

## = Watson 's Hotel =

Watson 's Hotel , now known as the Esplanade Mansion , is India 's oldest surviving cast iron building . It is located in the Kala Ghoda area of Mumbai ( Bombay ) . Named after its original owner , John Watson , the building was fabricated in England and constructed on site between 1860 and 1863 .

The hotel was leased on 26 August 1867 for the terms of 999 years at yearly rent of Rupees 92 and 12 annas to Abdul Haq . It was closed in the 1960s and was later subdivided and partitioned into smaller cubicles that were let out on rent as homes and offices . Neglect of the building has resulted in decay and , despite its listing as a Grade II ? A heritage structure , the building is now in a dilapidated state .

## = = Design = =

Watson 's hotel was designed by the civil engineer Rowland Mason Ordish , who was also associated with the St Pancras Station in London . The building was fabricated in England from cast iron components and was assembled and constructed on site . The external cast @-@ iron frame closely resembles other high @-@ profile 19th century buildings such as London 's Crystal Palace . The main façade of the hotel is distinguished by building wide open balconies on each floor that connected the guest rooms , which were built around the atrium in a courtyard arrangement .

## = = History = =

John Watson opened the hotel as an exclusive whites @-@ only hotel , and it one of the most renowned hotels in the city in those days . Then it was handed over to Hannah Maria Watson , by then the Secretary of State for India , wherein she entered into a lease deed with Sardar Abdul Haq , Diler ul Mulk , Diler ul Daula , for a term of nine hundred and ninety nine years on 26 August 1867 . Later on , another indenture was made on the date 22 @-@ 12 @-@ 1885 , between the trustees of Port Trust of Bombay and Sardar Diler ul Mulk in which land on the Wellington Reclamation Estate in island of Bombay admeasurment of 8129 sq.yrds. was leased by the Sardar Abdul Haq for a term of fifty years from 01 @-@ 01 @-@ 1880 . The five @-@ storied structure housed 130 guest rooms , as well as a lobby , restaurant and a bar at the ground level . The hotel also had a 30 by 9 metres ( 98 ft × 30 ft ) atrium , originally used as a ballroom , with a glass skylight . At its peak , Watson 's hotel employed English waitresses in its restaurant and ballroom , inspiring a common joke at the time : " If only Watson had imported the English weather as well . "

After Watson 's death , the hotel lost its popularity to the rival Taj Hotel . In the 1960s the hotel was closed . Sometime after this , it was subdivided and partitioned into small cubicles with independent access and let out on rent . Over the years , apathy toward the building by the residents has resulted the building decaying , and it is now in a dilapidated state . The atrium was subsequently used as a dumping ground and has several illegal constructions . As of 2005 , building had 53 families and 97 commercial establishments . Most of the commercial establishments are chambers of lawyers attached to the adjacent Bombay Civil & Session Courts and the nearby Bombay High Court .

## = = Notable guests = =

Among the hotel 's notable guests was Mark Twain , who wrote about the city 's crows he saw outside his balcony in Following the Equator . It was also the first place in India to screen the Lumière Brothers ' Cinematographe invention in 1896 .

Muhammad Ali Jinnah used to play pool in the hotel , to make a little extra money for himself .

A popular myth surround the hotel was that the staff at Watson 's Hotel denied Indian industrialist Jamsetji Tata access to the hotel . In retaliation he built the Taj Hotel , a hotel that stands near the Gateway of India , in 1903 . However , author and historian Sharada Dwivedi debunks this legend .

She points out a lack of evidence to prove that Tata was a man of vengeance .

= = Current state = =

The building 's poor state of affairs has been commonly remarked , and efforts by heritage activists to persuade its present owner to invest in restoration have been unsuccessful . One of the possible reasons proffered for apathy is the fact that the rent collected is low as it has been frozen by government legislation . The condition of the building was publicized by Italian architect Renzo Piano , and as a result of his efforts , the building was listed in June 2005 on the list of " 100 World Endangered Monuments " by the World Monuments Fund , a New York @-@ based NGO . Just a few days after its nomination , part of the building 's western façade , originally balconies developed into small offices , collapsed , killing one person and crushing several cars and motorcycles parked in the street below . The building is listed as a Grade II ? A heritage structure . On 13 June 2010 , the Mumbai Heritage Conservation Committee ( MHCC ) gave its approval for the 130 @-@ year @-@ old structure to be restored . The restoration work will be carried out by the Maharashtra Housing and Area Development Authority ( MHADA ) .