

Chettinad

KARRAIKUDI, TAMIL NADU, INDIA

19TH CENTURY



stablished by the Chettiars, a caste of traders who flourished in nineteenth-century India, Chettinad is famous for its opulent palaces and temples. Economic pressures forced the Chettiars to largely abandon the area as a business center in the 1940s. The residential buildings preserved from the Chettiar settlements incorporate both local and western architectural traditions in their plans and decoration. Courtyards and balconies provided airy spaces for entertaining and protection

from the heat, and elaborate interiors and decorative façades impressed visitors and passersby alike. The Chettiar structures are still admired for their fine craftsmanship and materials used in their decoration.

A substantial number of Chettinad's buildings have been razed since the 1940s, and many of those that remain are in a dilapidated state. Much of the destruction has been caused by commercial interest in antiques, with decorative elements from many structures being removed for sale or use in private homes. A few of the

palaces have been restored as hotels and others are partially occupied by local families. The Indian government has expressed interest in further development of the area for tourism, but there is no overall plan in place to regulate the preservation or adaptive reuse of these unusual and important buildings. It is hoped that the international attention received from Watch listing will encourage India to extend protection to the civil architecture and urban heritage of this unique place.

Jantar Mantar (The Observatory)

JAIPUR, RAJASTHAN, INDIA

1729, 1901 RECONSTRUCTIONS

he Jaipur astronomical observatory, Jantar Mantar—thought to have been
built by the enlightened
ruler Sawai Jai Singh II in
1729—is one of the world's
most accurate pre-modern observatories, and
attests eighteenth-century efforts to improve
understanding of planetary and other cosmic
movements. One of five
observatories built by
the same monarch in

the same monarch in northern India—the others are in Delhi, Ujjain, Mathura, and Varanasi—the one in Jaipur is the largest and the best known. Unfortunately, the observatory began to deteriorate quickly following its construction. By the close of the nineteenth century, it had fallen into ruin. In 1901, Maharaja Ram Singh embarked on the restoration and reconstruction of the observatory. The remains of this reconstruction are what we see today. Some of the instruments, or yantras, are still in use to forecast weather and crop yields. These include constellation and meridian observatories and a giant sundial. Located in the administrative heart of Jaipur,



the site is also used as a public park and outdoor museum.

The reconstructions of 1901 and subsequent efforts to maintain the site during the British period and the decades that followed have helped avoid major structural damage to the yantras. However, the site has begun to deteriorate once again as a result of weathering, vandalism, and normal wear and tear of materials. The most urgent issue is the loss of the fine, calibrated markings on the instruments, which are eroding. These need to be restored in order to protect the historic function of these extraordinary instruments.