

IN THIS ISSUE **Ask not for Who the Bell Tolls—It's 'for Whom'** 01
He Named a Mountain 03

Ask not for Who the Bell Tolls—It's 'for Whom'



Photograph in the Heritage Centre showing a bell. The person in white is Mr. Walter Götz.

At the Heritage Centre we have a photo that is dominated by a bell. The photo is somewhat worse for wear. But we can see clearly that the bell appears to have been placed on a short platform on the ground. We can even see a legend that has been chased on the lip of the bell—‘OF T C NOLOGY सिद्धिर्म’ is visible. Working on the bell are two men. One of these men, dressed in white, is crouching close to the bell. He is apparently using some light tool on the bell. The other man may be in khaki, and he is likewise engaged.

We can say with some certainty that the person in white is Mr. Walter Götz, who came to IIT Madras in 1960 and set up the foundry at the Central Workshop (A great transformation, *Letter from Heritage Centre*, 24 January 2024).

Considering everything, there is little doubt that the bell was made at IIT Madras: First, Mr. Götz worked at IIT Madras. Second, the inscription on the bell is obviously the name of the institute and its motto. And third, there has been a foundry at IITM since 1961 or so. One could even go so far as to say that the bell must have been cast some time in the 1960s since Mr. Götz had worked at IIT Madras from 1960 to 1970.

Given that the name of the institute was embossed on the bell, was it made for use in the campus? What purpose would it have served? What was it rung for? Was it meant to signal the beginning and end of instruction hours in the daily time table?

Attractive as that suggestion is, we need to abandon the thought.

In 2021, the late Thomas Tharu, of the batch of students who graduated in 1969, asked his classmate Sashi Rao whether he knew or recollected seeing a 1 ton bell somewhere placed outdoors near the workshops. Mr. Rao had indeed heard of a bell casting on campus, but he thought that it must have been there before the time of his batch. He conjectured that only some seniors, perhaps those who had studied metallurgy, would be able to throw some light. Mr. Rao knew that the foundry had a cupola furnace for cast iron and that it had provisions for melting non-ferrous metals. He recalled that the B.Tech. workshop curriculum included aluminium casting, probably in the second year. Mr. Rao told Mr. Tharu that casting a bell was a standard exercise for training foundry workers. So he supposed one or more brass or bronze bells were cast at IIT, perhaps as a practical job for job applicants. Maybe a good specimen was put up for display.

At the back of the photograph, there is an echo of Mr. Sashi Rao's explanation: pencilled there are the words 'Bell exhibited near the East Entrance of Central Workshop'.

So maybe the bell had been just for exhibition. Well, I suppose the campus is so large that it would be practically impossible to make a bell of the dimensions required such as to be heard in every classroom. Such a bell would have had to be installed in a tall tower. Definitely, no ordinary school bell can possibly be expected to be heard throughout the Academic Zone.

At any rate, the IITM bell is not to be seen today.

Talking of announcing the end of classes, I remember there was a siren on campus when I was a student, in the 1980s. The siren stood on a tower, 30 feet high or so, near the IIT Madras post office. The strange thing is that I never heard its sound; yet I am quite sure it was a siren.

As with the bell, there is no trace of that siren nor the tower.

Why was a siren installed? Was it put in place during a war to warn campus residents of air raids? Or was it ever used to signal the beginning and end of instruction hours, lunch breaks and suchlike?

Prof. P. Sriram, Department of Aerospace Engineering and 1982 alumnus, explained that the siren was used during his student days to signal the beginning of classes at 8 O'clock. It was also used to announce the commencement of quizzes and workshop sessions.

Siren in the Aeronautical Department

Prof. S. Santhakumar, senior faculty member and alumnus of the 1969 batch, informed me that he had a hand-cranked siren in the Gas Dynamics Lab. The siren was operated, as a warning, just before the gas gun was fired.

Siren Heard at the Snake Park

Zai Whitaker mentions in her book *Scaling Up* that a siren used to be heard at the Snake Park, nextdoor, around 1971. She says that the jackals of Guindy Park 'joined wildly in' with the siren. Which siren was this?

But actually there is one more photo at the Heritage Centre showing a bell at IIT Madras.



Another bell, this one with a cross embossed on it. Looking at this bell are Director B. Sengupto, Minister of Education, Madras, Mr. V.R. Nedunchezbian and others. November 1967

This was a different bell. It had a cross embossed on it. Thomas Tharu thought it had been made for the Christian Medical College (CMC), Vellore. I enquired with the CMC, but I was not able to trace it.

He Named a Mountain

IITMAA used to publish a newsletter named *GC Alma Mater*. I was browsing through an issue of this newsletter, and the name R. Jaikumar caught my eye.

I recognised this name as that of the mountaineer I had written about in a previous issue (Mountainous Terrain in the Campus, *Letter from Heritage Centre*, 1 November 21). I experienced a pang: Jaikumar's name appeared in the obituary section of the newsletter. Jaikumar had died on 10 February 1998, aged 53.

Jaikumar had obtained an MA in industrial engineering from Oklahoma State University and a Ph.D. in decision sciences from the Wharton School. He had joined the management faculty at Harvard. He was a renowned authority on manufacturing management and technology.



Ramchandran ("Jai") Jaikumar: an extraordinary researcher and a beloved teacher.

R. Jaikumar, professor, writer, researcher. He had been a mountaineer even during his IIT Madras days. Image courtesy: <https://www.alumni.bbs.edu/stories/Pages/story-bulletin.aspx?num=5579>

Jaikumar had continued his mountaineering activities throughout his life, and it appears that it had become a habit for him to climb unconquered summits.

In 1997, he climbed a mountain in Greenland that had not been conquered previously. Having earned thus the right to name that mountain, he called it Minarjnik, after his wife, Mrinalini Mani, and his two sons, Arjun and Nikhil.

Jaikumar had had a heart attack and had passed away in Ecuador, while doing what he liked doing so much: climbing a mountain.

Kumaran Sathasivam

Your response to Letter from Heritage Centre is welcome.

Please send mail to heritage@iitm.ac.in.

The Heritage Centre is located in the ground floor of the Administration Building, IIT Madras.

It is open on weekdays from 9.30 am to 7.00 pm

heritage.iitm.ac.in