

Heritage Alliance Travel Grant: Post-Trip Report

Part 1:

Organisation: Milton's Cottage Trust (CIO)

Name: Kelly O'Reilly

Job title: Business Director

Country travelled to: India

Specific region or cities travelled to: Mumbai, Chennai, Delhi

Organisation(s) visited: Asiatic Society of Mumbai; Broke Bibliophiles, Delhi & Mumbai chapters; Connemara Library, Chennai; David Sassoon Library, Mumbai; Delhi World Book Fair; Jaipur Literature Festival (meeting in Delhi); Madras Literary Society, Chennai; People's Free Library, Mumbai; Poetry Society of India, Delhi; St Paul's Institute of Communication Education, Mumbai; St Xavier's College, Mumbai; Sir JJ School of Art, Mumbai; Tamil Nadu Archives, Chennai; Tata Literature Live, Mumbai

Dates of visit: 8th – 18th October 2019

Part 2:

1. Original purpose of the visit:

Milton's Cottage receives visitors from all around the world and is in the process of establishing the International Friends of Milton's Cottage as part of our aim to increase Milton's profile and encourage more people to read his work.

In recent years we have established international partnerships with the Academy of American Poets, Milton Society of America, New York Public Library, Poetry Society of America and the University of Sydney to support this process. We are keen to build networks in India, as well, having observed an increasing number of visitors from India to Milton's Cottage in recent years. In addition, media coverage of our activities is more likely to be published there than any other country outside the UK.

The British Council / Heritage Alliance Travel Grant provided us with an opportunity to investigate the reasons for this in greater detail as well as build new partnerships, collaborations and friendships in India. Through our visit, we hoped to explore the potential for developing shared events to celebrate Milton's legacy and launch the International Friends of Milton's Cottage in India.

People, organisations, projects of relevance to your organisation/ project that you encountered during your visit:

India's literature scene is thriving and I had the opportunity to visit a wide range of libraries, literary festivals, bookshops, book clubs and more during my visit. Key amongst them was the Oriental Society of Mumbai, one of India's most historic literary venues and one of the four depository libraries in India. They also have an active events programme for their members and work with the

University of Mumbai and other educational organisations to develop literary activities for local students and residents.

In addition, I also had opportunities to meet and discuss future collaborative opportunities with representatives from the following organisations:

- Broke Bibliophiles, Delhi & Mumbai chapters
- Connemara Library, Chennai
- David Sassoon Library, Mumbai
- Delhi World Book Fair
- Jaipur Literature Festival (meeting in Delhi)
- Madras Literary Society, Chennai
- People's Free Library, Mumbai
- Poetry Society of India, Delhi
- St Paul's Institute of Communication Education, Mumbai
- St Xavier's College, Mumbai
- Sir JJ School of Art, Mumbai
- Tamil Nadu Archives, Chennai
- Tata Literature Live, Mumbai
- Title Waves Bookshop, Mumbai

Summary of the visit, including what went well and what was challenging:

With publishing and literary festivals booming in India, this visit has given me the opportunity to explore first-hand the enduring popularity of literature – including Milton's work – within Indian culture. During my time in India I was able to attend a number of literary events as well as make professional connections with a variety of writers, archivists, educators and organisers to share and exchange literary heritage project ideas and future collaborative opportunities.

As a result, I have developed a network that will support the development of an International Friends group for Milton's Cottage within India, as well as events and activities to support its continued artistic and organisational development. This includes the potential to apply for future shared grants to support travelling exhibitions, online talks and conferences and greater involvement of Indian academics in international Miltonic collaborations, such as the International Milton Symposium.

The challenge we now face is how to turn good will into practical opportunities with benefit for everyone involved, given the limited resources available on all sides. There was great enthusiasm for developing and extending our exchange of ideas and good practice, but funding will be an issue as there can be a significant amount of work involved in attracting international partnership grants and all organisations are facing the standard on-going struggle to fund their own core costs.

Overall, this visit to India has developed and strengthened a range of partnerships to mutual advantage and identified new opportunities for Milton's Cottage to promote Milton's legacy to literary and cultural partners throughout India. It has increased our cultural awareness of different literary and heritage viewpoints and practices, better equipping us to promote Milton's Cottage values internationally as well as collaborate with a wider range of literary partners to explore the benefits that our shared literary heritage brings to our society.

2. Experience and knowledge gained, with particular focus on how this experience and knowledge will benefit your organisation:

This visit has helped us gain a deeper knowledge and understanding of India's literature and literary heritage scene and how Milton fits into that landscape. We were able to experience first-hand just how widely his work is still read there – something of a shock coming from Britain, where it sometimes seems like no-one reads Milton anymore!

As India is one of Britain's most important growth markets for inbound tourism – and the only country in the world where publishing is booming – we believe this knowledge, alongside the networks we have developed through this trip, will give us a strategic advantage as we look to increase the number of Indian and international visitors to Milton's Cottage.

During the visit, we were also able to gain experience in international research, knowledge sharing, network building and skills development. It has widened our horizons for Milton's Cottage and we hope that the resulting projects we develop will build these networks of interest further. We look forward to developing a wider knowledge and understanding of Milton's international legacy with the active assistance of our new friends and partners.

3. Top tips for other heritage professionals working internationally, based on the learning gained during your visit:

Don't expect all meetings to lead somewhere: although a number of the organisations I met with didn't feel able to commit to any long-term collaborations, these discussions were nonetheless very useful in helping to learn more about the wider literary landscape of the cities that I visited.

Go off piste: although I had a set schedule, some of my most productive encounters were entirely impromptu. Exploring local bookshops has led to the offer of support from a book shop with its own event space while attending a number of local book groups has enabled me to engage with a younger (tech-savvy) generation of literary enthusiasts, widened our network of potential supporters and even given us the first subscribers to our International Friends scheme, ahead of its official launch in India.

Leave enough unscheduled time for impromptu encounters: many of the people I met were very helpful about providing introductions to other organisations and individuals while I was out there. It was therefore helpful to have a couple of unscheduled mornings and afternoons to take advantage of these opportunities.

4. What are the next steps you are going to take following the visit, and what resources/ support might you need in order to successfully realise your ideas?

Our next step will be to work towards the launch of the International Friends of Milton's Cottage in India, working in close dialogue with the Asiatic Society of Mumbai and other literary heritage partners in Mumbai, Delhi and Chennai.

We would benefit from local administrative support to help launch the International Friends of Milton's Cottage in India and are exploring the possibility of working with academic and corporate partners, as well as literary heritage organisations, to increase our resources in this area.

5. In one sentence, please summarise the impact the visit has had on your organisation and the organisation(s) you visited:

We believe that the resulting work from this visit will enable us to build an international community of friends for Milton's Cottage in India, strengthen connections made prior to and during our visit, and lead to further international collaboration to exchange ideas and explore our shared literary heritage.

6. In one sentence, please summarise the impact the visit has had on you personally:

Milton's writing had an international impact and following this visit - and the wonderful support from everyone I met - I feel inspired to take his words, works and legacy into a wider range of local, national and international settings.

7. Quote from your Director / Trustee / senior staff member on the benefit and impact of your international visit on your organisation:

"This was a wonderful opportunity for us to expand out network of international contacts and for our Business Director to build up greater experience in developing international partnerships and projects. We look forward to developing the Friends of Milton's Cottage in India and exploring the benefits of collaboration for both us and our new international partners." – Simon Avery, Chair

8. Following this international experience, how likely is it that your organisation will fund another international visit in the next 12 months from 1 to 5 (1 = very unlikely, 5 = very likely)?

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9. Will there be any follow up to this visit (e.g. jointly paper writing, online community building, future project applications, formal partnership formed, etc.)? (max. 150 words)

Yes. We are planning to work in partnership with the Asiatic Society of Mumbai and other partners to launch the International Friends of Milton's Cottage in India. We will continue to exchange any collaborative project ideas and opportunities that arise following this visit, ensuring we champion the respective work carried out in both organisations via our websites and social media platforms.