
ON JAMALPUR – ANGLO-INDIAN RAILWAY

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Jamalpur is best known as a very large workshop on the East Indian Railway, employing at one time, over 12,000 persons and over 1000 Anglo-Indians. Jamalpur was overnight from Calcutta and was famous for its Anglo-Indian social life. The Railway Institute was huge - it had its own movie theatre, a six-lane swimming pool, four tennis courts, two billiard rooms and a bowling lawn. Its dances were renowned and railway folk came from all over EIR to attend.

Jamalpur was also the premier training center of the EIR and the Indian Railways. There were basically four ways of joining the Railways. First, there were Trade Apprentices, who, after three years of training in a specific skill - machinist, welder, moulder, fitter, boilermaker and so, on became skilled factory workers. Second, as an entry level on the running side was a cleaner, who after training, became a fireman and then a Shunter, Passenger train Driver and finally a Mail Driver. Some of this category became Officers - Assistant Mechanical Engineers (AME's) or even a Divisional Mechanical Engineer (DME). Third were the Apprentice Mechanics. These were High School or Senior Cambridge passed lads, who were selected through a Government services commission. They spent four years in training, both theoretical and practical, at the end of which they became chargemen, then foremen and then general foremen. Towards the end of their careers many became Officers - Assistant Works Managers or even Works Managers. Most Anglo-Indians in Jamalpur joined as Apprentice Mechanics.

There was however, a fourth category of apprentices. These were called Special Class Apprentices an All India Railway Service cadre, recruited by a Public Services Commission. The British established this category of Apprentice in 1927, probably for 'brown sabibs' - young Indian gentleman who were very English in upbringing, language and thinking, usually from well-known families. They trained for four years

at Jamalpur, completed an Engineering degree from London (yes they were sent to London) and on completion were posted as Assistant Mechanical Engineers or Assistant Works Managers. This was a training position, as in two years, they were promoted to Works Manager or Divisional Mechanical Engineer. These gentlemen retired as Chief Mechanical Engineers or General Managers, the highest position on the Railways.

From over 10,000 applicants, through a series of competitive examinations, only about **ten** special class apprentices were selected annually. Once selected the apprentices lived a life of class privilege. A beautiful hostel called Jamalpur Gymkhana housed the apprentices. Each apprentice had an individual room with a bearer allotted to three rooms. The bearer cleaned the room, made the bed, polished the shoes and served the apprentices at meals. There was an exclusive kitchen where meals were prepared according to the apprentices' instructions. The hostel had its own swimming pool, three tennis courts, a squash court and even its own playing field. It was laid out on over two acres of land, and 'malis' (gardeners) kept the lawns immaculately green and the beds full of every type of exotic flowers. There were several entertainment rooms for billiards, table tennis and cards. Each apprentice received a stipend, enough to pay for his meals and club dues; all other expenditures were picked up by the Railways. Talk about royalty!

In the course of the history of Jamalpur Gymkhana, 43 years from 1927 through to the year 1969 (my records end there), from over 400 apprentices, there were **15** Anglo-Indian Special Class Apprentices. This is a very significant achievement and one that has somehow not been acknowledged in the pages of Anglo-Indian history. I would like to publish their names, in the hopes that some of their descendants in the UK or Canada or Australia may recognize them and know what their fathers achieved. Most of them migrated and I knew only two - R.D.Kitson who retired as Chairman Railway Board in the 80's (the equivalent of the Commanding General of the Indian Army) and Norbert DeSouza who retired as Chief Mechanical Engineer on the Central Railway in the 90's. Both continue to live in India. I migrated to the USA in 1976 when I was Joint Director of the Railway Board in Calcutta. Here is the roll call of these distinguished gentlemen.

1927 - H.V.M.Stewart, C.J.Butler; **1928** - D.B.King; **1930** -H.O.Toomey, J.O.Burns;

1931- W.C.Britter, E.L.T.Jones; **1932** - J.B.Rosair; **1943** - M.A.Plunkett; **1944** - H.G.T. Woodward; **1945** - E.J.Kingham; **1949** - T.M. Fritchley; **1951** - R.D.Kitson; **1956** - B.R.Williams; **1958** - N.DeSouza