A Study on British Architects in East and Southeast Asia: 1830 - 1940

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Abstract

This paper aims at identifying a profile of the British architects who have worked in East and Southeast Asia from 1830 to 1940. They played a vital role in the modern development of Asian architecture. Although most of building works have been done by military and civil engineers all the time of the 19th century, a couple of trained architects came to this region to look for the luck as soon as the British possessed new colonies. After Suez Canal opened, professional British architects began to be employed by local or colonial governments and designed marvelous and symbolic buildings probably to show colonial supremacy to the locals. During economic boom starting in 1880s, private architectural firms were also set up by partnership of civil engineers. Three firms took advantage of this boom and grew up immediately as leading architectural office. After the First World War, the number of British architects gradually decreased supposedly because Japanese and American architects advanced to this region.

Keywords: British architect, Royal Institute of British Architects, royal engineer, public work department, modernization

1. Introduction

Japanese government in the end of Edo period through to early Meiji period (1860 - 1880) employed quite many foreign engineers and architects for its modernization projects including foundation of modern arsenals, dockyards, mint, engineering college and so on. The majority was from British, who played a vital role in development of modern architecture not only of Japan, but also of neighboring countries, although the modernization for most of Asian countries was forced by European colonial powers.

This paper aims at identifying a profile of these British architects who have worked in East and Southeast Asia from 1830 to 1940; name, origin, training and working place, and period of practice. Cases of India, Indonesia and Indochina are excluded from this study as they need further study, although some pioneering works have been made some times ago; for case of India (Nilssen; 1968) and of Indonesia (Wall; 1942). Highlighting some leading British architects and civil engineers in Southeast and East Asia, the author has contributed several papers (Izumida; 1990, 1991, 1992).

The main source for the study is biographical data described in “Dictionary of National Biography”, “Builder”, “R.I.B.A. Journal”, “R.I.B.A. Calendar”, “R.I.B.A. Nomination Papers”, “Imperial Calendar”, and contemporary various “Commercial Directory”. These data was collected in the R.I.B.A. Library, the Public Record Office and library of the Institute of Civil Engineers by the author for total 4 months in 1988, 1990, 1994 and 1996.

‘Architect’ in this article means the professional who had received architectural training or education, and exclusively designed buildings on business for public or individual. Civil engineers are excluded from this study even though they often designed and supervised building especially in the early time of modernization or colonization. Referring to various resources, 57 trained British architects could be listed up as shown in Table 1.

2. Foreign Architects Before 1870

The chief clients for European buildings before 1870 were official trading bodies such as the British East India Company (E.I.C.) in Straits Settlements (Singapore, Malacca, Penang) and Hong Kong Colony, and some European entrepreneurs in these colonies and foreign settlements. The Dutch East India Company (V.O.C.) in the 17th and 18th century seems to have provided superior building department to construct and maintain city of Batavia, which was often admired as ‘Queen City of the East’ by European travelers. E.I.C. also provided engineering staffs under the army, called Royal Engineer (R.E.)². The highest position was Surveyor General, which was originally used for the Office of Works (Crock: 1968, p.108). Wyatt Family had turned out a number of the Surveyor General for E.I.C. (Colvin: 1978, p.258). and the Office of Works. The R.E.’s duty was to
| NAME          | BIRTH | DEATH | LIRA | ARIBA | ARAF | FRIBA | EDUCATION          | TRAINING          | PLACE           | OFFICE              | TERM              | SOURCE        |
|---------------|-------|-------|------|-------|------|-------|-------------------|-------------------|-----------------|---------------------|-------------------|---------------|
| Ballardie, J.H. | 1878  | 1938  | 1896 |       |      |       | Leeds Univ, RA    | Waterhouse, Webb | Rangoon         | PHD                 | 1918-1933        | REBA1933      |
| Barrow, J.W.   | 1845  | 1929  | 1977 | Austin |     |       |                   |                   |                 |                     |                  |               |
| Bird, H.W.     |       | 1977  | 1977 |       |      |       |                   |                   |                 |                     |                  |               |
| Biddulph, R.A.J. |     |       |      | R.S.I. |    |       |                   |                   |                 |                     |                  |               |
| Bingham, F.    |       | 1850  | 1987 |       | 1888 |       |                   |                   |                 |                     |                  |               |
| Boulton, E.F.  |       | 1752  | 1840 |       | 1841 |       |                   |                   |                 |                     |                  |               |
| Bouvier, C.G.  |       | 1910  | 1919 |       | AASchool |     |       |                   |                   |                 |                     |                  |               |
| Bouveret, T.M. | 1879  | 1958  | 1906 |       |       |       | Haileybury Coll.  |                   |                 |                     |                  |               |
| Bullock, A.    | 1880  | 1974  | 1917 |       |       |       |                   |                   |                 |                     |                  |               |
| Clark, W.H.    | 1842  | 1896  | 1857 | 1879 |       |       | Cathedral School  | C. Underwood      |                 |                     |                  |               |
| Conder, J.     | 1852  | 1920  | 1878 | 1884 |       |       | University Coll.  | W. Burgess         | Tokyo            |                     |                  |               |
| Core, J.M.     |       | 1880  | 1886 |       |       |       |                   |                   |                 |                     |                  |               |
| Croft, D.M.    | 1873  | 1942  | 1906 |       |       |       |                   |                   |                 |                     |                  |               |
| Dowdall, W.M.  |       |       |      |       |      |       |                   |                   |                 |                     |                  |               |
| Dyer, M.B.Y.   | 1870  | 1956  | 1911 |       |       |       |                   |                   |                 |                     |                  |               |
| Drewett, F.G.  | 1878  | 1958  | 1977 | 1978 |       |       |                   |                   |                 |                     |                  |               |
| Edwards, J.C.  | 1875  | 1935  | 1917 |       |       |       |                   |                   |                 |                     |                  |               |
| Fisher, H.G.   |       |       |      |       | 1977 |       |                   |                   |                 |                     |                  |               |
| Garton, F.M.   |       | 1818  | 1851 |       | 1867 |       |                   | R. Nesketh        |                 |                     |                  |               |
| Halse, S.J.    |       | 1890  | 1881 |       |      |       |                   |                   |                 |                     |                  |               |
| Hassell, A.N.  | 1856  | 1940  | 1891 |       |       |       |                   |                   |                 |                     |                  |               |
| Hewitt, A.E.   |       |       |      |       | 1910 |       |                   |                   |                 |                     |                  |               |
| Hubback, A.B.  |       |       |      |       | 1905 |       |                   |                   |                 |                     |                  |               |
| Iker, S.H.     |       | 1919  | 1909 |       |      |       |                   |                   |                 |                     |                  |               |
| Johnson, A.    |       |       |      |       |      |       |                   | T. R. Smith       |                 |                     |                  |               |
| Jones, W.G.E.  |       |       |      |       | 1977 |       |                   |                   |                 |                     |                  |               |
| Keys, P.H.     |       | 1900  | 1920 |       |      |       |                   | Hildbert Smith    |                 |                     |                  |               |
| Kidder, M.     | 1841  | 1900  | 1877 |       |      |       | RA                |                   |                 |                     |                  |               |
| Lane, H.R.     |       |       |      |       | 1935 |       |                   |                   |                 |                     |                  |               |
| Lemm, J.       | 1875  | 1920  | 1917 | 1912 |       |       |                   |                   |                 |                     |                  |               |
| Little, A.C.   | 1877  | 1937  | 1907 |       |       |       |                   | Leven Sharp       |                 |                     |                  |               |
| Mollard, F.A.  | 1877  | 1937  | 1977 |       |      |       |                   |                   |                 |                     |                  |               |
| Meadows, S.D.  | 1877  | 1937  | 1977 |       |      |       |                   |                   |                 |                     |                  |               |
| McGorry, G.    | 1877  | 1938  | 1911 |       |      |       |                   | A. Stevenson      |                 |                     |                  |               |
| Morris, H.S.   | 1877  | 1903  | 1914 |       |      |       |                   |                   |                 |                     |                  |               |
| Neubronner, H.A.|     |       |      |       | 1899 |       |                   |                   |                 |                     |                  |               |
| Norton, A.C.A. | 1858  | 1944  | 1881 |       |      |       |                   |                   |                 |                     |                  |               |
| O'Sullivan, J. | 1875  | 1935  | 1911 |       |      |       |                   |                   |                 |                     |                  |               |
| Owen, A.H.     | 1863  | 1917  | 1937 |       |      |       |                   |                   |                 |                     |                  |               |
| Palmer, C.     | 1857  | 1852  | 1882 | 1891 |       |       |                   |                   |                 |                     |                  |               |
| Puller, E.J.   | 1876  | 1929  | 1910 |       |      |       |                   |                   |                 |                     |                  |               |
| Ran, E.A.      |       | 1897  | 1937 |       |      |       | Royal Art School  | G. J. Clarke      |                 |                     |                  |               |
| Robinson, H.G. |       |       |      |      | 1912 |       |                   |                   |                 |                     |                  |               |
| Roberts, W.J.  | 1877  | 1915  | 1937 |       |      |       |                   |                   |                 |                     |                  |               |
| Salway, William | 1844  | 1892  | 1874 | 1885 |       |       |                   | Willian Read      |                 |                     |                  |               |
| Scott, A.      | 1878  | 1944  | 1904 |       |      |       |                   |                   |                 |                     |                  |               |
| Scott, Walter  | 1861  | 1918  | 1885 |       |       |       |                   |                   |                 |                     |                  |               |
| Simpson, C.J.W.|       |       |      |       |      |       |                   |                   |                 |                     |                  |               |
| Spence, H.M.   | 1883  | 1954  | 1907 |       |      |       |                   |                   |                 |                     |                  |               |
| Steadman, V.   | 1931  | 1889  | 1914 |       |      |       |                   |                   |                 |                     |                  |               |
| Stewardson, R.E.|     |       |      |      |    |       |                   |                   |                 |                     |                  |               |
| Terrace, T.S.M. |     |       |      |      | 1912 |       |                   |                   |                 |                     |                  |               |
| Thomas, C.     |       |       |      |      | 1901 |       |                   |                   |                 |                     |                  |               |
| Tickle, A.G.   |       | 1911  | 1915 |       |      |       | Regent St. Polytec | M. J. Simonnann   |                 |                     |                  |               |
| Tyrwhitt, T.   | 1874  | 1956  | 1900 |       |      |       |                   |                   |                 |                     |                  |               |
| Ward, R.N.     | 1875  | 1957  | 1906 | 1907 |       |       | Liverpool Univ.   |                   |                 |                     |                  |               |
| Wood, E.M.     |       | 1909  | 1920 |       |      |       |                     |                   |                 |                     |                  |               |

**Table 1. RIBA Members Having Worked in Southeast and East Asia 1870s to 1930s**

**Sources**
- Calendar: RIBA Calendar
- Nomination: RIBA Nomination Papers
- Directory: Commercial Directory of China, Hong Kong, Singapore and Malay

**RIBA:** RIBA Journal

A&B: "Architects and Builders"  
Imperial: Imperial Calendar

Builder: "Builder"
set up camp and construct various defensive facilities quickly in state of warfare, and lay out settlement and construct various public facilities such as road, jetty, godown, government house, and so on under a military administration. They often kept on their duty after the settlement was transferred to civil administration.

For instance, Colonel Mackenzie (Colin Mackenzie, 17887-1854) spent most of his life in South India and shortly in Java as a Royal Engineer under E.I.C., and finally became Surveyor General in Calcutta Presidency. Colonel Farquhar, R.E., (William Farquhar, 1790-1850) contributed to the early urban development of Singapore following T. S. Raffles’ instructions for town planning (Buckley 1967, 155). The number of professional architects was really small in the early period of colonies probably because private and individual business did not develop yet and it was too adventurous to sail for Southeast and East Asia without certain official support, especially before Suez Canal open in 1867.

However, there were some exceptional figures. One is G. D. Coleman (George Dramgold Coleman, 1795-1844) in Singapore (Hancock 1986), who had worked in Calcutta and Batavia some time after receiving architectural training in Ireland. He designed almost all public and private buildings including Maxwell’s House (1826-27), Coleman’s House (1829), Caldwell’s House (1840-41), St. Andrew’s Church (1835-36), Armenian Church of St. George (1836), and superintended various public works before he leave Singapore in 1841. Although he was not qualified himself an architect or an engineer from any professional institutions, he was given status of Surveyor General by Singapore colonial government. Anyhow, Singapore is indebted to Coleman for his talent and achievement.

Hong Kong also had such figures, Edward Ashworth (? - ?) of Exeter (Meller 1989, 126) and George Strauchan (? - ?) of Edinburgh (Eitel 1895, 248). Both worked around the 1850’s, and designed almost all the early commercial buildings there. Ashworth, who was resident in China nearly two years contributed an interesting article regarding his experience of building an European house in Hong Kong to “Builder” (Ashworth 1851, 686-8). While Strauchan, according to William Kingsmill (1837-1910), the first President of the Society of Engineers and Architects in China, preferred the Greek Revival style, with two-storied colonnades, or verandahs in Asian terminology (Kingsmill 1893), probably because the style was believed to suit tropical and subtropical zones. His works include Hong Kong Club (1845), George Burnet Company’s office in Shanghai (1851), and most buildings along the Praya of Hong Kong and the Bund of Shanghai.

Another architect in early Hong Kong was William Salway (RIBAJ Nov. 1902, 461), who practiced for 11 years there. He was born in London, and moved to Australia with his parents in the early 1850s. After articled to William Read, he did not come back to Australia, but Hong Kong to find job. He designed many public and private buildings during 1860s and early 1870s, but finally in 1876 he left Hong Kong for Melbourne due to recession.

W. Kidner (William Kidner, 1841-1900) might be the most talented and famous British architect in the second half of the 19th century in East and Southeast Asia. He first came to Shanghai in 1866 to supervise construction of the Holy Trinity Cathedral. The original design had been drawn by Sir G. G. Scott, who was often commissioned to provide designs for Anglican churches abroad. While supervising this work, Kidner was
commissioned to design some commercial buildings, as well as a Gothic church in Hankow (1867)\textsuperscript{14} and a prison for the Shanghai British Consulate (1867). Leaving China after the completion of the cathedral in 1869, strong tie recalled Kidner several times to Asia to design important buildings; Shanghai office of Hong kong and Shanghai Bank (1877) (Architect 6 Oct., 1877, 1885)\textsuperscript{15}, Kudat Church (1885) (Builder 11 Jul., 1885).\textsuperscript{16} and Government House (1885) (Builder 5 Dec., 1885)\textsuperscript{17} of the British North Borneo Company. All these works were introduced in "Builder" with illustrations. Designs for the Company’s Government Office was so impressive as he combined local architectural elements to the European building. He was a member of Royal Academy in 1860s, and joined R.I.B.A. as Associate in 1870s. As an expert of Asian architecture, he was asked to give some comments upon Josiah Conder’s papers regarding Japanese Architecture at the R.I.B.A. general meeting in March in 1878 (Builder 13 Apr., 1878)\textsuperscript{18}.

3. Architects in Public Sector

57 professional British architects worked in various cities of East and Southeast Asia as shown in Table 2. Hong kong had total 15 architects, and followed by Shanghai 12 and Singapore 9. They were employed by colonial governments and private firms except 8 for the Office of Works in Shanghai as in Table 3. The number of architects drastically increased from 1895 to 1910 and gradually decreased afterwards as shown in Table 4.

The Office of Works in Shanghai was established in 1867 after Major Crossman’s (William Crossman, R.E., 1830-1901) proposal to build and repair the consular and legation buildings in China and Japan (Izumida 1990, 96)\textsuperscript{19}. R. H. Boyce, the first chief architect was dispatched by the home office in 1868, then replaced by F. J. Marshall in 1877 and W. Cowan in 1897. C. J. W. Simpson, the fourth chief architect was the first R.I.B.A. qualified architect. After him, the Works had always at least one qualified architect, probably because of the British policy to adorn their diplomatic buildings in specific style and quality.

Employment of C. A. C Boinville (Charles Alfred Chastel de Boinville, 1850-1897) in 1874 and J. Conder (Josiah Conder, 1852-1911) in 1877 respectively by Japanese government were really exception, as the qualified architects came to be employed by colonial governments only after 1895; A. C. Norman from 1895 to 1903, R. A. J. Bidwell from 1895 to 1897, and A. B. Hubbock from 1901 to 10 in Selangor, D. M. Craik from 1902 to 06 and W. C. Oman from 1907 to 12 in Singapore, C. G. Boutler from 1913 to 19 in Alor Setar, C. G. W. Tyrwhit from 1902 to 04, A. C. Little from 1904 to 13 and S. H. H. Ixer from 1910 to 16 in Hong kong respectively.

Boinville was commissioned to design some important

Table 2. The Number of British Architects by City (Original Employment)

| PLACE          | NUMBERS | PLACE          | NUMBERS |
|----------------|---------|----------------|---------|
| Hong kong      | 15      | Singapore      | 8       |
| Shanghai       | 12      | Malaya         | 1       |
| Office of Works| 8       | Selanogor      | 2       |
| Canton         | 2       | Penang         | 1       |
| Peking         | 1       | Alor Setar     | 1       |
| Japan          | 4       | Rangoon        | 2       |
| Misc.          |         |                | 1       |

Table 3. The Number of British Architects by Employment

| SECTOR                    | NUMBERS |
|---------------------------|---------|
| Office of Works. Shanghai | 8       |
| Public Works              | 14      |
| Private Firms             | 32      |

Table 4. The Number of British Architects by Year
public buildings in European style which Japanese governmet wanted, while Conder chose an odd style for the Ueno Imperial Museum in 1877. It was a simple reflection of Major C. Mant and R.F.Chisholm's attempts to create “Modern” Asian Architecture in the British India, later called Indo-Saracenic(Metcalf, 77).

A. C. Norman and A. B. Hubbock also applied the Indo-Saracenic to building projects of the newly formed British Malaya. This style was strongly recommended by colonial administrators who regarded the style as being the most suitable for the state (Gullick, 85)\(^2\).

C. G. Bouler in Alor Setar designed public buildings of the new Kedah state under the British colonization in Neo-Baroque style except State Mosque in Indo-Saracenic style in 1916. T. Tyrwhitt and H. G. Fisher in Hong kong were sent respectively for supervision of the New Law Courts building designed by Aston Webb, R. A., Surveyor General of the Colonial Office, London in collaboration with E. Ingress Bell, F.R.I.B.A.(Wright 1908a, 163)\(^3\). The design featured a large dome similar to St. Paul's, flanked by hipped roofed penthouses. S. H. H. Ixer, becoming A.R.I.B.A. in 1909 was employed by the Public Works Department of Hong kong Colonies, and taught building construction and survey at the Queen's Collage (RIBAJ 14 Feb, 1919)\(^2\), and followed by A. G. Tickle who taught architectural theory and history there from 1916 to 1927\(^2\). Both Ixer and Conder were coincidentally studied under T. R. Smith, London University.

Therefore, the British Architects generally were employed by colonial governments only from 1895 up to 1919, and applied basically Neo-Baroque style for the buildings except Indo-Saracenic in the British Malaya.

4. Architects in Private Sectors

Civil engineers have set up firms and prevailed all the time in all kind of construction works including building design. Professional architects came to settle down there only after 1880's, and had to join civil engineers in a partnership; “Gratton and Morrison” (1881-1918) in Shanghai, “Palmer and Turner” (1883-present) in Hong kong\(^2\), and “Swan and Lermit” (1887-92, 1892-present in name of “Swan and Maclaren”) in Singapore. F. M. Gratton (18??-1918) and C. Palmer (1857-1952) had to be very ambitious for business success as they came there after they became an Associate Member of the RIBA in 1881 and 1882 respectively. “Swan and Maclaren” was an all-around civil engineering firm before R. A. J. Bidwell joined leaving the Public Work Department of the Federated Malay States in 1897. He was so talented architect that the firm received high reputation from public in the early 1900's\(^2\).

These three firms grew up during the economic boom starting in 1880s and ended in 1910s and designed most marvelous commercial and residential buildings including Hong kong and Shanghai Bank (1886, P & T, Hong kong), Hong Kong Club (1897, P & T, Hong kong), Raffles Hotel (1899, S & M, Singapore), Teutonia Club (1901, S & M, Singapore) and Victoria Memorial Hall (1905, S & M, Singapore). These firms kept at least one qualified architect all the time, and expanded their business all over this region. Other than these Big Three, partnership firms established later were relatively short life; “William, Drapper and Steadman” in Singapore, “Atkinson and Dallas” and “Moorhead and Halse”, “Lester, Johnson and Morris” in Shanghai, “Wilson and Neubronner” in Penang, “Leigh and Orenge” and “Denison, Ram and Gibbs” in Hong kong, “Thomsan and Adams” and Little, Adams and Wood” in Canton. It was hard to survive for these new firms after the Big Three established strong connection with regional leading entrepreneurs.
There were 18 architects, most of whom took root into the local architectural business and closed their careers there, for example, D. M. Craik from 1906 to 42 in Singapore, A. N. Hansell from 1888 to 1919 in Kobe, A. C. Little from 1913 to 1937 in Hong Kong, H. A. Neubronner from 1907 to 192? in Penang. They designed quite many middle and small sized commercial and residential buildings.

5. Conclusion
The number of professional British architects increased after firstly the opening of the Suez Canal in 1867 and secondly the economic boom in 1880s. The increase was remarkable in private sectors from 1890s up to 1910s as they were commissioned to design office, bank and department store by foreign entrepreneurs, and social facilities including hotel and club house by wealthy foreign businessmen. The leading architectural firms grew up in this period, while sole architect’s offices served local wealthy class for building offices and residents.

Notes
1 UNESCO East Asian Cultural Research Center, Shiryo Oyatoigakosaijin, 1975.
2 Weiler, J. M., Army Architects, Ph.D. Dissertation of York University, 1987.
3 Crook: 1968, vol1, p.108.
4 Colvin: 1978, p.258.
5 Buckley, C. B., Anecdotal History of Old Times in Singapore, 1965.
6 Hancock, T. H. H., Coleman’s Singapore, 1986.
7 Meller, H., Exeter Architecture, 1899, p.126. The author describes that Edward Ashworth was diocesan architect and assisted rebuilding of Almshouses in 1860’s
8 Eitel, E.J., Europe in China, 1895, p.248.
9 Ashworth, E., ‘How Chinese Workers Built an English House’, Builder, 1 Nov. 1851, pp.686-8.
10 Kingsmill, W., ‘Early architecture in Shanghai’, North China Herald, 24 November 1893.
11 The late William Salway, RIBAJ Nov. 1902, p.461.
12 Izumida: 1992, p.100.
13 Scott, Personal and Professional Recollection, 1879.
14 His drawing is preserved in the Maps and Drawing Collection of the Public Record Office, Kew.
15 Illustration in Architect, 6 October 1877, p.185.
16 ‘Illustration of Church of the British North Borneo Company’s Settlement, Kudat’, Builder, 11 July 1885.
17 ‘Illustration of Government House, Sandakan’, Builder, 5 December 1885.
18 Discussion papers for J. Conder’s ‘The Architecture of Japan’, Builder, 13 April 1875, pp. 386-7. J. Conder was employed by Japanese government to teach architecture in Engineering College. As soon as he arrives in Japan, he contributed several papers on Japanese architecture to the RIBA.
19 Izumida: 1990, p.96.
20 Gullick, J. M., Kuala Lumpur 1880-1895, 1989, p.85. According to Gullick, Norman was not directly responsible for the “Moorish style”. He had drawn plans for a classical building in renaissance style. C. E. Spooner, then Director of Public Works, accepted his general lay-out of the building, but made him change the form of decoration, believing an oriental style to be more in keeping with a tropical environment.
21 Wright: 1908, p.163.
22 Chronicle, Dyer, Lieut. Sydney Howard, R.N.V.R., RIBAJ, Feb., 1919.
23 Nomination Papers of Arthur George Warkham.
24 Tall Storeys, Palmer and Turner, Architects and Engineers-The First 100 Years, 1985.

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3) Stephen, Sir L. and Lee, Sir S.(ed.), The dictionary of national biography : from the earliest times to 1900, 1917.
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10) Crook, J. M. and Port, M. H., The History of the King’s Works, 7 vols., 1973.
11) Eitel, E.J., Europe in China, 1895.
12) Gullick, J. M., Kuala Lumpur 1880-1895, 1989.
13) Hancock, T. H. H., Coleman’s Singapore, 1986.
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15) ditto., British Consular and Legation Buildings in East Asia Part II, Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians of Japan, Vol. 16, pp.78-91, 1991.
16) ditto., Scottish Architects in the Far East: 1840-1870, Journal of the Architectural Heritage Society of Scotland II, pp.93-105, 1992.
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20) Nilsson, S., European Architecture in India 1750-1850, 1968.
21) Wall, V. I., van den Oude Hollandische bouwkunst in Indonesia, 1942.