

## **Transforming the Tropics: The Creation of British Space in India**

Situated in the Nilgiri Hills of Southern India, Ootacamund or Ooty as the settlement became popularly known, stands at 7,500 feet<sup>1</sup> above sea level, and is an island of temperate climate in the hot tropics. Now officially named Udhagamandalam, the settlement lies in modern day Tamil Nadu. This is South India's most famous hill station, the official summer retreat of the Madras Government during the Raj and throughout the nineteenth century a popular British choice for both short retreat and permanent residence.<sup>2</sup> Through the exploration of wide ranging historical archives, this paper and the accompanying images document and reflect upon the changing identity of Ootacamund and the surrounding Nilgiri region over the Victorian period.

The European 'discovery' of the Nilgiri region is widely attributed to Whish and Kindersley, assistants to John Sullivan the Collector<sup>3</sup> of Coimbatore (the neighbouring lowland District), who stumbled upon the hills in 1818 during a mission to capture tobacco smugglers.<sup>4</sup> When the two men returned, they fascinated Mr Sullivan with their tales of the region's strange climate, fertile soils and abundant game. After visiting the Hills for himself, Sullivan explained to the Government,

There is no Asiatic or African climate known to us (with the exception of that of the [Nepaul] Mountains) so cool and equal throughout the year as the climate of the Neilgherries [it being accepted at this time that it was great and sudden changes which were injurious to the health of the invalid]; and I have no doubt that when the road is made accessible, and a medical man stationed there, these mountains will become the general resort of invalids, instead of the Cape and the Isle of France.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This is an approximate figure. I have chosen to keep measurements in the format popular during the period of interest. The metric equivalent is 2,286 metres.

<sup>2</sup> For more on this see Hockings, P. (1989). British Society in the Company, Crown and Congress Eras, In: Hockings, P. (Ed). (1989). *Blue Mountains: The Ethnography and Biography of a South Indian region*. Delhi: Oxford University Press. pp.334-359, and Kenny, J. T. (1995). Climate, race and imperial authority. The symbolic landscape of the British hill station in India. *Annals of the American Association of Geographers*. 85(4):694-714.

<sup>3</sup> District Collectors are part of the Indian Administrative Service, being the most powerful government officials of the district. During the period of British rule, the Collector was an important colonial officer given the responsibilities of revenue collection and other civil duties including acting as magistrate. For most of the nineteenth century natives were not eligible to become District Collectors. For information on John Sullivan himself see Hockings, P. (1989). British Society in the Company, Crown and Congress Eras, In: Hockings, P. (Ed). (1989). *Blue Mountains: The Ethnography and Biography of a South Indian region*. Delhi: Oxford University Press. pp. 334-359.

<sup>4</sup> This tale is recounted in Panter Downes, M. (1967). *Ooty Preserved. A Victorian Hill Station in India*. London: Hamish Hamilton, and Price, F. (2006). *Ootacamund: A History*. Chennai: Rupa and Co (originally published in 1908).

<sup>5</sup> John Sullivan to the Secretary to Government, 5<sup>th</sup> July 1820. Reproduced in, *Papers relative to Formation of Sanitarium on Neilgherries, for European Troops*. House of Commons Papers, 1850 (729), p. 1.

Sanitaria were desperately needed to house and rehabilitate those Europeans whose constitutions had apparently been shattered as a result of exposure to the continual heat of the Indian climate. Permanent settlement in the tropics had long been desired yet feared by Europeans. The tropics represented ‘an impenetrable barrier to the worldwide expansion of the white races and sapped them of the racial superiority derived from their northern homelands.’<sup>6</sup> The prospect of suitable temperate conditions and sites of recuperation, being available within India was exciting and important news. As the British explorer Richard Burton explained in 1851, ‘Such a climate within the tropics was considered so great an anomaly that few would believe in its existence.’<sup>7</sup> A convalescent depot designed to simulate a return to Europe,<sup>8</sup> was duly constructed and was reported as ready for the reception of European invalids on the 8<sup>th</sup> January 1830.<sup>9</sup> The official medical statistics soon classified many sick military men as ‘recovered’ after spending a sojourn on the Nilgiris.

Baikie, the first medical officer assigned to Ootacamund, enthusiastically endorsed the quality of the Nilgiri climate, declaring it to be similar to that of Great Britain, and therefore particularly suited to the British constitution.<sup>10</sup> He was not alone in drawing similarities to Britain.

Others compared the Hills to Sussex,<sup>11</sup> or viewed them as an eclectic combination of English counties as Lord Lytton wrote to his wife,<sup>12</sup>

The morning was fine and for the first time I have seen Ootacamund. *Having* seen it, I affirm it to be a paradise, and declare without hesitation that in every particular it far surpasses all that its most enthusiastic admirers and devoted lovers have said to us about it. The afternoon was rainy and the road muddy, but such beautiful *English* rain such delicious *English* mud. Imagine Hertfordshire lanes, Devonshire downs, Westmoreland lakes, Scotch trout streams and Lusitanian views!<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Arnold, D. (2000). “Illusory Riches”: Representations of the Tropical World, 1840-1950. *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography*. 21(1): 6-18. p. 13. Also see Livingstone, D. (2002). Race, space and moral climatology: notes towards a genealogy. *Journal of Historical Geography*. 28: 159-180.

<sup>7</sup> Burton, R. F. (1851). *Goa, and the Blue Mountains; Or, Six Months of Sick Leave*. London: Richard Bentley: London. p. 188.

<sup>8</sup> Duncan, J. (1998). Dis-Orientation. On the shock of the familiar in a far-away place. In Duncan, J. and Gregory, D. (1998). *Writes of Passage: Reading Travel Writing*. London: Routledge. pp.151-163.

<sup>9</sup> G.O. by Government, 8<sup>th</sup> January 1830. Reproduced in *Papers relative to Formation of Sanitarium on Neilgherries, for European Troops*. House of Commons Papers, 1850 (729), p. 50.

<sup>10</sup> See Baikie, R. (1834). *Observations on the Neilgherries, Including an Account of their Topography, Climate, Soil and Productions, and of the Effects of the Climate on the European Constitution*. Calcutta: Baptist Mission Press.

<sup>11</sup> See Morris, J. (1981). Under a gum tree in Ooty. *Observer Colour Supplement*. pp. 24-31.

<sup>12</sup> Lord Lytton was Viceroy of India between 1876 and 1880.

<sup>13</sup> These words from Lytton (or similar versions) are often quoted but the original text from which they are taken is not known, this version is taken from Price, F. (2006). *Ootacamund: A History*. Chennai:

**Figure One: Ootacamund, (Veale, 2007)**



This normalisation of the exotic through the identification of supposedly temperate characteristics was by no means unique to the site of Ootacamund. As Driver and Martins have illustrated, ‘the contrast between the temperate and the tropical is one of the most enduring themes in the history of global imaginings.’<sup>14</sup> James Duncan attributes the fascination the Victorians had with the Kandyan Highlands of Ceylon to the region’s hybridity, travellers’ accounts operating ‘through a set of exoticizing and familiarizing gestures.’<sup>15</sup>

In comparison with the sultry Indian plains, descriptions of the Nilgiri climate as temperate and enjoyable were accurate. The region’s newfound reputation acted to draw up a significant British population from other regions of India, and importantly from women and children back home who had hitherto been considered especially

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Rupa and Co. p. 126 (originally published in 1908), who takes them from Lady Betty Balfour’s History of Lord Lytton’s Indian Administration (1899).

<sup>14</sup> Driver, F. and Martins, L. (Eds). (2005). *Tropical Visions in an Age of Empire*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. pp. 3-5.

<sup>15</sup> Duncan, J. (1998). p. 151.

vulnerable to the hazards of the tropics.<sup>16</sup> The establishment of Ootacamund as a suitable and desirable place for raising families, as well as a popular bachelor retreat, was a development of the utmost importance.<sup>17</sup>

As resident and visitor numbers expanded, England remained the most frequent climatic comparison, although likenesses were also drawn with Australia, South America, the Mediterranean, Switzerland, Egypt and others, places often familiar to, and popular with, their readers.<sup>18</sup>

Through the creation of a new ‘imaginary geography’<sup>19</sup> the British aided their interpretation of the region. Lightly populated regions like the Nilgiris were relatively easy to negotiate, their supposed ‘emptiness’<sup>20</sup> serving to illustrate the great opportunities for the improvement of these landscapes through settlement, agriculture, and cultivation.

The Nilgiri environment was not only thought to aid the acclimatisation of Europeans to India, but also to be conducive to the establishment of an array of plantation crops, garden productions and European agriculture.

In the early days, residents were preoccupied with attempts to establish English flowers, trees and vegetables on the Nilgiris from seeds which accompanied them from home.<sup>21</sup> The enthusiasm for importing English produce may well have come from John Sullivan whose passion for gardening led him to send for a gardener

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<sup>16</sup> See Bell, M. (1993). “The pestilence that walketh in darkness”. Imperial health, gender and images of South Africa, c. 1880-1910. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*. 18(3): 327-341. pp. 327-328.

<sup>17</sup> Although most guidebooks stressed the importance to health of travel to the hills by British women (sometimes away from their husbands), during the hot season, Alison Blunt documents that some stated that the practice of women retreating to the hills led to break-ups of homes, threatening not only domestic security but also the legitimacy of imperial rule (see Blunt, A. (1999). Imperial geographies of home: British domesticity in India, 1886-1925. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*. 24(4): 421-440).

<sup>18</sup> Referring to the same practice in Ceylon, Duncan explains that, “In doing so they engaged in an act of translation, recuperating the specificity of this place to a series of places on the tourist circuit in Europe”. See Duncan, J. (1998). p. 155.

<sup>19</sup> See Gregory, D. (1995). Imaginative Geographies. *Progress in Human Geography*. 19(4): 447-85, who, drawing on the writings of Edward Said describes the notion of imaginative geographies as “representations of space [that] are entangled with relations of power” (p.474), Duncan, J. and Gregory, D. (Eds). (1999). *Writes of Passage: Reading Travel Writing*. Routledge: London, and Ryan, J. R. (1997). *Picturing Empire: Photography and the Visualization of the British Empire*. Reaktion Books: London.

<sup>20</sup> Pradhan, Q. (2007). Empire in the hills: The making of hill stations in colonial India. *Studies in History*. 23(1): 33-91. p. 37. In 1908, Francis described the Nilgiris “to be one of those happy countries which have no political history, see Francis, W. (1994). *Madras District Gazetteers. The Nilgiris*. Asian Educational Services. p. 90. Originally published 1908.

<sup>21</sup> See Price, F. (2006). Chapter 14. pp. 238-262. Originally published in 1908.

from England, a Mr Johnson, who arrived in Ooty in 1821 accompanied by English apple and peach trees, and strawberries.<sup>22</sup>

The climate appeared to suit English produce even better than it suited the English people, encouraging extraordinary growth. Horticultural competition was soon rife as Frederick Price reflected in *Ootacamund* originally published in 1908,

In 1826, Hough<sup>23</sup> refers to them [vegetables] as thriving in a very extraordinary manner, and growing much larger than in their native country. He gives the following astounding measurements. A beetroot upwards of three feet in circumference; a turnip three feet; a turnip radish thirty-four and a half inches; a Spanish radish twenty-seven and a half inches round, and three feet long; and a cabbage plant – probably a Jersey – eight feet high, with a stalk ten inches in circumference. All these measurements were evidently of plants that had run to seed, but even though this was the case, they are enormous.<sup>24</sup>

In 1998 Judith Roberts commented that the desire to create English gardens became the ‘central theme of the gardening activities of the British in India.’<sup>25</sup> The opportunity which the Nilgiris presented for Europeans to work out of doors safely was fundamental, the cooler climate also aiding the survival of European plants.<sup>26</sup> Captain Robert Mignan (Bombay European Regiment, and member of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland) recognised how richly productive the region had already become in his notes of a tour through Ootacamund published in 1834,

Vegetables here are very fine, and in great abundance,- a striking difference, and a convincing proof of the superiority of the soil and climate to that of the plain below, where neither corn nor vegetables will ever attain to great perfection... Here potatoes ripen, and cauliflowers come to a head. Also turnips, radishes, beet-roots, onions, leeks, peas, beans of all kinds, carrots, parsnips, cabbages, lettuces, artichokes, pumpkins, &c, thrive amazingly.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> See Panter Downes, M. (1967). *Ooty Preserved. A Victorian Hill Station in India*. London: Hamish Hamilton. p. 30.

<sup>23</sup> James Hough was a Chaplain in Madras who visited the Nilgiris for health purposes and, “was most anxious to acquaint others with the benefits to be derived from the place and to persuade the Government of India to patronize it as a sanatorium” (Francis, W. (1994). *Madras District Gazetteer: The Nilgiris*. Madras: Asian Educational Services. p. 124 (originally published in 1908)), publishing his *Letters on the Climate, Inhabitants, Productions etc. of the Neilgherries, or Blue Mountains of Coimbatore* in 1829, London: John Hatchard.

<sup>24</sup> Price, 2006. p. 257, (originally published 1908).

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.* p. 115.

<sup>26</sup> As Sir W.T. Denison (Governor of Madras between 1861-1866) wrote home to his son in a letter written in May of 1863, “the truth is that it cannot be, the climate will not allow the European to work out of doors except in a few exceptions at places such as the Neilgherries”. Letter from Sir W.T. Denison, Guindy, Saidapet, India, to W.E. Denison; 7 May 1863. University of Nottingham Manuscript Collections. (DeWmC76/1/1). In many other parts of India, as Roberts has explained, “The heat for much of the year restricted the use of the garden, and much other activity, to mornings and evenings”, (Roberts, 1998. p. 117).

<sup>27</sup> Mignan, R. (1834). *Notes extracted from a private journal, written during a tour through a part of Malabar, and among the Neilgherries: Including an account of the topography of Ootacamund, with observations on its climate, inhabitants, and natural history*. Bombay: American Mission Press. p.82-3.

Both horticulture and botany received a huge boost when the Ootacamund Government Botanical Gardens were founded.<sup>28</sup> William McIvor, a trained gardener from Kew, arrived in 1848 to transform the chosen site from dense jungle.<sup>29</sup> In the early years, the Government Garden concentrated on expanding the ongoing efforts of Nilgiri residents in growing European fruits and vegetables – essential components of the European diet. As McIvor explained:

This garden, together with the branch garden attached to this establishment, has already contributed very considerably, to the benefit of the country...More especially as the demand for vegetables, for the supply of European soldiers is now made a matter of great moment.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Large botanical gardens had already been established elsewhere in India by this time, notably in Samulcottah (north of Madras) in 1776, Calcutta in 1788 (see Thomas, A.P. (2006). The establishment of Calcutta botanic garden: Plant transfer, science and the East India Company, 1786-1806. *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*. 16(2):165-177), and Peradeniya in Sri Lanka in 1821.

<sup>29</sup> William Graham McIvor, was born in Dollar, Clackmannan, Scotland in 1825 and died on the 8<sup>th</sup> June 1876 in Ootacamund, aged 51. He began working as a gardener at Kew in 1845 before being sent out to India in 1848. He went on to be credited with the acclimatisation of cinchona to southern India (see Desmond, R. (1994) *Dictionary of British and Irish Botanists and Horticulturalists, including Plant Collectors, Flower Painters and Garden Designers*. London: Taylor Francis and the British Museum).

<sup>30</sup> McIvor, W.G. (1856). Report on the Government Botanical and Horticultural Gardens, Ootacamund, for the year 1854-55. Madras: H.Smith, Fort Saint George Gazette Press. p.11. British Library Oriental Collections (IOR/V/24/1688).



**Figure Two: The Botanical Gardens at Ootacamund, (Veale, April 2007)**



McIvor viewed acclimatisation very much as a method for improving what India had to offer:

Next in importance to the discovery and application of indigenous productions is the improvement of the resources of the country by the introduction of various useful trees, shrubs, herbs, &c., such as are indigenous to other countries similarly situated. The success with which this has been done in other countries argues for success in India also. For instance, sugar, coffee, cotton, ginger, pepper, cloves, maize, lemons and plantains were introduced to the West Indies;- rice, cotton, &c. to America. The vine to the Cape. Hence the produce of plants introduced to these countries, now form the principal source of their own wealth, staple products and exports.<sup>31</sup>

Only a few years after its founding, the government garden at Ootacamund was offering fifty three varieties of apple tree for sale, alongside apricots, cape plum, almonds, cherries, filberts, figs, guava, granadella, grape-vine, bread fruit, lemon, lime, loquat, mango, mulberry, medlar, orange, peaches, pears, nectarine, plums, pineapple, quince, currants, gooseberries, raspberries, strawberries, and blackberries,

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<sup>31</sup> Extract from a letter dated 21<sup>st</sup> November 1855 from McIvor to T. Clarke, Collector of Malabar. Appendix to McIvor, W.G. (1856). *Report on the Government Botanical and Horticultural Gardens, Ootacamund, for the year 1854-55*. Madras: H. Smith, Fort Saint George Gazette Press. p.17. British Library Oriental Collections (IOR/V/24/1688).

the Government taking active steps to encourage private cultivation efforts.<sup>32</sup> It was even hoped that India could produce healthy specimens of varieties under threat in England, like the Golden-pippin Apple, and send them back.

The Government Gardens were the main supplier of plant and seed to the public, although commercial suppliers of flowers and plants did open up locally and nationally.<sup>33</sup>

McIvor believed that education in horticultural matters was the precursor for success, superior knowledge able to overcome the difficulties which the Indian climate may present.<sup>34</sup> His desire to better inform the residents in botany was displayed through the publications issued with the annual reports of the Government Gardens including *Brief hints for the culture in India of Fruit Trees; and the rearing of Vegetable and Flower seeds* from 1857.<sup>35</sup> In time, independent publications specifically targeted towards horticulture on the Indian hills emerged.<sup>36</sup> Most, like Pogson's *Indian Gardening*, were targeted towards bungalow gardens, and as Roberts has explained, 'many gardening books included designs for flowerbeds that aimed to reproduce popular or well-known designs from home.'<sup>37</sup>

As Mr McIvor grew in ambition, enclaves throughout the empire became involved in his projects,

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<sup>32</sup> See McIvor, W. G. (1852). *Report on the Horticultural Gardens, Ootacamund, Neilgherry Hills, 1852*. Madras: Asylum Press. p. 1-2. British Library Oriental Collections (IOR/V/24/1688).

<sup>33</sup> One of the most popular of these being Sutton's Seeds whose advertisements clearly stated the popular desires of the English in India, "For flowers and vegetables, every Garden Lover can, with ordinary care and by using Sutton's Seeds, reproduce in India the exquisite flowers and delicious fresh vegetables so typical of English Gardens", (Advertisement for Sutton's Seeds on the cover of S. Percy-Lancaster, *An Amateur in the Indian Garden*. In Roberts, 1998).

<sup>34</sup> He expresses this view in the annual report for 1855-56: "In my humble opinion the want of a better knowledge of Horticulture is the cause of three-fourths of the valuable plants supplied with profit to these gardens, being a dead loss to the public, and a total failure as regards future benefit to the country", (McIvor, W.G. (1856). p. 13-14).

<sup>35</sup> Advice booklet included in the 'Catalogue for 1857 of Fruit Trees and Shrubs, Timber and Ornamental Trees, Flowering Shrubs, Choice Perennial Flowers, Ligneous Climbers, Herbs, Kitchen Garden, and Flower Seeds for sale at the Botanical and Horticultural Gardens, Ootacamund', which in turn was included in McIvor, W.G. (1857). *Report on the Government Botanical and Horticultural Gardens, Ootacamund, for the year 1856*. Madras: H. Smith, Fort St. George Gazette Press.

<sup>36</sup> These include Pogson, F. (1872). *Indian Gardening. A Manual of Flowers, Fruits and Vegetables, Soils and Manures and Gardening Operations of every kind in Bengal, the Upper Provinces and the Hill Stations of India*. Calcutta: Wyman., Landolichus. (1881). (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition). *The Indian Amateur Gardener: Practical Hints on the Cultivation of Garden Flowers and Imported Vegetable Seeds. Adapted for the Plains of Bengal, the North-West Provinces and Hill Stations from Notes Compiled during Eighteen Years of Experience of Gardening in India*. Calcutta: W. Newman and Co., Stevens, I. (1909). *Potatoe Cultivation on the Nilgiris*. Madras: Higginbotham & Co., and, Fyson, P. F. (1932). *The Flora of the South Indian Hill Stations. A revised edition of the Nilgiri and Pulney Hill Tops* (2 volumes). Madras: Government Press.

<sup>37</sup> Roberts, J. (1998). p. 123.



An active interchange of seeds and when possible of living plants, is kept up with kindred institutions in Ceylon, Calcutta, Mauritius and Melbourne. It is specially desirable to reciprocate with the Government Gardens at the two places last named, as the productions of New South Wales appear to suit the Neilgherry Hills in a remarkable manner. We are likewise endeavouring to establish a system of exchange with persons at Hongkong and Saint George's Sound.<sup>38</sup>

Innovations in transport technology opened up new opportunities. Better and faster ships gave rise to improved survival rates for transported plants and animals, and 'what had been perilous and difficult became routine.'<sup>39</sup> Attention began to shift from acclimatising European productions to those native to countries where environmental conditions were similar to those on the Nilgiris. Shortages of fuel wood led to the Australian eucalyptus being introduced in the 1850s.<sup>40</sup> After initial reports of failure,<sup>41</sup> many people consider that they took to Ooty only too well, for 'houses and views were swallowed up wholesale in their luxuriant dark shade.'<sup>42</sup> However there was recognition that the Indian climate placed restrictions upon their growth.<sup>43</sup>

Usefulness and functionality was an important attribute of the majority of plants gathered at Ooty and it was not long before attention shifted from vegetables to medicinal plants.<sup>44</sup> Developing a local source of medicines was desired not least because of the impending disease threats posed by the tropics – even on the hills. The most ambitious Imperial project, in which the Government Gardens and residents of Ootacamund played a crucial part, was the introduction of the cinchona tree (native to South America), the bark of which contains the anti-malarial alkaloid quinine.

<sup>38</sup> Comments on; McIvor, W.G. (1860). *Report on the Government Botanical and Horticultural Gardens, Utakamund, for the year 1859-60*. Madras: H.Smith, Fort Saint George Gazette Press, by Dr. Cleghorn (Professor of Botany to the Chief Secretary to Government, Fort Saint George), p.1. British Library Oriental Collections (IOR/V/24/1688).

<sup>39</sup> Dunlap, T. R. (1997). Remaking the land: The acclimatisation movement and Anglo ideas of nature. *Journal of World History*. 8(2): 303-319. p. 305.

<sup>40</sup> See Pradhan, Q. (2007). p. 50-51. Sir William Denison is sometimes credited with the transfer.

<sup>41</sup> Although the eucalyptus soon became the main source of fuel at Ootacamund, "It was, however, for a long time considered a failure, and as late as 1854 the Joint magistrate of Ootacamund, a Colonel Babington, wrote to the Collector as follows: "You have amply tried the extension of Australian trees here, but have found it impossible to clothe the hills with them to any extent, from their early delicacy, their being stolen, and their shape, which is not adapted to affecting climate by foliage as are commoner forest trees"" (Price, 2006. p.252-253).

<sup>42</sup> Panter-Downes, M. (1967). p.34.

<sup>43</sup> Measurements taken in 1882 by the Forest Department showed that the trees had, "apparently attained nearly the full growth that they will reach in this climate, which is however a mere nothing compared with the size which the eucalyptus, a variety of which is the largest tree in the world, attains in its native land", (Price, F. (2006). p.250).

<sup>44</sup> Comments on; McIvor, W.G. (1855). *Report on the Government Botanical and Horticultural Gardens at Ootacamund for 1853-54-55*. Madras: H.Smith, Fort Saint George Gazette Press, by Dr Cleghorn, Professor of Botany to the Chief Secretary to Government, Fort Saint George, p.1. British Library Oriental Collections (IOR/V/24/1688).

The first batch of cinchona plants and seeds arrived in October 1861 and were placed under the care of Mr McIvor.<sup>45</sup> Clements Markham, who had gathered the plants in South America and accompanied them to Ooty, included regular updates on the plants in his diary. On December 10<sup>th</sup> 1860, he wrote:

Went down to the gardens and saw McIvor. The little green cutting, of which there were hopes when I left, was dead and gone – thus all the green cuttings are lost. The stumps or wood cuttings were exactly in the same state as when I last saw them; except that one of the calisayas had thrown out a weakly shoot, surrounded by dead scales, which was ¼ of an inch long when last seen – it is about two inches under ground. The rest are no better and no worse: they will not begin to grow: almost in despair.<sup>46</sup>

Poor weather associated with the monsoon eventually claimed the last of the plants. Acclimatising the cinchonas was proving problematic, despite the supposed similarities between their native home of the Andean highlands and Ootacamund.<sup>47</sup> However, more batches of seeds and plants soon arrived and, largely due to the determination of Mr McIvor, were more successful. Once again, private investors were also encouraged to take up the crop, and although they had mixed degrees of success, their plantations made a substantial impact on the Nilgiri landscape.

Acclimatisation efforts involving animals are also evident in the documentary sources. Charles Denison (brother of William, Governor of Madras) wrote home with a report on William McIvor's less well known experiments in December 1867,

He has been very successful in bringing out trout, carp, eels, golden fish and a French fish so I hope in a few years we may have the lake and our hill streams stocked with trout and other fish...<sup>48</sup>

Alongside fishing, hunting was another popular gentlemanly pursuit in the region. The Ooty Hunt began hunting jackals (efforts fell short of attempting to import the English fox) with imported and acclimatised hounds and horses in 1844 and is still in

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<sup>45</sup> A photography of Cinchona trees en-route from Ecuador in Wardian cases can be found at: <http://www.plantcultures.org/pccms/action/showItem?id=524>

<sup>46</sup> Markham, C. R. Entry for 10<sup>th</sup> December 1860. Journal in India Nov 26<sup>th</sup> 1860 to Jan 30<sup>th</sup> 1861. RGS Collections. (CRM/68).

<sup>47</sup> By 1856, the successful growth of Australian and South American plants had been observed alongside the “suitableness of the climate to many Patagonian and Chinese plants”, (Comments on; McIvor, W.G. (1855). *Report on the Government Botanical and Horticultural Gardens at Ootacamund for 1853-54-55*. Madras: H.Smith, Fort Saint George Gazette Press, by Dr Cleghorn, Professor of Botany to the Chief Secretary to Government, Fort Saint George, p.1. British Library Oriental Collections (IOR/V/24/1688)).

<sup>48</sup> Letter from C. Denison, Club Cottage, Ootacamund, Madras, India, to J.E. Denison; 31 Dec. 1867. University of Nottingham Manuscript Collections. (OsC907/1-2).

existence today.<sup>49</sup> In 1920, Davis described the method for acclimatising horses to their new home:

Horses require a little time to acclimatize on first arrival in the hills, owing to the altitude: the great secret is to take them very easy for the first fortnight or so, keeping them on almost “All Bran” for the first week.<sup>50</sup>

Although my focus here has been on the efforts to negotiate the Indian landscape through altering the natural world, it is worth mentioning that typically British man-made structures and social institutions were also imported and became prominent features in the Nilgiri landscape.<sup>51</sup>

Trademark social and educational institutions played a key role in the foundation of a British community on the Hills. Schools were established, and the hills became a renowned educational centre for European children.<sup>52</sup> The Nilgiri Library was founded in 1859, and its reputation quickly established owing to its collection of imported books and periodicals. By the 1920s Davis noted that,

It is, next to the library of the Madras Literary Society, the most complete and best stocked library in Southern India. On its tables in the main hall will be found all the leading and most popular English Weeklies and Monthlies – illustrated papers, magazines and reviews – as also popular English daily newspapers.<sup>53</sup>

Founded in the early 1850s, the membership of the Ootacamund Club increased rapidly and it provided a meeting place primarily for the men of the town. As Hockings eloquently explained, the Club, provided facilities for interdining and interdrinking... Elsewhere Englishmen might meet, at the club they mingled... Wives could find the company there that was lacking in houses full of servants but empty of

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<sup>49</sup> For more on hunting in the Nilgiris see: Pandian, M.S.S. (1995). Gendered negotiations: Hunting and colonialism in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century Nilgiris. *Contributions to India Sociology*. 29. 239-263.

<sup>50</sup> Davis, J. A. (1920). “*Observer*” *Guide and Year Book to the Nilgiris*. Ootacamund: Ootacamund and Nilgiri Press: Ootacamund. p. 31.

<sup>51</sup> As Susan Pederson explains in the introduction to a special issue of the *Journal of British Studies* titled “At Home in the Empire” from 2001, “the British in India had stocked their faux-highlands summer resorts with the village churches, half timbered Tudor villas, and cottage gardens of an imagined rural English world.” Pederson, S. (2001). Introduction: Claims to Belong. *The Journal of British Studies*. 40(4). At Home in the Empire. pp. 447-453. p. 447.

<sup>52</sup> The earliest school for Europeans at Ootacamund was opened by the Church Mission Society c., 1832. This was followed by a number of others including the Lawrence Asylum established c. 1859 and The Breek’s Memorial School established c. 1873. See Price, 2006. pp 37, and 193-198 (originally published 1908).

<sup>53</sup> Davis, J. A. (1920). p. 72.

kin.<sup>54</sup> Services at St Stephens Church (opened in 1831)<sup>55</sup> were well attended and provided an opportunity for meeting other residents and visitors. Residents gave their homes<sup>56</sup> and estates familiar names (including Snowdon, Southdowns, Tudor Hall, Warwick and Woodcot)<sup>57</sup>, and dinner parties, garden parties and lavish balls were held throughout the year.<sup>58</sup>

**Figure Four: a) The Interior of the Ootacamund Club (Veale, April 2007) and b) St Stephens Church (Veale, April 2007)**



<sup>54</sup> Mandelbaum, D. (1989). The Nilgiris as a Region. In, Hockings, P. (Ed). (1989). *Blue Mountains: The Ethnography and Biography of a South Indian region*. Delhi: Oxford University Press. pp. 1-19. p.13.

<sup>55</sup> For a history of St Stephens, see Price, 2006. pp. 138-174. (Originally published in 1908).

<sup>56</sup> Ordinary house building can be seen as a key action of colonisation and taking possession of the hills.

<sup>57</sup> See Price, (2006). Chapter 18. An account of some old, and otherwise noteworthy houses. pp. 290-343.

<sup>58</sup> With private bungalows, hotels, clubs, racecourse, shops, botanical garden, schools, churches, banks, newspapers, road and rail networks, tennis courts, golf courses and other amenities (see Spencer and Thomas, 1948), it is easy to see why the hill stations were often referred to as “India’s summer playgrounds” (Kenny, 1991:108), this association with being “places of pleasure” (Clarke, H. (1881). The English stations in the hill region of India: Their value and importance, with some statistics of their products and trade. *Journal of the Statistical Society of London*. 44(3): 528-573. p. 529), sometimes acting to undermine their serious role.

In this brief overview of British activities on the Nilgiris, I have explored a few of the ways in which the British visitors and residents interpreted, negotiated and transformed the Indian landscape concentrating on the particular setting of Ootacamund. As Anderson has noted, ‘the presence of the empire provided a constant pressure to assert the universality of science, to integrate distant, exotic, heterogeneous phenomena with familiar ones.’<sup>59</sup> The Nilgiri climate was thus reconstructed by its new residents as one which would encourage growth among a broad range of the globe’s plant and animal species, and one in which the European could conduct physical work safely. In this way, India became a natural laboratory for the wider empire. Experimental introductions were mainly born from joint desires to feel safe and at home in an unfamiliar land, and to “improve” the region through productivity. Although many of the remaining Indian features (natives, temples, palms etc) were seemingly erased from view, the tropics did fight back. The result was a peculiar and unique juxtaposition of landscape elements from across the globe.

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<sup>59</sup> Anderson, 2005:252-253