

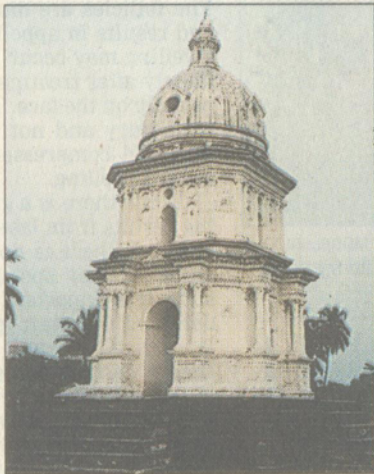
A Slice Of Holland Just An Hour Away From The City

Somen Sengupta

FOR MOST of us, Holland is a distant reality with little or no relevance to our daily lives. Not so for the residents of Chinsurah, a small town on the banks of the Hooghly.

Dutch traders came to Chinsurah in 1628, lured by the prospects of business and went on to rule and live there for the next 150 years. Not surprisingly, Chinsurah, which is just about an hour's drive from Kolkata, is littered with Dutch monuments. The most imposing of these is the Chinsurah Court, originally built as Fort Gustavus. The only other piece of Dutch architecture that is as visible is the Clock Tower. Set up in 1911 in honour of King Edward VII, it stands on an island in the town centre, called Ghari More.

A small Dutch church near the tower is a popular tourist haunt, though the larger St. John's Armenian Church at Mugaltuli is a bigger draw. Built in 1695 by an Armenian, the church is a marvellous piece of



PHOTOS: SOMEN SENGUPTA

Left: An example of Dutch architecture; **Right:** The Shandeshwari temple

architecture and is said to be the second oldest church in West Bengal. The Armenians came even before the Dutch in 1625. The church is still considered sacred by the few re-

maining members of the Armenian community in India and many of them come together to celebrate Christmas on January 6, not December 25 like everybody else.

The contribution of the Dutch is not limited to churches. A Shandeshwari temple on the banks of the river also has strong connections with the traders. Legend has it that a pair of brass drums and a silver statue of Shiva were presented to the Hindus by the Dutch and these have been preserved at the temple. There's also a Dutch Mandir in Chinsurah, although it's actually the grave of an unknown Dutchman. Situated near the station, the grave is unique in terms of structure because it has a large dome and open gates on all four sides.

Chinsurah's Mohsin College should also be visited for its history. The institution is housed in a mansion, which was once the palace of a French soldier called Perron who participated in the Maratha war.

Travel information

Take a local train from Howrah to Chinsurah, about 50 minutes' journey. From the station, take a cycle-rickshaw to go around. ■