

UK scholar on indigo trail

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Kolkata: UK museum officer Helen Bradley's quest for truth has landed her not just in Kolkata, but given invaluable insight into the atrocities committed by her British forefathers on Indian peasants in the 18th century. What began as a causal interest in the founder of Bradley's workplace and his birthplace could well turn out to be one of the most candid versions of the Indigo Revolt (1859-61).

Bradley is the development officer, Llandudno Museum, Wales. She is on a research assignment not only on early life of Francis Chardon, son of an indigo planter, or the momentous event in history but to especially explore the potential of the indigo dye. Bradley has got a British Council grant for coming to Kolkata, seeking collaborations between her museum and the Indian Museum and the Victoria Memorial Hall (VMH).

"We want to learn more about Francis Chardon and his family, and to understand our collections better with help from colleagues in India. We are carrying out some initial research into the Chardons in India and the plantations that they managed throughout Bengal," Bradley said, ahead of her meeting with Jayanta Sengupta, curator, VMH, on bringing Welsh and Indian museums together. She has spent hours at the National Library, the Indian Museum, Neelhat House and the VMH, compiling records on the Indigo Revolt.

Llandudno Museum was established in 1926, and Char-



Helen Bradley

don was born in (then) Calcutta in 1865, to Maria and Edouard. His father, Benjamin, cousins and uncles were all indigo planters in lower Bengal, Bihar and Bangladesh between 1830 and 1890.

Chardon was born at Galis Hotel, Dharamtala, his mother, Maria, was born on Mangoe Lane, and his father, Eduoard, lived at 5 Dacres lane. Bradley, whose week-long trip (her first to India) ends on Thursday, has clicked photographs of all these places that will figure in an exhibition on indigo in 2016, as part of project "Indigo Trail".

The exhibition will begin at Llandudno and travel to several locations. A landscape survey and research which will include the location and layout of indigo houses and plantations will complement the exhibition. "The idea is to tell the true story of indigo — with the tales of oppression and also its significance as a time when national consciousness was growing in Bengal. We want to examine the Indigo Revolt not just from the Chardon family's perspective, but from the ryot's point of view — to view the picture of exploitation," Bradley said.