that effect.

Incidentally, the Church was for multiple faiths among the Christianity, as that was the ask from the Wadiyar family for the land grant. There have been multiple instances of tensions among the faiths, including a case where the church organ was stolen one night and dumped at a nearby pond. Thankfully, the overall harmony was always maintained.

Whitefield colony saw a downward spiral post-independence when many of the original residents migrated to the UK, Australia, Canada, etc. – spurred by the prospect of a better future, and uncertainty of integration with mainstream India. Many sold their properties, and some kept them in the hope of coming back (which happened in a few cases too). These unoccupied properties and the vast common lands came into sight of the developers when the IT boom reached Bangalore.

IT took wings in India in the 70s with the first wave of automation, when local companies came about to maintain the infrastructure. But the real boom came in the early 90s, when Indian IT was at the forefront of the Y2K issue, and the skill of its engineers as well as their availability became known globally.

There was a wave of global firms who wanted to set up operations in Bangalore (weather, connectivity, and talent pool were easy draws). It started with the setting up of the International Technology Park of India (ITPI), Bangalore in collaboration with Singapore. ITPI to date stands as a flagship moment for the industry.

Soon more players were looking for space, and the employees were looking for residences in proximity for ease of travel. Whitefield with large plots, often infirm and even absentee landlords, the drowning voices of the aging Anglo-Indian community enabled rapid expansion. As private infrastructure came in, the government also joined the same bandwagon of taking over land either to sell it to builders, or build infrastructure.

Multiple instances of demolitions have been reported in the Whitefield area, often without proper agreements or approvals. Even the Church was served notice to let go of the boundary wall to widen a road. Some heritage-loving residents, who are either descendants of the original inhabitants or ones who moved in in search of a serene life, are putting up their struggle (can be seen in the INTACH series mentioned below). However, the market forces are very powerful and difficult to resist.



# A road-widening drive caught in a protest jam

V SHORA  
BANGALORE, AUGUST 26

**O**N HUNDREDS of walls lining Bangalore's streets, little red arrows point inward, staking claim to a piece of all that is beyond—shops, offices, schools, temples, churches, mosques, hospitals and homes. At least 216 roads have been earmarked for widening to ease traffic, but with citizens organising themselves against the drive and refusing to settle for Transferable Development Rights (TDRs) in return for giving up a part of their homes, the writing on the wall is far from clear.

Initiated in 2005 to decongest 85 roads, the road-widening drive has been steadily scaled up to encompass over 200 roads. With the Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP)'s roads division upping the ante over the past year and a half, resident welfare associations across the city have mounted an attack on the



The Whitefield Memorial Church, which is to be widened.

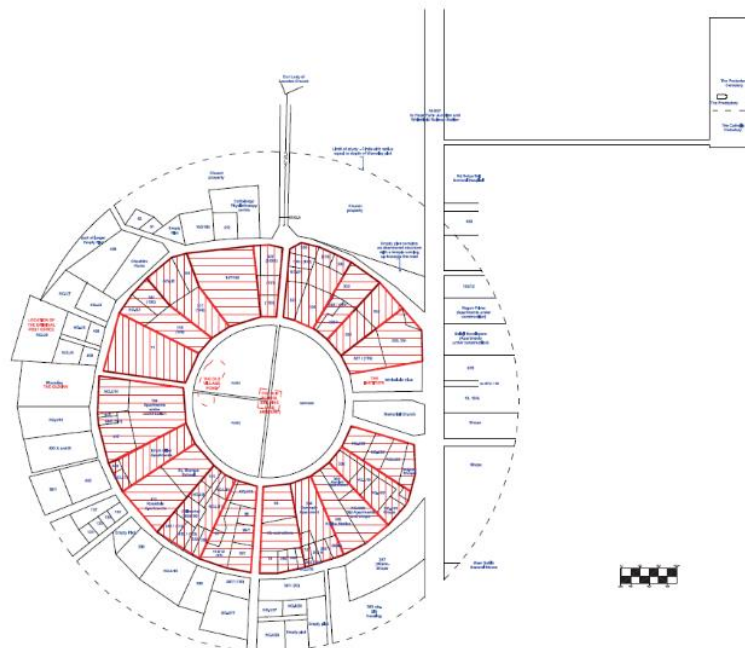
roads in 'core areas', 17 are either in the process of being widened—such as Banaswadi Road, Hennur Road, Kasturba Road and Mysore Road—or have already been widened, while the rest are to be resurveyed.

Roads in areas that aren't listed as 'core' remain under the widening scanner. Which includes Whitefield, an idyllic 19th-century Anglo-Indian enclave-turned-tech hub where residents were served notices in May 2010 to make way for a signal-free corridor from Junction to Hope Farm, along Old Airport Road. Among properties on the Whitefield-Vartur road that stand to lose land is the Whitefield Memorial Church, consecrated in 1886. A year short of acquiring heritage status, the mud-and-brick church will lose its altar and sanctum sanctorum should the BBMP decide to claim the 22.5 metres it needs to widen the road.

"The road has been widened six times in 10 years. It was just this April that a pavement was added. If this BBMP claims 20 ft, it can make it

ple's wishes and principles of engineering. Says UN Dushadur, head

The INTACH study of Krupa Rajangam (referred to below) paints a bleak picture of the current status.



4. Overlay of archival map and present-day plot boundaries, which makes it clear that the village originally comprised just the Inner Circle. The Outer Circle and associated plots came much later. Original public buildings that no longer function or exist are highlighted. Author's drawing.

Overlay of archived maps and present-day boundaries

Source: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/02666030.2011.556013>



Whitefield today is the shadow of what it was, and we may soon lose its past too. But Whitefield has also been instrumental in giving the most successful export business of India, and gave the country and its people a global footprint. So, for sure, it is a mixed bag.

Unfortunately, the history of Whitefield has been reset to IT, while forgetting its heritage. The pioneers were all dead, and their families mostly migrated. Also, the Anglo-Indians steadily lost their social and political clout in India, so much so the two seats reserved for them in the Parliament have also been abolished.

Past will not come back, but can we still preserve the present? The Inn, the Church, the Club, and the last houses standing (The Emerald House, Perfect Peace) – all of them are exquisite pieces of heritage and beauty.



The Perfect Peace



Source: Various publications as appended

India has a great tradition of preserving the past with the present, and Whitefield should not be an exception. A few ideas:

1. A core team of anchors who passionately feel about the area.
2. Reaching the global Anglo-Indian diaspora
3. Local political support
4. Build on studies like INTACH and Engagement
5. Push for heritage status and preservation
6. Start a heritage walk sort of activity for better understanding and engagement.
7. Approach local companies, especially the Tech ones, for support in the initiative

Just to see what Whitefield Inner Circle looks like, I took a drive around. Attaching a couple of photos in a recent visit, gave me hope.



## References

1. White and Whitefield  
<https://maddy06.blogspot.com/2023/04/white-and-whitefield.html>
2. Of a circle within a circle  
<https://www.deccanherald.com/india/karnataka/of-circle-circle-2512004>
3. Whitefield: An Important but Forgotten Chapter of India's Colonial Heritage – Krupa Rajangam  
<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/02666030.2011.556013>

A set of six videos has been made with grants from INTACH UK about the history of Whitefield, led by Krupa Rajangam.

Whitefield Diaries -Circle without circle

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OPg8LkUWYbs>

Whitefield Diaries: The past is a foreign country

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CF7dvKbQNgU>

Whitefield Diaries - The Whitefield Tea Party

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IEvWf5kXmgY>

Whitefield Diaries -Church Tales

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ca4RQO-bjWU>

Whitefield Diaries - Those were the days

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hcEU6r7MA98>

Whitefield Diaries - Time capsule

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dhhrTzhgMg0>