

St. James Church, Baroda.

Like almost all religious institutions, Vadodara's churches, too, tell a fascinating story about a people and a belief that found a comfortable hearth in the city. Perhaps the most comprehensive tale of all is told by Fatehgunj's St James Church-popularly known as the White Church-which is one of the oldest churches in the country.

Its history dates back to the arrival of the Protestant missionaries in Gujarat in the early 17th century, following the establishment of the factories of the East India Company. A number of churches were built during this period.

The White Church is dedicated to the memory of James Sutherland Esquire (1790-1840), Political Commissioner for 'Guzerat' and Resident at the Court of Highness the 'Guicoward'.

The East India Company had with them their chaplains since their earliest days. In 1814 Thomas Fanshawe Middleton was consecrated Bishop of Calcutta; his jurisdiction included not only the whole of India and Sri Lanka but also Australia.

The appointment of Bishop Middleton and the establishment of British power in Gujarat led to an increase in the number of company chaplains. The company maintained an Anglican Chaplain in Surat. The first chaplain of Baroda, Henry Jeffereys, was appointed in 1818.

During this period, the Anglican Archdeacon of Bombay was George Barnes, who was responsible for the building of three churches in Gujarat-in Kaira, Baroda and Surat. These were ready to be consecrated by Middleton's successor Bishop Reginold Heber in 1825.

Bishop Heber succeeded Middleton as Bishop of Calcutta in 1823. During his visit to Gujarat in March-April 1825, he consecrated three churches - St James Church in Baroda, St Georges Church, Kaira and Christ Church, Surat.

Baroda, with its British Residency, continued to be a British military and civil hub for many years. In November 1870, William Taylor, a leading preacher and evangelist, arrived in Bombay. In 1872, he was invited to Baroda by a group of army officers-mainly European and Anglo-Indian-in the service of the Gaekwads of Baroda.

St. James Church has an eventful history.

As far as the architecture is concerned, like all churches in Gujarat, this, too, owes a lot to the artistic ability and historical interests of J Sinclair Stevenson, who developed an attractive Indian-Gothic style. St. James Church is a very early example of 19th century Gothic, though the low pitched roof is more akin to the classical style.