



[< issue toc next >>](#)

Historical Records of the Survey of India - A Glimpse into the Cartographer's Work Long Ago

by Linda Musser

Contrary to popular belief, librarians do not spend a lot of time reading the books in their collections - we are much too busy for that! But every now and then, a work comes across the desk that captures your attention. In this case, it was the *Historical Records of the Survey of India*, a set in 4 v., published by the Survey between 1945-58 by Colonel R.H. Phillimore, late of the Royal Engineers and Survey of India (see full citation at the end of this article). Each volume covers a specific time period of the Survey with special topics scattered throughout.



Figure 1: 1842 Map of India shewing the British possessions in the year 1750

Volume one explores the early years of the efforts to map the Indian subcontinent with subsequent volumes covering the years 1800 to 1843. Special topics include samples of maps, descriptions of the people and the countryside, education of surveyors, instruments, biographical information about Survey employees such as William Lambton and George Everest, who completed the Great Trigonometric Survey of India.



“The violent gusts of wind and rain prevalent in the western parts of Mysoor at the commencement of the Malabar monsoon render every precaution necessary...At Cowly Droog, the observatory tent was blown away, and the Instruments would have shared its fate, had not two of my coolies thrown themselves on the frame, and with difficulty preserved it. The case in which it is carried, though held by two men, was dashed in pieces on the rock.” (v.2 p.370)



Figure3: Map of the District Monghyr

The details in these volumes evoke a long ago era of exploration and days of adventure prior to the British Raj. In the words of the author “the work of our pioneers should not be forgotten” and, thanks to this massively detailed set, the lives and achievements of the early surveys of India live on.

For those with an interest in the historical maps of India, a catalog was created listing the Historical Maps of the Survey of India (1700-1900), which is available online at <https://zenodo.org/records/3596387>. The map images for this article were sourced from this site.

Historical records of the Survey of India / Reginald H. Phillimore. Dehra Dun: Survey, 1945-1958. 4 v. (v. 1. Eighteenth century — v. 2. 1800-1815 — v. 3. 1815-1830 — v. 4. 1830-1843)

[A volume 5 covering from 1844-1861 was published in 1964 by author Andrew



Waugh.]

Linda Musser, Head of the Fletcher L. Byrom Earth and Mineral Sciences Library
Penn State University, 105 Deike Building, University Park PA 16802 U.S.A.
lindamusser@psu.edu

[< issue toc next >>](#)

Citation Author: Linda Musser