Under the 120-foot-high dome of Kolkata’s General Post Office (GPO), a special postal cover was released on Monday. The event marked 150 years of the GPO.

A fresh coat of paint and tiny fairy lights adorned the heritage structure with Corinthian columns on the east and the south, overseeing the Dalhousie square in the city. The historic building was opened to the public on October 2, 1868.

“The construction of this building started in 1864. The building was designed by architect Walter B. Granville and in those days ₹6.5 lakh was spent on this structure,” Arundhati Ghosh, Chief Post Master General, West Bengal circle, told The Hindu.

Describing the GPO as not only an iconic building of the city, but also the biggest working post office of the Kolkata circle with a revenue of ₹4-5 crore every month, Ms. Ghosh said that the cost of renovation of the structure came to ₹70 lakh.

Earlier in the day, an extension of the postal museum, housed in the building, was inaugurated.

The museum displayed an exhibition of illustrations depicting postmen carrying letters. Titled In the eyes of Artists Abroad, the exhibition includes a picture of bullock carts carrying letters. These photographs were published in several journals and periodicals published in the mid 19th century.

Other exhibits in the museum include badges used by postmen, weighing machines and the first postage stamps, printed at the Survey of India office in 1854 and a “Post Office Map of provinces of Bengal, Behar, Orissa and Arracan” dating back to 1854.

Cannon found
Ms. Ghosh said that the site where the GPO stands played witness to many historical events. “A few months ago, during renovation of the building, we found a cannon. We will place it in the extended museum,” she said. She added that it was still a “matter of conjecture” whether the Old Fort, where the GPO stands today is the site of the “Black Hole Tragedy” of 1756.

According to historians, the “Black Hole Tragedy” refers to the time when several English prisoners died as a result of incarceration in a cramped prison by Nawab of Bengal Siraj ud-Daulah after he attacked Calcutta. “We have a plaque of this nature and researchers of the Archaeological Survey of India are working to ascertain whether this is a site of the alleged incident,” she said.

J. Charuksi, Postmaster General, Kolkata region, said that even before the GPO, the first post office in India operated from 1774 in Kolkata from another building. “In those days, the postal department catered to the mail requirement of the East India Company and British officials,” she said.

Ms. Charuksi said that the history of building was linked to the history of the city. During the week-long celebration, several events like a heritage walk, release of a coffee-table book and a documentary on the GPO have been planned. “The GPO is also an important tourist destination and we all must take pledge to conserve this beautiful structure,” Ms. Ghosh.

There are several other post office heritage structures, including the head post offices in Darjeeling, Cooch Behar and Dead Letter Office on Dalhousie Square, where all letters whose addresses could not be traced used to end up.