

THE SHILLONG RECREATION GROUND TRUST

Then & Now

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First Publication : 2021

Second Publication : 2023

Published by D.M. Pariat, Secretary cum Trustee
for Shillong Recreation Ground Trust, Shillong

Printed by : Ri Khasi Enterprise, Umsohsun, Shillong 793 001

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At a meeting of some residents of Shillong held on the 12th of November 1901, a Trust in the name of The Shillong Recreation Ground Trust was formed in order to take on the responsibility of bringing about great improvements of the unsightly appearance and unhealthy condition of a portion of the land commonly known as the 'Umkhrach Valley' lying immediately to the north of the Shillong Station to provide a conducive site for polo, gymkhana, horse racing and other sports and games. The Trust was also given the responsibility of procuring enough land in the, 'Umkhrach Valley', and also to take on the task of clearing and preparing the land for the above said sporting activities as might be from time to time determined for the benefit of the residents of Shillong. The Trust was duly registered at the Sub Registrar's office. To meet the aforesaid aims, the Trust subsequently purchased three plots of land situated at the 'Umkhrach Valley' generally now known as the Polo grounds on which sporting and other recreational activities have been taking place for well over a hundred years.

At the meeting the following gentlemen were duly appointed as the first Trustees -

1. Phillip Richard Thronhagh Gordon -A Major in His Majesty's Indian Staff Corps and Superintendent of Ethnography in Assam residing in Shillong. (Author of the book titled 'The Khasis').
2. William McMurdo Sweet, gentleman of Shillong.
3. George Russel Row - A Major in his Majesty's 8th Gurkha Regiment.
4. Robert Herriot Henderson, gentleman of Dewan in Cachar.



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5. Charles Howard Holder of Dacca.
6. George Loftus Garth, Dacca Solicitor.

A short time later, George Loftus Garth died on 16th June 1904 and this was followed by the resignation of George Russel Row. The Meeting of the remaining Trustees held on 12th July, 1904, appointed Arthur William Davis – Inspector General of Police, Assam, residing at Shillong and Malcolm Macgregor Hadow, of Dibrugarh, Assam, Solicitor in place of George Loftus Garth and George Russel Row.

To meet the expenditure for improvements and construction etc, the Trustees decide to raise money estimated at ₹35,000.00.

The first and immediate herculean task of the Trust at the time was to divert the course of the Umkhras river which flowed through the paddy fields (now Football Ground No.2 and Football Ground No.3). The work was allotted to one Mulla Buksh for filling and levelling the old course of the Umkhras River, and the earth was dug out from a neighbouring ground which in the process formed a tank which came to be known as 'Buksh's Tank' and to the Khasis as, '*Ka Nan U Bok*' in its literal meaning. The work was completed in the latter part of 1906 while the improvement work and construction of the Race track and Polo field was going on.

From 1907, the Trustees of the S.R.G.T. appointed an agency i.e. the General Sports Committee, to start conducting regular races, gymkhana, football, hockey and other games on behalf of the Trust. On the other hand, the Shillong Polo Club used to conduct polo games during the games season. Polo

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players used to come with their ponies from Dacca and Calcutta to participate in the polo games. The conduct of the races was under the appointed body of stewards in the name of 'Shillong Races' which later, in 1936, came to be known as 'The Shillong Gymkhana Races'.

From the early days only people with social standing were appointed as Trustees. Some of the earlier Trustees were A.G. McCall, OBE, ICS, Deputy Commissioner, H.G. Bartley of the Indian Police, A.H.S. Fletcher, MBE, ICS, Deputy Commissioner, R.W.A. Ashe, Commissioner of Income Tax, U.C. Roy, IAS, K.C. Baruah, I.A.S Deputy Commissioners and a host of other senior officials. One of the Trustees was a gentleman who went on to become the President of India, (L) Shri Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed who was then Advocate General of Assam. Thereafter there were other reputed citizens like (L) Mr. Maham Singh, MLA and solicitor, (L) Mr. Stanley Nichols Roy, MLA, (L) Mr. L.K. Handique, Director of Agriculture, Govt. of undivided Assam whom Mr. J.M. Pariat replaced followed by Mr. Wallampphang Roy, (L) Colonel O. Laloo, Indian Army, (L) Mr. Hector Roy, Chief Engineer/Secretary, PWD, (L) Mr. L. Jyrwa, a local resident who knew the Trust history well.

All Trustees are appointed as per the provisions of the law and by the power conferred upon the Trustees by the Trust Deed. All appointments are registered at the Sub Registrar's office. Hence a Trust cannot 'die' but can carry on indefinitely as long as Trustees are legally appointed.

The present Trustees are Mr. J. M. Pariat, Ex MLA, Mr. Wallampphang Roy, of the well known Sawian family and a



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reputed businessman, Mr. G. P. Wahlang, I.A.S. (Retd.), 1st Chief Information Commissioner, Govt. of Meghalaya, Mr. D. M. Pariat, retired tea planter and the Deputy Commissioner, who had been appointed by the Trustees in 1909, as an ex-officio Trustee.

The SRGT's association with Sports bodies is recorded below :-

SRGT and Shillong Sports Association (SSA) - In the year 1916, the General Sports Committee, an agency representing the SRGT and with the knowledge and consent of the Trust, allowed the SSA, through mutual understanding, to make use of what is now the 1st Ground for sporting activities. While the SSA ran the tournaments on the 1st Ground, the G.S.C. took care of the maintenance of all the playing fields. The Trust continued running the horse races, polo, (hence the name Polo Ground for the area), horse riding, cricket etc. The arrangement with the G.S.C. lasted till August 1976 when the S.R.G.T. terminated the agency agreement with the General Sports Committee. Thereafter, in August 1976 and at the request of the SSA, the SRGT made a direct arrangement with the SSA for use of the 1st ground. Following many informal agreements in the intervening years, a 30 year lease agreement, effective from 1st January 2012, was agreed upon and signed on the 21st February 2017.

Over the years the Trust had always been very accommodating when it came to helping the SSA. The last instance was in 2014 when the SSA requested for a long strip of land measuring 2 meters wide for erecting the gallery at the 1st ground - this was given with no hesitation and had this not

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been given, the erection of the gallery in its present place would not have been possible. Extra land was also given along the road leading to the stadium, the bit lying between the gallery and the road was also leased out so that SSA could erect a proper wall.

Over the last 100 years except for a few minor ups and downs, cordial relations were maintained between the Trust and the SSA and efforts were always made to solve the problems amicably.

SRGT and State Sports Council (SSC) - Similarly, when the government wanted land for their Sports Directorate, it was the Trust that came forward and offered about 29 acres of land vide a lease agreement signed in 1979 at a nominal rent of ₹2000.00 per year – this is now the J.N. Complex. The signatories on behalf of the Trust were Mr. S.D.D. Nicols Roy, M.L.A., Mr. Maham Singh, M.L.A., Mr. Ramesh Chandra, Chief Secretary and Mr. H.W.T. Syiem, Deputy Commissioner who were all Trustees, while on behalf of the SSC, Mr. V.S. Jaffa I.A.S., Secretary Education and Mr. Wood Sohliya, Secretary, did the signing.

SRGT and Meghalaya Football Association (MFA) - In 2009, Meghalaya Football Association was looking for land to put up the State's first astro turf field and, again it was the S.R.G.T. that stepped in and offered land at the 3rd ground vide an agreement signed on the 10th July, 2010 at a nominal rent of ₹1000.00 per year for 30 years and this was done so as to encourage sports.

The rent received from the leased areas is a pittance as the Trust puts more importance on encouraging sports than on



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commercial activities. Over the 115 years of their existence, the Polo grounds have given a great deal of pleasure to the residents of Shillong.

The Trust also sponsors deserving sports activities and sports persons for training under certain conditions. Every year the Trust provides generous financial support to the Pynthorumkhrah Golflinks Higher Secondary School located on land given by the Trust.

In the last few years the Trustees noted the lack of space for recreational activities in Shillong when the Trust was under great pressure to allow holding of various functions like fetes, concerts, church services etc. including the celebration of Independence and Republic days, on the 2nd Ground. To ease the pressure on the 2nd Ground and to preserve it for sports, the Trust decided to develop the river side area so that the above activities can be held without disturbing the playing field.

Another aim of the Trust is to try and bring back the beauty of the Polo Grounds. Hundreds of saplings have been planted and anti social activities have been curtailed. An attempt will be made to clean up the adjacent portion of the river so that a river walk can be made where people can pass time and relax with musicians sauntering up and down. We wish to transform this area to its old glory and seek the co-operation of like minded people to join hands with us in making this dream a reality – a dream dreamt up by a group of far sighted citizens about 122 years ago, it will be a gift from the Trust to the people of Shillong, to people who reside in a town that is fast running out of clean, safe and green areas.



P.R.T. Gordon, one of the Founder Trustees of SRGT Early 1900's



Old picture of SRGT's Shillong Gymkhana Turf Club



Signing of Lease Agreement
between SRGT and Shillong Sports Association (SSA) - 2017



Signing of the Lease Agreement with Mission Trust
for the Eye Hospital - 2020



Mr. W. Roy Trustee, with 3rd Division Winners of the
S.R.G.T Football Cup - 2017
organised by Shillong Sports Association.



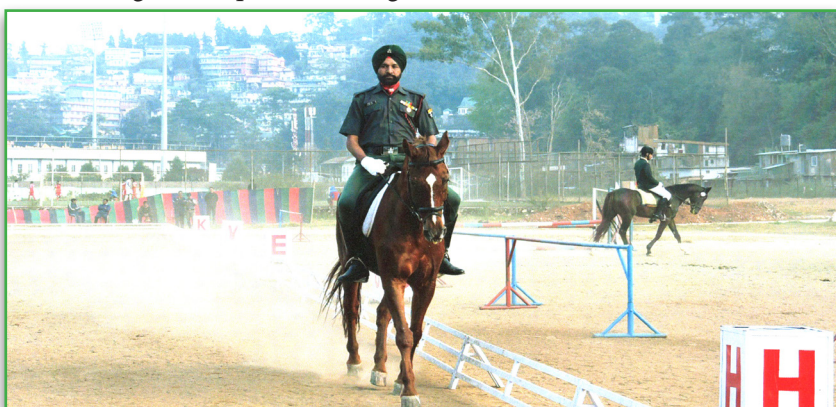
Mr. J.M. Pariat Sr. Trustee of SRGT
handing over champions trophy to
Winners of 3rd Division
S.R.G.T Football Cup
organised by
Shillong Sports Association.



Trustee of SRGT, Mr. D.M. Pariat
handing over medals to
Winners of 3rd Division
S.R.G.T Football Cup
organised by
Shillong Sports Association.



Mr. J.M. Pariat, Senior Trustee as Chief Guest at Horse Show & Regional Equestrian League, 2018 at SRGT 2nd Ground



Horse Show & Regional Equestrian League, 2018 at SRGT 2nd Ground



Tent pegging at Horse Show & Regional Equestrian League, 2018 at SRGT 2nd Ground



International Food Festival, 2019 at SRGT 2nd Ground



Independence Day Celebration, 2022 at SRGT 2nd Ground



Rongbiria organised by Seng Khasi Kmie at SRGT 2nd Ground - 2022



Food Festival, 2022 at SRGT Park



Church Service, 2023 at SRGT 2nd Ground



Parked Vehicles at SRGT Parking Lot during North East Food Show-2022



Signing of Agreement between SRGT and Powergrid
for E.V. Charging Point - 2022



Local Lads playing at SRGT 2nd Ground - 2023



Mr. D.M. Pariat, Trustee SRGT, handing over Provisions to the needy during COVID-19 Crisis - 2021



Mr. D.M. Pariat, Trustee SRGT, handing over a Cheque to Principal of PGHS School as part of SRGT's Social Welfare Programme