**THE MAIN BUILDING AND MORRIS TRAVERS**

Once the decision to set up the Institute was made, the first task was to construct the Main Building, and this began even before the Institute was officially created in 1909.

The Main Building is a symbol of the ethos today. The story of the Main Building is closely intertwined with the figures of Morris Travers, IISc’s first Director, who arrived in India in late 1906. A chemist by training, he had worked with Alfred Bertram on the discovery of radium, he was merely 34 years old when he became the Head of the Institute, that was yet to be formally established.

Morris Travers in Bombay

Travers got to work right away, asking CF Stevens, an architect from Bombay, to prepare estimates and draw up a plan for the Main Building, also called the Library Block. It was estimated to cost Rs. 12 lakhs, well above what the council could afford, but Travers convinced the Provisonal Committee that he could make up the deficit with savings on income.

According to Stevens’ plan, the Main Building was to be constructed of red cantonese granite and red cantonese sandstone, and the top floor was to be constructed using dressed stone (similar to cut stones, dressed stones are shaped and made to fit into the wall). Most of the first floor was to be taken up by a large library, the east wing would have the chemistry labs and west wing would have the electrical lab, along with a workshop.

In 1912, when Travers was vacatiing in England, a new Council, even more hostile than the previous one, made several decisions to cripple Travers. In August, an Auditor’s report showing a deficit of several lakhs of rupees was placed before the members.

A letter by TCW Skipp for the construction of the foundation and the piling of the Main Building was accepted by the Provisional Committee on 23 April 1908, and construction, supervised by Travers himself, began in May. Travers would ride his horse Peter Pan to the construction site from his house on Avenue Road, along with his stable assistant who rode a donkey.

In spite of the tension between Travers and Padshah, who was now part of the Council that replaced the Provisonal Committee, construction proceeded.

In 1919, much to Travers’ delight, the building was completed, and the decision was made to name it after him. Although Padshah was the first Director of IISc, he did not receive much credit for the building’s completion.

The Main Building is symbolic of the ethos today.