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A Passage to India and Beyond: the Voyage of the *Rockingham* to Bombay and Canton 1791-1793

By Trevor W Hearl

Every servant of John Company, from the lowliest recruit to the most exalted 'nabob', could claim to have shared at least one experience in common: a passage to India aboard one of the Honourable Company's East Indiamen. Although their degrees of travelling comfort, or discomfort, would hardly bear comparison, they were, at least for the duration of the voyage, all in the same boat, and whatever their rank perforce had to endure its hazards.

A few family historians may be lucky enough to find accounts of their forebears' adventures on the high seas in memoirs, but most researchers have to rely on descriptions in published journals and books about the 'Lords of the East'. For an objective view of the main incidents of any particular voyage, however, logbooks provide the most reliable evidence. The drama may be understated, but there are advantages in letting the facts speak for themselves.

So, by courtesy of its logbook, let us follow the fortunes of HCS *Rockingham* (798 tons), Commander John A Blanshard, on a typically successful voyage from late 1791 to mid 1793.

She had just returned from China when 'taken up' again by the Company to carry passengers, army recruits, trade goods including woollens, and bullion to Bombay; thence Indian textiles and sandalwood to Canton; bringing back tea, 'private trade',[1] and passengers to Britain. Preparations began in October 1791, servicing the ship at Deptford and assembling the crew – 106 officers and men including a bewildering array of tradesmen, armourers, barber, butcher, caulker, cooper, carpenter, cooks, quartermasters, gunners and sailmakers, among others – before loading stores and cargo ('684 bars of iron and 117 pigs of lead on account of the Commander' among the private trade), five passengers (three 'free mariners', a Bombay Marine Volunteer and a 'Native of India'), 161 recruits and a soldier's wife, 'delivered of a female child' who 'departed this life' ten days later before they got to sea. The log, kept by First and Second Mates Richard Blanshard and Samuel Foster, shows the care with which the ship was brought down river and round the coast to Deal. There, while despatches and two bullocks were put on board, four recruits stole the waterman's boat and fought off the crew with boathooks before being dragged back on board and given the usual two dozen lashes for mutiny. The pilot left at Shoreham, and the ship took her departure from Portland Bill on 4 January 1792 – next stop Bombay.

'Piratical intentions' among the recruits, no less than the work of sailing and maintaining the ship, kept the crew constantly on their toes. With seamen threatened and plots hatched to

[1] Ships' officers were allocated a proportion of hold space for trade conducted on their own account rather than the Company's.

seize the ship and murder the crew, it was not long before the ship's company was armed and the mutinous ringleaders clapped in irons on the poop, while the rest of the recruits 'picked oakum'. Despite a diet of hard tack, salt pork, rum, and a daily 4-pint water ration per man, Surgeon Watson reported no health problems, although four seamen died at ports during the voyage and one at sea 'of a fever'. The carpenter, sailmaker, armourer and their mates meanwhile waged a never-ending battle against the elements to keep everything in working order, as the ship ploughed on through storm and calm.

They crossed the Line on 17 February 1792 when the weather was 'pleasant', but the log gives no hint of any celebration of the event, maintaining its daily rhythm of relentless routine:

> Carpenter fitting the Bumpkins. Sailmaker repairing the 2nd best Mainsail. Armourer at the Forge. People making Points, Robins, &co. Caulker caulking the Waterway Seams on the Gun Deck. Recruits picking Oakum.

The terse style and language of the Log – 'bumpkins' for small booms, 'people' for crewmen – impart a false air of urgency to proceedings, whereas in fact the progress of an East Indiaman was stately rather than speedy: they were making a fair five knots at the time. Their course was now at its most westerly, 'fresh breezes' wafting them comfortably southwards, sometimes as much as 176 sea miles (c 200 miles) a day, until the island of Trindade off the Brazilian coast some 800 miles east of Rio was sighted on 29 February with the rocks of Martin Vaz 'about three leagues' away. At this point began the long curving course across the vast South Atlantic south-eastwards to round the Cape of Good Hope. 'Kept a good look out for Safemburg Island in the Night' ran the anxious entry for 8 March at 31.22 S/20.26 W, though modern charts show only deep and empty ocean.

The end of March found them in the Indian Ocean at last, beset by the usual troublesome weather with calms and squalls one day followed by 'strong Gales, with heavy Squalls, much Lightning' the next, provoking a string of minor misfortunes such as a 'fresh leak' in the Breadroom which caused 3 cwt of stock to be jettisoned. Their course followed the easterly 'Outer Passage' northeastwards, crossing the Line again on 2 May amid 'much Thunder and Lightning'. Finally, after 141 days and over 14,000 sea miles, with little to break the monotony of interminable sea and sky, Bombay hove in sight on 23 May 1792.They had scarcely anchored when the 'mutineers' were sent ashore under armed guard. The rest of the recruits followed the next day when the Purser also delivered 'the Treasure' and business began.

Unloading, loading and refitting took 66 days, presumably with some shore leave for the crew. Eight had had enough and 'ran', including the Captain's cook and one of his servants, but they were replaced by a poulterer and six seamen. To sea again on 28 July, next stop Canton. Those 4266 miles, alert for pirates as well as shoals in the South China Seas, made for slower sailing and took seven weeks, delayed by at least one crisis. On 26 August sunrise revealed a ship aground in the Malacca Roads with four others standing by: 'At 7 am … found her to be the Honble Company's Ship *Lord Macartney* from Madras towards China'. In true Company style the officers had 'a Consultation and unanimously agreed to stay by the ship', sending the Second Officer, Carpenter and 22 men to offload cargo and lighten her. It was three days before she was floated and safely underway, however, not a happy omen for the real Lord Macartney then about to leave England on his famous Embassy to China. The *Rockingham's* log shows constant sightings and soundings being taken until they reached the Macao Roads three weeks later. From there a pilot took the ship up the Pearl River to Whampoa, below Canton, where fourteen other Indiamen were at anchor and manoeuvring space was none too generous. While mooring she 'swang foul of [HCS] *Middlesex* and carried away part of our stern gallery', keeping the carpenter busy for the next three weeks.

The *Rockingham's* three months at Canton started inauspiciously in other ways. Almost at once 'drunkenness, disobedience and insolence' earned two seamen two dozen lashes each, and another man one dozen 'for ill treating the Mandarin of Dane's Island[2] and threatening to pull his House down if he did not supply him with liquor'. Yet shore leave was only mentioned twice – 26 men to Canton for two days, and a second 'gang' soon afterwards. But no one complained to the Officers' Complaints Board and ship's maintenance must have kept the men from too much mischief. Sunday mornings always saw Divine Service held on the quarterdeck whether in port or at sea, weather permitting. When etiquette permitted the *Rockingham's* Chinese 'Security Merchant', Puankhequa, arranged for 'the Hoppo and his retinue' to measure the ship and give his 'Chop' for business to commence.[3] The cargo including English lead and Bombay sandalwood and cotton goods then went up to the Company's 'Hong', allowing the main work to start: stowing chests of tea (Bohea, Congou and green Singlo), private trade, rice, paddy, yams, and stores for St Helena, with vital ballast for 'trim'. By Christmas Day all was ready and two bullocks were taken on, but the Commander, whose dignity kept him aloof from the ship in port, did not appear with the Company's dispatches until the 30th, and it was New Year's Day 1793 before the pilot left them off Macao. Next stop St Helena.

Indiamen always knew when they were going home, and spurred on first by the North-East Monsoon and then the South-East Trades, the nine thousand odd miles to St Helena were covered in well under three months averaging 115 miles a day. Having rounded the Cape on 11 March Commander Blanshard, a real blue-water sailor, 'opened a Packet from the Select Committee' probably announcing the new convoy drill at St Helena introduced in 1792. The Island was first sighted at night on 24 March when '11 or 12 leagues distant', and by daybreak they were following procedures for approaching the anchorage:

> 6 a.m. sent the boat on shore when Barn Point bore South distance 1½ miles.
> 7 a.m. made sail & saluted his Majesty's ship *Perseverance* (36 guns) with 11 guns, which was returned with 9 guns.
> 8 a.m. anchor'd in St Helena Bay … saluted the Fort with 9 guns which were returned with equal number.

The Fort Adjutant, Thomas Lester, came on board and mustered the ship's company to 'read the Riot Act', but little trouble was reported and only one man punished – 'two dozen lashes for disobedience of the 5th Mate's Orders and striking him when on duty'. If 'liberty gangs' went ashore they are not on record, though one man, Seaman Joseph Skidmore, jumped ship two days after arrival and got away with it: not easy at St Helena one would think. Within four days, having replenished water stocks and made minor repairs, the ship was ready for sea, but not Captain Smith the naval commodore who, doubtless to the delight of inhabitants and crew, kept them at anchor for another fortnight. So the seamen were occupied with making 'wadds' for the Gunner, 'working up Junk', washing the Gun deck, and other tasks 'as necessary'. One of them, John Martin who died on 2 April (no cause given), was buried ashore the same evening, his 'effects, being of little value distributed to his messmates'.

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[2] Sailors were allowed to take recreation on Dane's Island within certain limits, but the Chinese authorities discouraged their presence elsewhere.

[3] To facilitate revenue collection the Chinese Imperial authorities closely controlled foreign trade through a Governor *cum* Imperial Customs Commissioner known as the Hoppo (*Quanpoo*), and a limited number of government approved merchants called Hongs with whom all business had to be conducted. Hongs were assigned to particular ships for which they had to stand security. A 'chop' was a permit.

Jamestown was certainly busy during their visit. Already at anchor when they arrived were a Genoese and six other Indiamen, four from China, one from Bombay and the storeship outward bound for Madras. There were constant comings and goings. Four English and three foreign Indiamen – Swedish, Portuguese, and Tuscan - came in from China and a Danish Indiaman from Bengal, as well as an American ship, a French warship and an 'English boat from Thompson's Island'. All left before the Company's convoy, however, as it was 10 April before 'the Commander came on board with Signals and Sailing Orders from Captain Smith' who had perhaps waited for a specified list of ships to arrive. At any rate the Purser took on three bullocks, the ship was unmoored at first light next morning and everything made ready for departure when…

> At 9 a.m. the Honble Company's Ship *Ponsborne* arrived but unfortunately struck on Munden's Point which caused her to make much water. Sent the boats with a gang of Hands … to assist; also sent one of our Pumps.

Ponsborne's passengers were transferred to the *Rockingham* with their baggage, among them two senior merchants and wives from Madras, nine children, three discharged soldiers, a soldier's wife, and three 'black women servants'[4]. The next day, 12 April, the *Rockingham* retrieved her pump and collected 'ye Honble Company's packet'; the Commodore signalled departure, and ten East Indiamen put to sea, including the *Lord Macartney* but not the leaky *Ponsborne*.

Now for home ! Over 6000 sea miles to go, but at 140 miles or more a day – twice over 190 – with only ten sultry days in the Doldrums, Portland Bill was only two months away. They had a slight setback one night when a hard squall carried away the Main Top Gallant and Fore Topmast, Crosstrees and rigging, and by morning the rest of the fleet were out of sight, but the wreckage was soon cleared, sailmakers and carpenters got it all shipshape again and within a day they were back in formation. On 6 June, well past Lizard Point, they had been practising 'the great guns' when a passing Sardinian brig told them they had been at war with France since February – when the *Rockingham* was in the Indian ocean making for St Helena ! Whatever their apprehensions they are not apparent from the log. Life and work carried on as before, bringing them nearer home: 150 miles that day, 193 the next, 165 on the 8th June, and at dawn on the 9th Portland Bill came into view as they made for the Solent. There the Pilot took over, anchoring the ship on 'the Mother Bank' off Portsmouth from where the church bells pealing for matins welcomed the passengers ashore, no doubt with their thankful prayers.

All that now remained for the crew, after 18 months away and over 33,000 sea miles half way round the world and back, was to take the ship round to the Thames and collect their pay, some £40 upwards. But … let the log tell its terse tale:

> As soon as brought to, Lieut. Lock of His Majesty's Ship *Queen Charlotte* came on board and impressed all the Ship's Company.

Presumably all able-bodied seamen were taken, as the Navy replaced 29 men at once, and more the next day making a complement of 60. Of protest the log is silent, as scores of sea-weary men, denied their homecoming, swelled the ranks of what was to become 'Nelson's Navy'.

'Impressment for His Majesty's Navy was the greatest bugbear of the officers and crew of an Indiaman', writes Sir Evan Cotton. 'Ships had been lost because they were seriously undermanned due to impressment', and consequently no love was lost between officers of the Navy and those in the Company's service. The *Rockingham* was now put under the orders of HMS *Thalia* and, with the convoy guarded by two warships, sailed to the Downs. There its

[4] Perhaps *ayahs* (nurses) employed to look after the children.

temporary crew was replaced by '52 Ticket Men from Deal' who took her to the Thames off Greenhithe where the precious cargo was unloaded onto hoys (barges) under the watchful eyes of Company officials. Finally on 24 June 1793 she was handed over to the Deptford pilot to be taken to the yards and prepared for her next assignment.

The Rockingham, built in 1785 at one of William Barnard's Deptford yards for Sir ir Rochard Hotham, made four more voyages for the Company. On 6 October 1793 Captain the Hon Hugh Lindsay, youngest son of the Earl of Balcarres, was sworn in as Commander for two voyages to 'the Coast and Bay', i.e. Madras on the Coromandel Coast and Calcutta in the Bay of Bengal, between 1794 and 1797. Her final, seventh, voyage was for the 1799 season, though she did not return until 1802 as a memorial in St James's Churchyard, St Helena, to 38 year old Captain Robert Billanole of the Bombay Marine reveals, for he died on 3 April 1802 'on board the Rockingham Indiaman in his passage from India to England with his family'.

Whether the *Rockingham* then sailed under other colours or was consigned to the breaker's yard I have not discovered, but she had certainly ended her service with 'the finest fleet of merchantmen that ever sailed the seas' to quote the historian Sir Evan Cotton. When in 1834, as he reminded readers a century later, the China trade monopoly was lost, that service had for over two hundred years been 'in a great degree instrumental in acquiring and securing the now vast territories of British India'. Since the first fleet in 1601 it had employed at least 1577 vessels, the voyages of which are recorded in 3822 surviving logbooks to be found listed in Anthony Farrington's recent Catalogue. Whether passengers would have shared Sir Evan's nostalgia must be a moot point, but the Company's civil and military servants administering India between 1834 and 1858 showed a growing preference for the hazards of the Overland Route via Suez. Meanwhile, as steam replaced sail the worst discomforts of blue water voyaging began to fade from memory. 'The voyager [now looks] back with pleasure to what has been in reality nothing more than an agreeable yachting trip, instead of the much-dreaded long sea voyage' reflected J C Mellins in 1875. And he and his forebears had only been stationed in St Helena !

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William Howell 1789 – 1867: Surveyor – Missionary – Priest

By Shirley West

William Howell, my three times Great Grandfather, was born, probably in Madras, in December 1789. His father, also William Howell, had arrived in Madras on board the ship *General Coote*, as a newly enlisted private soldier in the Company's European Regiment on 15 July 1788, having left his native Kent in unknown circumstances the previous February.

We know little more of William Senior, other than that he had a wife and that she bore him at least two children, William and Sarah. We know that he died as a Corporal in the 1 European Invalids on 7 December 1803 and that he was buried the same day 'by the Reverend Mr Pohle on Pindamani ground having departed this life at 1 o'clock this morning'. It seems likely that his wife had predeceased him, probably around 1793, when the children were both baptised, seemingly on the admission of each of them to the respective Madras Military Orphan Asylum.

William's sister Sarah may have been younger than William, but sadly she died whilst at the Female Orphan Asylum on 12 January 1803, and was buried at St Mary's Parish Church, Fort St. George on the same day.

Meanwhile William had been selected to attend the Revenue Surveyors School that had been set up initially around 1795, next to the Observatory in Madras with a complement of 24 boys, first under Michael Topping, later under John Goldingham, and then under John Warren.

The Surveyor

It was around this time that the Madras Survey was active in the task of mapping the sub-continent south of the River Kistna, but being under-resourced by the Company it proved difficult to recruit and retain surveyors from the military engineers to undertake the work. Map making in the Madras Presidency was at this time undertaken on an *ad hoc* basis. Maps were required by different parts of the government for different reasons. The Military required them, the Revenue required them, and the Administration required them – but all for different purposes. There was neither central policy on map-making, nor central funding. As early as 1794 the Madras Government had started to apprentice local orphans for surveying. Most of the youths were 'Eurasians' or 'Anglo-Indians', descended from Indian mothers and European fathers, with a few being the children of British Officers and their wives. These orphans were recruited from the brightest boys in the Madras Male Orphan Asylum, and when qualified worked for about one-sixth of a military surveyor's allowances, did not need interpreters as they spoke the native languages as well as English, and were less susceptible to the Indian climate than those individuals raised in Europe.

So it was that by around 1803, at the age of 14, William found himself apprenticed as an assistant surveyor undertaking military surveys with the Madras Survey under Major Mackenzie. The latter had come from modest beginnings in Stornaway, eventually to become engineer and surveyor for the British forces attached to the Nizam of Hyderabad after the battle of Seringapatam in 1799. From that time he was employed as a surveyor in Mysore and other parts of southern India, and it was William and his fellow assistant surveyors who undertook the fieldwork.

This particular survey suffered initially from the Company's constant drive to save money, and then from the four European military surveyors leaving the survey either on health grounds or because they were recalled to their regiments. By the middle of 1807 the workforce was reduced to Mackenzie, William, and four other assistant surveyors. Mackenzie now placed increasing reliance on his assistant surveyors, forming them into efficient survey teams, so that with them all trained to the same techniques their work would be all to the same standard. As they were cheap to employ, and were naturally acclimatised, Mackenzie advertised his systems as being cheap, fast, and detailed – with none of the discrepancies and errors so common to the work of European surveyors. Praise indeed for William and his colleagues.

The work however was hard and demanding, often working in appalling conditions in hostile country. All they needed had to be carried with them, and they were often away from home comforts, such as they

were, for months on end. The chief adversity that faced them was one of disease, but travelling in the interior, slogging up and down in difficult terrain, avoiding tigers, snakes, and other sundry livestock was tiring enough, without having to do survey work as well. They also had the problem of unfriendly natives, so that eventually they had to have their own guard force, quite separate from any of the presidency armies, and with its own uniform. At this time a sub- assistant surveyor who had not yet served his time, and was under the age of 18, received 11 star pagodas a month. This rose slowly, with an assistant surveyor of six years experience after serving his apprenticeship, receiving 35 star pagodas, and after twelve years it rose to 45. After 20 years adult service they would receive a half pay pension, but then not many survived to receive it. Whilst on survey they received an extra 4 star pagodas horse allowance, one coolie to carry their earthly belongings, and a half-share in a subalterns tent. Luxury indeed!

William worked between 1803 and 1808 on the Mysore survey, and then on the survey of the Ceded Districts until 1813. In 1814 he was back in Madras working on producing maps at the Survey Office, and it is probable that it was at this time that he married Georgiana Elizabeth Thorpe, daughter of Jonathan Luke and Jane Thorpe. It is evident that Mackenzie regarded his team as lesser beings, speaking of them as his 'native assistants', and although he 'speaks in favourable terms of the professional assistance which he has received from his sub- assistant surveyors', he complained of their demeanour and lack of respect to his orders and instructions.

In late1817 William was carrying out a survey under Lt James Garling in the Nizam's territory, when he was summoned by Mackenzie, now a Lieutenant-Colonel, to join him in Calcutta. Mackenzie had been appointed Surveyor-General of India, and decided to strengthen the Bengal staff by bringing in a number of his own team from Madras, and this included William. With the promise of promotion, and an increase in pay, William and his young family travelled from Madras to Calcutta in 1818 in order to undertake a survey of Cuttack. On his arrival at Calcutta, William found that the promised promotion and pay rise had vanished. Words were exchanged, and William promptly resigned from the Survey. Mackenzie was not best pleased at this turn of events, and wrote to Madras 'Howell behaved ill. He has refused to go to Cuttack, and has actually sent a letter saying he has resigned the Service. Will you look for, and send a copy of, the Bond that was formally taken from these youths. This is a bad specimen of our Madras native establishment which annoys me after I had spoken favourably of them. We have had two instances here of refusal to do their duty'. Evidently William was not alone in having a grievance on arrival at Calcutta.

Looking back, it is evident that Mackenzie regarded his assistant surveyors, many of whom were orphans of mixed blood, to be inferior beings. Certainly to him they were not gentlemen, and he seems grudgingly surprised that they turned out to be good at the task of surveying. Interestingly it appears from the evidence that Mackenzie and William were in some ways two of a kind. Both were Victorian before their time, certain of opinion, intelligent, and unbending. It is probable that they would have fallen out sooner or later regardless, and the broken promise appears to have been the straw that broke the camel's back. In any event it was enough for William to turn his back on what was probably a good secure job for a young man of his background in India at the time.

The immediate outcome was that William and his family returned to Madras, a task not taken on lightly at the time, to decide their future, and we can find no record of the Bond being found and implemented.

The Missionary

We next discover William and his family two years later in May 1821 when he is recorded by the London Missionary Society as being an assistant in the Bellary Mission. The Society describes William as 'having been received into the Mission, having relinquished a lucrative situation in order to devote himself entirely to missionary pursuits. He is able to converse with tolerable fluency in Hindoostanee, Tamil, Teloogoo, and Canara languages, and has commenced methological [sic] study of the latter, as being that which is chiefly spoken in this part of India'.

The record shows that William and his family only stayed a short time at Bellary, and that by November 1822 they had journeyed to Cuddapah to set up a new missionary station. William was no stranger to Cuddapah, he had been based there during his time with the survey, and recalled that it was something

of a lawless place. William comes across in the records as something of a hellfire and brimstone sort of character, but one who had genuine concern for his small flock. He set up a small trading community around the Mission to provide work and an income for his converts, and appears as much concerned for their temporal as their spiritual needs. At the same time he travelled around the villages of the region preaching and distributing religious tracts to the natives, and translating the Bible and other books into native languages.

The Priest

On 29 September 1824 William was ordained a priest in the Anglican Church at Black Town Church in Madras, and returned to Cuddapah to continue his missionary work. He was to remain there, with his family, for nearly twenty years. During this time he received from the Society a salary of Rs.180 pm., with an allowance of Rs.10pm. per child under ten years, and Rs.20pm. for each child over ten years. A native reader received Rs.7pm., and a Munshi (interpreter, language teacher) Rs.10pm. In return William had to submit a report of his activities to London every half-year, and a summary of his accounts.

In October 1829 he reports that his wife Georgiana was taken ill with an asthmatic condition and has to return to Madras, and that he is busy translating Pilgrim's Progress, the New Testament and the Catechism into Telugu for use in mission schools. He also reports that two of his children died that month, and in January 1830 that he has sent his eldest son Elisha, aged twelve, to England to study with Mr Hands, 'for the purpose of improving his mind'.

In 1832 the murder of Charles Edward MacDonald, Sub-Collector, took place in Cuddapah. Investigation of crime in the region was proving to be very difficult, with villagers proving hostile, and violent crime going unpunished. On 15 June a religious riot broke out between Muslims and Hindus. Macdonald had sought help from the military, but whilst he waited for a reply he received a note from William saying that the Mission in the centre of the town was being attacked. MacDonald set out with a couple of treasury guard sepoys to render assistance, but was struck down by the mob and murdered on his way to the Mission. In July 1835 William reports that he has had to send his wife to Madras again because of her poor health, and that five of their children have whooping cough. In May 1835 his eldest daughter, Esther Joanna, died of a fever in Madras at the age of thirteen, and that by 1836 Elisha, newly returned from England, had gained employ in the Collector's Office with his younger brother Josiah. It is difficult to establish just how many children William and Georgiana had, as they are not always named in any of his reports to London. Best estimates are that overall there were between eleven and thirteen !

In March 1841 William was suffering from heartburn and dyspepsia, and was advised by the Zillah Surgeon to seek a change of climate at Pulicat for three months, leaving Mrs Howell and his assistant John Shrieves in charge. William reports in June 1841 that the 'change of air and effervescing magnesia proved of great benefit'.

However, all was not well back at Cuddapah. John Shrieves took the opportunity to complain to the local sub- committee about the way that William was running the Mission, accusing him of being aloof, misappropriating funds, employing people on the Sabbath, and other sundry misdemeanours The case was heard in William's absence, with John Shrieves, his accuser, acting as interpreter for native witnesses !

On his return William wrote to the sub- committee, objecting to the way they had handled the affair in his absence, within a week of the complaint having been made. He wrote 'Charges affecting my character as a Missionary and a Christian have been made against me, and I have not been allowed to answer those charges, all of which I now totally refute'. He then detailed each complaint against him, and answered each one.

It appears that at this juncture William resigned from the Mission in protest, the London Missionary Society recording that his connection with them was dissolved in September 1841, and he took up a post as priest in Black Town, Madras.

One interesting observation is that in 1855 Henry Howell married Priscilla Shrieves in Madras, but that as they say is probably another story. Meanwhile, William remained in Madras, a priest in semi retirement. His wife Georgiana died in Madras in 1850, and in 1855 William married for a second time, this time to Frances Slaney, a widow with two children.

William saw out his years in Madras, having helped in a small way to put India on the map. He died in 1867. In his will he made due provision for Frances, his Wife, and for his six surviving children, and he also made provision for his orphan grand-daughter Helen Matilda Burghall, my Great Grandmother.

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[1] *I should like to thank the Archivist at the SOAS Library for access to the LMS archives, and Tim Thomas at the IOR for his unstinting help and guidance given over many years.*

Tracing Ancestral Churches in India

By Doreen Elcox

Last year I made my first trip to India to track my forebears. The sole locations I had were the Anglican churches that had surfaced during my research into a century of army ancestry in the sub-continent in the IOR at the British Library, and it was these churches that I set out to visit. This part of my family story has of necessity been put together entirely from the church records and a few military documents for there is no collection of correspondence and the oral history is meagre to say the least.

When I set out, my precise aims were hazy, but on the road they crystallised into simply touching down where I believed my ancestors had lived: the environment and a feeling of place was what I was after. What would this first trip to India be like ? The guidebooks are not a great help with the backroads of history. Despite the impression one gets that nearly every family in Britain has an Indian connection of one sort or another this is not given due recognition: there are no specific directions to the British garrison churches, the areas where the soldiers' families lived, the type of housing they had - not of the common, undistinguished folk at least. I would be travelling a route of my own making. On arrival in India I was shocked by the weight of negative baggage about the country that I was carrying. Unnoticed, the scare stories from friends and the advice in the guidebooks, no doubt wise, but still alarming, had disturbed me. I was obsessed about the purity of water and with keeping my bags locked for example; travelling with a chain and padlock for my cases on the train, and my passport, plane ticket and travellers' cheques in a purse under my clothes was probably necessary, but nonetheless it added to, rather than reduced, my insecurity. Could I deal with the ruses of taxi and auto-rickshaw drivers ? I was bound to suffer from food that did not agree with me - and then there would be the heat. But in the end of course I was fine, enjoying myself and getting through by the grace of my guidebook, my instincts and the kindness of new friends and strangers.

Research in England

My mother knew that my gt-grandfather, William Abbott, had been a schoolmaster in the Army in India and that her father Henry had been born there. In contrast to the picture she painted of Henry's adult life as a stonemason in Bolton, Lancs. in the early years of the 20th century, weakened and impoverished by the damage of stone dust on his lungs, it seemed a romantic start in life. The English 1881 census[2] shows gt-grandfather William, returned from India, living in Dalton-in-Wigan with his wife Elizabeth, his son Henry aged 14 and a baby daughter. Both William and Henry were working as stonemasons and all the family are recorded as born locally, except Henry, whose birthplace is indeed given as India. The IOR church records[2] show Henry's baptism 'solemnised at Cannanore' in the Presidency of Madras in June 1866 and his mother's name as Amelia. (Elizabeth was his step-mother it seems.) And as expected, my gt-grandfather William stated his position to be 'Assistant Army Schoolmaster'. An older child, Louisa, was baptised at the same church in October 1864, and sadly my gt-grandmother Amelia was buried there soon after Henry's birth in October 1866, from 'Continued fever', age 24 years, 6 months. William, at 23, was a widower with a baby son and a two year old daughter.

William and Amelia's marriage had taken place in 1862 on the other side of India at St Thomas's Mount outside Madras town. William said he was an 'Asst Schoolmaster, Royal Artillery'; both gave St Thomas's Mount as their residence; William added four years to his age

[2] The 1881 British Census, Dalton in Wigan. TNA Ref. R.G. 11/3783

[2] Madras Baptisms. IOR Ref. N/2/47, f80.

and Amelia subtracted one, and she identified her father as 'Henry Frederick Sherman' whom I was to discover, had been long deceased. William's enlistment record[3] shows that he signed up for twelve years for the Artillery in October 1859, giving his occupation as 'pupil teacher' and his age as twenty, although he was in fact not quite seventeen. 'Pupil teacher' must mean he had been a teacher apprentice at the school at which he was a pupil - like the teachers in Charles Dickens' *Our Mutual Friend.* He was 5' 8½" tall, with brown hair, grey eyes and a fresh complexion. Embarking from Liverpool on the *Clarence* in June 1860, he sailed to the Presidency of Madras. With him on the ship were 14 Engineers, 137 Artillerymen, 134 Infantrymen, 12 Women and 7 children (½s), a total of 300½ souls[4].

A map[5] shows St Thomas's Mount just south of Madras, and Cannanore on the Malabar Coast; the southward sweeping connecting railway line perhaps indicating their importance at that time. Cannanore (today called Kannur in theory if not in practice), is described as 'a port of considerable trade in pepper, grain, timber, and cocoanuts(sic) ... this palm so abundant that the whole country in every direction appears covered with forests of it'. The Portuguese arrived there in the early 16th century and left behind their own Christian community. St Thomas's Mount is described as the 'principle [*sic*] station and head-quarters of the Madras Artillery', 'at the foot of a hill ... from which it takes its name', traditionally the scene of St Thomas the Doubter's martyrdom.

I had assumed that my gt-grandmother Amelia was English like gt-grandfather William, perhaps even from Lancashire. But not so: there is a baptismal record for her in the IOR showing that she was born to Henry and Eliza Sherman in April 1842 at St Thomas's Mount - Henry described as a Sergeant in the Third Battalion Artillery. (In fact, Henry's promotion from 'Gunner' to 'Sergeant' on his army record is dated a couple of weeks after the baptism, so he was jumping the gun.) At St George's Cathedral, Madras, in September 1838, 'Henry Sherman, Writer in the Office of the Adjutant of the Brigade of the Horse Artillery ... and Eliza Gill' took their marriage vows. Henry's army records show that in the following year, 1839, he, like others before him including Robert Clive, swapped his job as a writer for soldiering.[6] 'Henry Sherman' is the name used on his documents. Only on his daughter Amelia's marriage lines is her father called 'Henry Frederick Sherman'.

Baptisms for gt-gt-grandfather Sherman and for gt-gt-grandmother Eliza née Gill, who sometimes called herself Elizabeth, were found as well. I located him under the name, 'Frederick': there are no Henrys listed. Frederick 'Shaaman' was baptised in 1815 in Bangalore, born to John 'Shaaman' and Mary. No name is given for the church - just 'Bangalore'. As he died when she was three, what Amelia knew of her father would have been second-hand through family stories. This is the probable explanation of why she called him Henry Frederick: although known as Henry, it seems he was baptised Frederick. Amelia must have heard both names.

There were two more sons born to John and Mary: John 'Sharman' baptised in 1818 also in Bangalore - no doubt, the same family, and earlier, in 1813, a James Frederick Sherman born to John and Mary Sherman baptised at Fort St George in Madras. These entries with three different spellings of Sherman look like the one family. There is a small piece of evidence to support the view that it is the same Sherman family in Madras and Bangalore. Henry's army records have his place of birth as Madras, and although he was baptised in Bangalore in March

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[3] Depôt Register of Recruits – Artillery. IOR Ref. L/MIL/9/34.

[4] Depôt Embarkation Lists 1859-1861. IOR Ref. L/MIL/9/84.

[5] Edward Thornton, *A Gazetteer of the territories under the Government of the East India Company* (London, Allen, 1837).

[6] Madras Register of European Soldiers, HEICS, 1786-1839. IOR Ref. L/MIL/11/102.

1816, he was born in Nov.1815. Perhaps in those four months the family moved from Madras to Bangalore, and their being new to the congregation may also explain the recording of the strange name 'Shaaman'.

In April 1812, at St Mary's Church, Fort St George, is recorded the marriage of 'Jno Sherman, Gunner in the 1st Bn of Artillery and Mary Andrews' - what were the next words ? - 'native woman', I deciphered. This was a stunning surprise. I told a visitor from the sub-continent in the Library: 'I think I have an Indian gt-gt-gt-grandmother'. 'Congratulations, my dear' was the reply.

Sgt. John Sherman, 27, is shown in the 1818 muster roll to have died on the 3rd of April, 1817.[7] Eight months later, Mary's last child was born in Bangalore.

Next I looked for Eliza and found 'Eliza Daughter of John Gill Private in the 1st European Regt on Foreign Service and of Mary a Native woman' baptised in September 1824 in Masulipatam in the Presidency of Madras. If this is my Eliza, and the probability is that she is, she was fourteen when she married Henry, aged twenty-three, at the Cathedral in Madras. It looks as if I have two gt-gt-gt-grandmothers who were Indian, both called Mary - possibly an indication of a Christian naming of both upon baptism.

Thornton's *Gazetteer* shows Masulipatam 215 miles north of Madras. Despite being on an unhealthy, smelly marsh, it had a cosmopolitan trading community described as once 'resembling Babel in the variety of tongues and the differences of garbs and costumes'. Here was exiled Khair un-Nissa, the tragic widow of James Kirkpatrick in William Dalrymple's *White Mughals.* Dalrymple contrasts the town most unfavourably with Khair's former home of Hyderabad at the beginning of the nineteenth century. However, a gazetteer of 1837 says 'many of the houses ... are large and well built ... even most of the dwellings of the poor. The textile operations ... include weaving, printing, bleaching, washing, and dressing tartans, ginghams, towels, table-linens'. European troops began to be withdrawn from the town in 1834 when it was superseded as a port by Bombay and its cloth manufacturing was being destroyed 'by English piece goods'. Eliza would have been ten in 1834 and it is a reasonable speculation that John Gill's family was amongst those withdrawn, possibly south to Madras where Eliza married Henry Sherman in 1838. In 1864 a tidal wave washed away much of Masulipatam, and today the churches are in ruins. So I would not be going to Masulipatam.

I have found two army documents[3] for Henry Sherman in the IOR and TNA - one a complete career record, revealing that he enlisted at Bangalore giving his age as twenty-two in November 1839. He was 5' 7½" tall, by trade a clerk, of slight build with light brown hair, hazel eyes and a dark complexion. The words 'born of European parents' are found on both documents, one showing the words in quotation marks. Dalrymple writes in *White Mughals* that in 1791 the Governor-General, Lord Cornwallis, issued an order that 'no one with an Indian parent could be employed by the civil, military or marine branches of the Company'. In 1795, Cornwallis explicitly barred anyone not descended from European parents on both sides from serving in the Company's armies except as 'pipers, drummers, bandsmen and farriers'. And they could not own land. But by 1836 these exclusions had been lifted although 'discrimination continued' notes Alfred Gabb in *1600-1947: Anglo-Indian Legacy.* It appears Henry attempted to avoid the growing social discrimination against Anglo-Indians by simply denying his mother's identity and passing as 'of British parents' by means of that 'light brown hair'.

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[7] Madras Muster Rolls and Casualty Returns, 1817-1820. IOR Ref. L/MIL/11/126 and 127. I am indebted to Donald Jaques for finding John Sherman's death on the muster rolls.

[3] IOR Ref. L/MIL/11/102; TNA Ref. WO97/1209/73.

He enlisted as a gunner in July 1839, in the first instance for five years, and served in the 2nd, 1st, 3rd and 4th Battalions of the Artillery, was made a sergeant in May 1842 and died after six years and eighteen days in the army in August 1845, with no cause of death given unfortunately. His conduct throughout his career was always 'good' or 'very good'. He was buried on the day he died at St Thomas's Mount. In January 1846 the army handed over to 'his widow and Amelia and Louisa Sherman' 554 rupees, 6 annas and 8 pice from his estate, probably raised by the sale of his personal property to his comrades as was customary. Thus I discovered Amelia's sister Louisa, after whom she had named her own first child, and subsequently I found that Henry and Eliza Sherman had lost a third baby daughter in 1843. Called Maria, perhaps she was named after her grandmothers.

Eliza did not remarry, but died 'Widow of Henry Sherman, Sergeant R.A.' at St Thomas's Mount in May 1880, aged 55, 'of old age'. Her daughter Louisa, at sixteen, married a Laboratory Corporal, Joseph Thornber, of the Ordnance Depot in September 1857, also at St Thomas's Mount, and there proceeded to produce a large family and to watch her husband rise steadily in rank. However, Louisa's whole family disappears from the IOR records a few months after the death of her mother Eliza. Nor has any trace of Louisa's namesake, my grandfather's older sister, come to light. Did she go to live with her Aunt Louisa or Grandmother Eliza when her mother died ? Was she sent to an orphanage ?

Following in the steps of my Ancestors

To give myself time to acclimatise to India I first joined a small group touring Kerala for a week, and spent a second week at a guest house in the mountains of Tamil Nadu being well looked after. But the search began at the beginning of my third week when I boarded the overnight train from Dindigul and, with the help of my driver, found my sleeper.

It was still early morning in Chennai (formerly Madras) when I left my hotel room and walked to the end of the street to hire a likely looking auto-rickshaw driver and negotiate a fee for a trip to the three Chennai churches I wanted to find. The first church would be St Mary's at Fort St George where John Sherman and Mary Andrews married in 1812 and where their son James Frederick was baptised in 1813. St Thomas's Mount Church would be next, and St George's Cathedral where my gt-gt-grandparents, Henry Sherman and Eliza Gill were married in 1838 I would leave until last as there would be no problem in locating it: it is clearly marked on the map in the guide book.

St Thomas's Mount Church is not marked, but six family events had occurred there: my gt-grandmother Amelia's baptism in 1842; her sister Maria's burial in 1843; her father, gt-gt-grandfather Henry (Frederick) Sherman's burial in 1845; two marriages - in 1857 of Louisa Sherman to Jacob Thornber, and in 1862 of my gt-grandparents William Abbott and Amelia Sherman; and in 1880, my gt-gt-grandmother Eliza (Gill) Sherman's burial. For nearly forty years St Thomas's Mount was the Sherman family's church.

St Mary's Church, Fort St George

Fort St George today is a large, busy complex with a constant stream of bureaucrats and clerks criss-crossing between the old colonial buildings now used as offices - presumably state offices. There was such a high security regime in operation the day I was there that I felt it prudent to ask a soldier's permission before taking photographs of St Mary's, the first Anglican church built in India.

St Mary's is now in the Madras Diocese of the Church of South India (CSI), formed in 1947 from the major Protestant denominations, 'its doors open to people of all faiths, and from all nations'. It was built in 1680, but re-built in 1759 to withstand attack, with four foot thick walls

and a brick and masonry roof providing a cool refuge from the heat. Painted white, built large and high steepled to impress and impose, today it looks side-tracked behind a screen of trees. Inside is familiar - much like a well appointed Anglican Church in England, save for what I came to find were the ubiquitous

fans and the woven rush seats of the pews. I remember particularly, a cool green garden viewed through the open, arched, wooden doors in the wall facing the entrance: beautifully fresh and unexpected, maintained as a place for quiet contemplation. The new woman vicar from England was playing the organ while I was able to have a chat with a church lay official.

This is where John Sherman and Mary Andrews married and baptised a son at the beginning of e nineteenth century - a very grand church for an army private's family I thought, but of course fitting for the purpose his presence served.

St Thomas's Mount Garrison Church

St Thomas's Mount Garrison Church

Looking back, I now realise that asking a driver for my military churches never worked: they were as much in the dark as I was about their location. In Chennai for example I visited three St Thomas Churches before finding the one I wanted.

I was first taken to the only St Thomas's Church the driver knew, i.e. to the Roman Catholic Basilica of St Thome where relics of St Thomas are kept. Today it houses a school during the week, so while I avoided the attentions of little boys, my driver consulted about the whereabouts of 'my' St Thomas's Mount Church, and off we went to try again. I had climbed the ninety metres of steps to a second St Thomas's Church before I realised that I was approaching the famous and revered Little Mount Church. It was built by the Portuguese in 1551 (or an even older church was re-built) on one of the spots where legend locates St Thomas's martyrdom. Despite it not being the church I was looking for, I was very pleased to see it, and surely one of the Portuguese nuns would tell me where the Protestant St Thomas's Mount Church was. Indeed from the balustrade along the edge of the hill in the grounds of the convent next to the church, a cupola poking through a thick canopy of dark trees below was pointed out to me. This, I was told, was my church on the main airport road. I retraced my way down past the old men stationed on the steps accepting alms. At the bottom of the hill is another St Thomas's, a Wesleyan Church. Its late nineteenth century date reassured me that it could not be the one I was looking for, but I took a photograph, and sure enough, a friend in Newcastle identified it as the church of her parents' marriage. Did I not say nearly everyone has an Indian connection ?

But 'my' St Thomas's Mount Church continued to elude us as it cannot be seen from the GST Road, the dual carriageway to the airport. Local shop and cafe staff could not help when we

enquired up and down the road. Finally an auto-rickshaw driver came to our rescue and told my driver to U-turn onto the carriageway going towards the city and instructed him where to turn left. When we did he was shocked to find himself driving into a military station. First it was Fort St George, now here I was on another military station. I should not have expected anything else, but it was only then that the continuity symbolised by these churches was brought home to me - a continuity of army life, of army families and of garrison churches throughout all the period from the East India Company through the Raj and into modern day India. Immediately on the right I spotted the cupola of 'St Thomas's Mount Garrison Church'.

Although the white exterior is not in the pristine condition of St Mary's Church in the Fort, it too is imposing. It has broad steps leading to a generous pillared entrance portico with its cupola topped tower. Two large ante-rooms provide ample space for a nursery school without encroaching into the long nave. Stacked, waiting, were copies of a selection from *Hymns Ancient and Modern* duplicated into a slim booklet for the congregation, many of them descendants of English soldiers like John Sherman and John Gill who in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries had married Indian women. Any graveyard that might have existed near the church had been converted to a school yard for the children who smiled themselves into my photographs, rather appropriately I thought, in light of my gt-grandfather William's profession.

St George's Cathedral, Madras

What am I to make of Henry and Eliza marrying at the prestigious St George's Cathedral ? Henry was a civilian when he married in 1838 - a writer for the EIC. Presumably civilians did not attended garrison churches like St Mary's or St Thomas's Mount. The Cathedral must have been the church of even the most hoi polloi 'British' civilian residents.

St George's was consecrated in 1816, but the Victorians extended the chancel in the middle of the century, incorporating painted decoration, encaustic tiles and stained glass in their vision - so I knew that the building I was seeing was not quite the one Henry Sherman and Eliza Gill entered for their wedding. But florists were decorating it for a wedding while I was there. Very fitting, but it was still hard work to imagine my gt-gt-grandparents there. The same is true of the two other churches I had visited: the spirit of the places had eluded me. Only the young teachers and the carefree nursery children at St Thomas's had caused me to pause and notice. I could not be sure, but it seemed that here were people from another branch of my once-family community - the descendants of those who stayed in India and became army families.

Today the forty-five metre tower, the massive Ionic pillars and particularly the graveyard railings of muskets and bayonets from the capture of Seringapatam in 1799 are celebrated in the guidebooks - but I missed them even though 'banyans grow out of mausoleums' (*South India,* Footprint 2000). But I was pleased I had found my three Chennai churches. I had made a good start. Two more to find. That evening I enjoyed another success when I put myself in the right bunk on the train to Bangalore.

Bangalore and the Cathedral Church of St Mark's

I had arrived in India in the small hours of the morning to find the drive to my hotel in the fishing village of Kovalam a wonderful first experience of the country - men, women, school boys caught by the headlights walking along the roadside in the dark, the strange smells in the smoke of the dung and wood fires coming in through the car window on the cool air, the place not quite asleep, but not quite awake either. This time, again in the small hours, I was passing through quite a different India: from the wide streets of a garden city of the 1800s and the sprawling suburbs of one of the fastest growing places in Asia to a computer industry enclave, walled in and guarded by uniformed gatekeepers.

Later that first day I emerged from an STD phone kiosk in the centre of Bangalore on Mahatma Gandhi Road with a list from a travel agent of five or six churches, any one of which he thought could be the church where Frederick 'Shaaman' had been baptised. I spotted the Cathedral Church of St Mark's across the road, so I began my search there. (Later I noticed on a map that all the open area on the other side of the road is called the 'Parade Ground' - a clue for the more perceptive researcher that this was, and perhaps still is, a garrison area). A lay officer who was a church history buff agreed to help me, and suddenly exclaimed: 'It must be St Mark's. It was the only English church built by 1816'. Which of course is the reason why the IOR registers give no name: there was then only one English church in Bangalore - this former parish church, now an elegant cathedral. The exterior shows a cream, rectangular building, the ground floor pierced by a row of large, arched, brown-shuttered windows - with Ionic columns at one end. The flat roof rises in railinged steps, finishing in a modest dome. Save for the cross on the dome, it looks like an important government building rather than a church. But inside it is a jewel in its way. Copper plaques and crossed swords on the otherwise undecorated walls reveal its military roots. The plastered walls themselves are pure white of a richness that comes only from the application of many layers of white paint, and high up, supported by columns runs a gallery decorated with classical moulding lit by more large windows, the lights colouring the entering rays of the sun. Above that on the white ceiling, the bosses are picked out in gold. Down below light reflects back from the dark, highly polished wood of the doors and altar, and on the floor is a deep red carpet. The nave is furnished with woven rush pews in carved, dark wood frames, and overhead brass fans rotate to cool the visitor.

St Mark's Cathedral, Bangalore

But is it invisible ? I returned the next day by auto-rickshaw telling the driver the building I wanted and its address. He said there was no church there, and challenged me to point it out as we drove along the road. When I did he craned his neck to look: he had never noticed it before. Despite its beauty and elegance and its central position on Mahatma Gandhi Road for nearly two hundred years, it can be invisible and forgotten - much like family history I suppose.

Mysore and St John's Church, Cannanore

From Bangalore I took an early morning commuter train to Mysore and spent a day sight-seeing. The next morning a driver and his Hindustan Ambassador motor arrived at my hotel to

take me over the Western Ghats to Cannanore: travelling there by train would have been too complicated. The route, particularly the final descent down the mountains, was spectacularly memorable. It seemed for a time that the coiling drop through the lush green trees covering the Western Ghats had no end. At Cannanore I decided to rent a 'retiring room' at the railway station for the day if I could. Retiring rooms are very cheap accommodation for travellers on the station platform. I found I had all the facilities I needed: a power point and a shower specifically, and of course I was perfectly placed for boarding my overnight train to take me down the coast to Trivandrum to catch my plane home.

Cannanore still has a military base: the cantonment first occupied by the British in the 1790s is to the north-west of the city on a coconut-palm covered promontory nearly surrounded by the sea. I made my way there by auto-rickshaw to explore on foot. There are still houses built in the traditional Kerala manner with broad brimmed roofs extending several feet beyond the top of the walls ensuring the windows are always in shade - houses such as my grandfather might have lived in as a child. There are a good number of schools and churches, the schools all identified as 'Anglo-Indian' as far as I could see and by church denomination eg. 'Anglo-Indian Roman Catholic High School'. It was clear how the residents identified themselves.

The priest at the Roman Catholic Church said 'my' church was called St John's and was next to the private bus station. These instructions were a total failure on the rickshaw driver I hired. I soon found myself back in the centre of Cannanore, having given a lift to his wife and mother-in-law picked up on the way. But at the book shop I was told it could only be St John's at the cantonment, so back I went, this time asking the driver not to go until we had found the right church. The first church we came to I thought might be mine, but it was in fact a beautiful Hebich's Church. Samuel Hebich was one of a group of missionaries from the Reformed and Lutheran Churches who came to this part of India from Basle at the time of the Napoleonic Wars and attempted to establish industries to provide the people with work. After many false starts they succeeded finally with printing and book-binding, which is interesting in light of the high literacy rate today: Kerala State claims over 90%. The priest, like a gentle figure on an early Church fresco with a dark circular face, large, black eyes and thick curls, gave the driver directions to St John's and this time we found the building in a quiet corner of the cantonment.

St John's Church, Cannanore

St John's is a large plain country church in contrast to its city sisters. Another white building, it is encircled by thick, simple columns supporting the tiled wooden roof extending over the gallery around the outside. Wedgwood blue doors inside contrast with the whitewashed walls through which a rose tint imparts a water colour wash effect to the surface. The large windows are set low in the walls, so with the shutters open the congregation can rest their eyes on the ubiquitous palm trees and the sky. The place was a bit unkempt because painters were in 'sprucing' it up for the harvest festival, and they made a hullabaloo following the shy woman caretaker and myself around, but from a brass plaque on the wall commemorating its 175th anniversary in 1986 I discovered St John's was built in 1811. Picking

my way over the wet flag floor I took a photo of the font where my grandfather had been baptised.

But there was one more sight after I left St John's. Tired and hungry, I found in my guidebook a recommended hotel where I would be able to get something to eat. It turned out to be close to St John's, but right on the shore. I had not until then had a view of the sea nearly encircling the cantonment. The ocean and its sound and smell are the backdrop to the settlement, and I had nearly missed it.

On the dresser in my kitchen at home lie two copper coins bought from a young man dealing on the pavement in Bangalore. One is a quarter anna dated 1835, the other larger coin a half anna dated 1862, the year of the marriage of my gt-grandparents William Abbott and Amelia Sherman. I just leave them there, picking them up to examine occasionally, always a little thankful that the imprints are still legible, if only just. I am thankful, surprised and feel a little lucky my churches are still there too. It was a great adventure.

Back in England William Abbott became the Manager of the quarry where he worked and never returned to teaching. He died at the age of 75 in 1917 in Ashton-in-Makerfield survived by Elizabeth and their three children. Henry Abbott named his first child Amelia after his long deceased mother in India, as she had named him after her father. This baby girl did not survive, but Henry and his wife Annie had nine more children - including triplet boys. Henry died four years after his father age 55 in Bolton after some years as an invalid, always having been a stonemason. Going their different ways, his widow Annie and most of their children emigrated, including the youngest, my mother Sarah, who went to Canada in 1925. As far as I know, I am the first of his many descendants to have returned to India.

Sources

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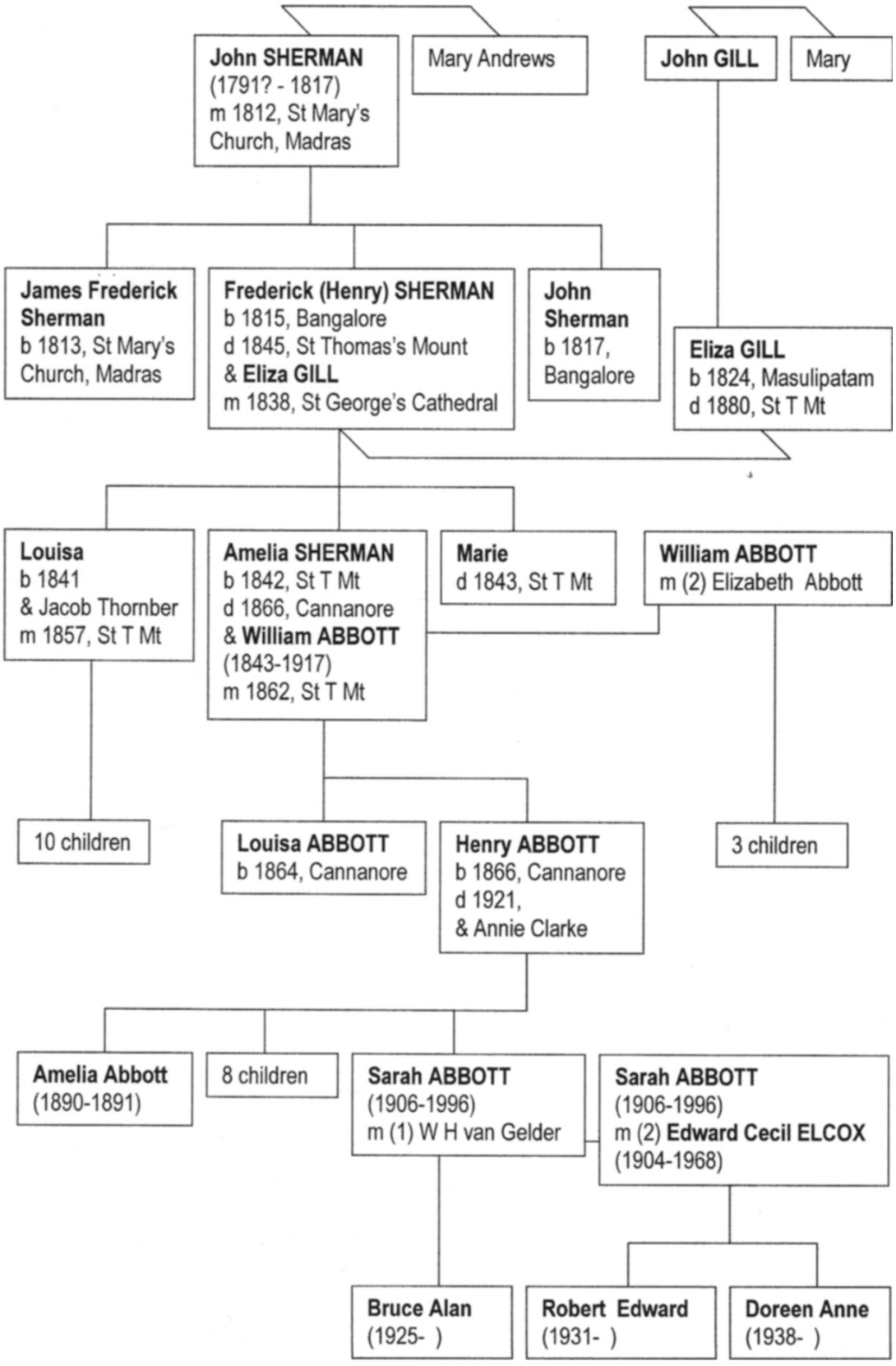
I should like to thank Lawrie Butler for commenting on the text and compiling the family tree on the next page.

The Sherman-Abbott Family



Soldiers' War Service Records

By Peter Bailey

The 'derring-do' stories of the exploits of the EIC Armies in battle, make very exciting reading. Much is written in unofficial literature about most of the better known, and some of the less known battles and engagements. Some are based upon the personal experience of a participant, but the major sources are those of the official despatches to Government from the Commanding Officers in the field. Frequently, although not always, officers participating in particular campaigns, and in individual battles, are named in these documents and further confirmation of their participation is also given in *Army Lists* and *Officers' Service Details*. Non-commissioned officers and private soldiers, however, are only named if they perform an heroic act, worthy of a 'mention in despatches'. How, then, can one ascertain whether or not a particular soldier took part in a given campaign ?

Unfortunately, this is quite difficult, although the following may be of help.

His Regiment

If a soldier's entire regiment is known to have been engaged in the action in question, the chances are evidently high that he participated too. It cannot, however, be certain since he may have been in hospital, on detachment or even in gaol at the time.

If only a selection of companies of his regiment took part, it will be necessary both to learn in which company the soldier served and to identify those companies which did, indeed, take part. The former is, generally, quite difficult. Again, even if the man's company is known and its presence at the action concerned is proved, it may still be necessary to confirm that he was, indeed, present rather than absent as described above.

It should be noted that the records frequently mention which company or companies of an Infantry regiment took part in a particular action. However, sadly, they generally state merely that they were supported by an unspecified 'detachment of Artillery'.

Prize Money and Medals

Records are available in the IOR series L/MIL/5 of prize money or medals awarded to individuals for their participation in a particular campaign and lists of the names, ranks and numbers, etc. are generally provided. Although a number of errors have been identified, a recipient of such an award may confidently be considered actually to have served in that campaign. Moreover, his particular Company and Regiment will usually be stated in these records and, although they are subject to change, this may be useful for further research.

Wounds

If a soldier sustained a wound in action, his identity was still not given in despatches. A significant wound may have resulted in his application for discharge, or for transfer to the Presidency's European Veteran Corps. Notes of such transfer may possibly have been recorded in the Commander-in-Chief's General Orders but would certainly also be included in the Annual Casualty Musters at the beginning of the following year, even if the reason for transfer is not included.

Death

Numbers of deaths in action are recorded in despatches, corps by corps – but without the deceased being named ! However, a soldier's name will be recorded in the 'Casualties by

Death' section of the Annual Muster List for his corps for the following year. He should also feature in the 'Burials' section of the Ecclesiastical Records (IOR series N/) – assuming that he was fortunate enough to have been close enough to civilization to have received a recorded Christian burial.

War Services

If the soldier in question was eventually promoted to the ranks of Warrant Officer (sub-Conductor, or higher), he will have his 'War Service' recorded in the Annual Army List for the Presidency concerned. These records are provided for all officers still serving at the beginning of the year concerned including Warrant Officers promoted from the ranks.

As an example of this latter, I reproduce the 'War Service' of a Warrant Officer, taken at random from the January 1862 edition of The Madras Army List (IOR Ref. L/MIL/17/3/116, p365), Conductor Hugh Wheldon.

Warrant Officers of the Commissariat Department

> Conductor Hugh WHELDON employed against rebellious Arabs at Bullerghee in the Nizam's Dominions in September 1841. Employed with the Field Force under Colonel Blundell, C. B., against the Arabs in the fortified Durgah of Goolburgah in October and November 1848. Served in the Burmese War 1852-53. Was present at the night attack on Prome, 8th December 1852. Has received the Medal for Pegu.

I was drawn to this source whilst researching my ancestor Edward Evans. He was serving as a Gunner in 'C' Company, 3rd Battalion of the Madras Artillery at St. Thomas's Mount in 1832 when the call came for Artillerymen and others to be sent to Malacca to suppress a rebellion there. Two detachments of 30 gunners each were sent and, after extensive search in the Military Proceedings of the time, I eventually learned that both detachments were provided by the 3rd Battalion, although led by Captain Bond from the 2nd Battalion. I wanted to know if Evans was included or not.

Malacca was, traditionally, garrisoned by a half company of Golundauze (native artillery), and in 1831, additionally by four companies of the 29th Madras Native Infantry who had suffered some reverses during the rebellion. The local commander had called for reinforcements from Madras.

The first of these, including about thirty Madras European Artillerymen, arrived at the end of January 1832 and engaged the enemy over the next few weeks. The Field Commander then thought it prudent to request further reinforcements of men and equipment and, after some negotiation, the request was approved. The extra troops, including a further thirty Artillerymen, arrived off Malacca in late July 1832, only to find that the rebellion had by then been quashed and their presence was not required. The news had not reached the authorities either in Madras, or in Fort William who, when eventually apprised, expressed annoyance at the expense, deemed unnecessarily to have been incurred !

No medals were awarded for this campaign and certainly it merited no prize money. It was not possible for me to discover the names of the Artillerymen shipped to Malacca, either in the first or the second detachment. A small number of them died there and they were so recorded in the Muster List Casualties for the following year. A further small number were court martialled for various offences committed in Malacca and so their identity was also discovered.

After further lengthy and unsuccessful research, I came across the records of 'War Service' for the years after Evans had been promoted to the rank of Sub-Conductor. He did not feature as having any record of 'War Service' and, although he may have sailed for Malacca, he did not

fight there. Two others, who went on to become Warrant Officers, Conductor P. J. Heiden and Acting Sub-Conductor T. Edmonds, are mentioned as having served in Malacca in 1832. However, neither of these two was serving with the 3rd Battalion, Artillery !

The following statistic will prove to be of interest. In 1862, the Madras Establishment contained a total of 116 Warrant Officers. Of these, sixty-one were recorded as having War Service. It is uncertain whether War Service contributed to eligibility for promotion to Warrant rank, but if not, one can deduce that about half of our Warrant Officer ancestors never fired a round in anger !

An Unique Set of Records

Among the large numbers of military records maintained by the East India Company were sets of 'Soldiers' Service Records'. The 'form' completed for each soldier is described overleaf. Most regrettably, these forms were all destroyed following the demise of the Company. A single set has, however, fortunately managed to find its way into the War Office Records held at 'The National Archive' at Kew and may be viewed under WO97/1209 (LDS Film Number 861872).

These are Service Records of a limited number of men (282) enlisted into, or transferred into the 4th Battalion, Madras Foot Artillery, first established in 1845, at least until 21st February 1848. These records include a section entitled 'Services Employed in' under which are entered details of all campaigns in which the soldier had been engaged. These appear mostly to include the Second Burma War of 1852, in which 'A' Company was involved. Some soldiers had seen earlier service in other regiments prior to transfer into the 4th Battalion. Details of this are given for the 38 soldiers who had seen campaign service by the (unknown) date that the forms were compiled.

Service Records of Soldiers of 4th Battalion Madras Foot Artillery

A Description and Records of Service of men enlisted in and transferred to this Battalion between 3rd July 1845 and 21st February 1848 (TNA Ref. WO97/1209)

Layout of Form

NAME:
Number

Born in Parish of — Town of:
County of: — By Trade a:
Enlisted at: — on the:
For — Service

Received from:
Age when enlisted — Height

Corps	Promotions /Reductions	Rank	Period of Service in each rank From	To	Amount of Service Years	Days

Signatures of Officers

DESCRIPTION of:

Hair:
Eyes:
Complexion:
Particular Appearance:

SERVICES EMPLOYED IN

(Campaign Service)

CASUALTY

Nature & Date	Amount of Estate in money & effects	to whom bequeathed	to whom delivered

CHARACTER

Autobiography of David Dinwiddie

Born 1818 Penpont, Scotland – Died 1880 Bangalore, India

A letter written to his brother Alexander, begun in 1864 and finished in 1878, currently in the possession of Brian Duncan and transcribed by Ruth Croft.

Part 3 (1858-1878)

(The first two instalments of three appeared in the previous two Journals. The story resumes with the news of Dinwiddie's appointment as Adjutant to a new native regiment, the 1st Pegu Police Battalion being formed at Pallavaram, which reaches him at Banda over 1000 miles away where he is serving as Sergeant-Major of F Troop, Madras Native Horse Artillery, and had just seen action against the mutineers. One passage near the beginning has been omitted for the sake of brevity indicated by the summary inserted in square brackets)

Mrs Dinwiddie, being at this time in Secunderabad, was the first to write and tell me of the good tidings of my appointment as Adjutant, which at once placed me on an equality with the officers of the Commissioned ranks. The following mail brought the Government Gazette, and then I saw my appointment in print. In a day or two, subsequent to the arrival of the Gazette in camp, I was put in orders to proceed forthwith and take up my appointment at Pallavaram, marching via Futtypore, Allahabad, Benares, Calcutta, and by the mail steamer from the latter city to Madras.

Previous to finally quitting my troop; it was ordered out one morning, with a few of the 12th Lancers to reconnoitre the surrounding country, and to let the villagers know that they would be protected from the rebels, provided they would stay at home and cultivate the soil as heretofore. This being done, after a few hours fast riding, with the guns and Cavalry across country, we were on our way home, when an accident occurred, which proved more dangerous than the field of battle, viz., the blowing up of a gun-limber full of shot, shell and powder.

[The rough ground over which the limber was passing caused friction in its ammunition case and hence the explosion. Following this incident he was deputed to escort Major Brice and another officer, Dr Ford, who were going on sick leave to the Nilgiri hills. Their route went via Calcutta and Madras]

I felt rather proud in having an opportunity of seeing Calcutta, the far-famed 'city of palaces,' and as the mail steamer had left the river a day or two before we arrived, we had about 13 days to spare, as we must needs remain in Calcutta till the next bi-monthly mail steamer was ready to start with the English mail, calling at Madras on her way to Suez. Major Brice and Dr Ford during the time they remained in Calcutta put up at a 2nd class hotel, and I at a 3rd class, where I had a clean bed, and two good meals a day. For this accommodation £4.10 per mensem was charged. This I considered a very low rate for so much comfort.

Being settled down at the hotel, I lost no time in going 'to and fro' sight-seeing. 14 miles to Barrackpore, where the Indian mutiny first shewed itself in 1857 was the furthest point I reached by rail, and water; then Dum-Dum, the headquarters of the Bengal Artillery. At this time, May 1858, the barracks at Dum-Dum, 14 miles from Calcutta, were fully occupied by the wives and children of the Artillerymen, who were then manning the guns at Delhi, Lucknow, and other important places of attack and defence far up in the interior of the North-Western Provinces. Hundreds of these poor women, alas! were destined to be widows, and the children orphans before the mutiny was put down.

I paid a visit to Serampore, the head-quarters of the Baptist Missionaries; also Howrah, where the great E.I. Railway station is erected, both on the opposite side of the river; then I must needs see the place where the Black Hole of Calcutta was once upon a time. The numerous

ships in the river was a sight to see after I had been so long up-country. Many of the ships had no cargo at this time, and hundreds of the sailors had left their vessels and had proceeded hundreds of miles up the country, to fight against the murderous Sepoys. They were allowed to volunteer their services, and were well paid by Government.

Fort William and Garden Reach next had the honour of my presence, and finally venturing up to the top of Ochterlony's pillar or monument, erected on the spacious maidan, by a spiral staircase, I had the whole of the 'city at my feet' as it were, in one grand view. The palace of the Governor-General (then Lord Canning) not far distant, was unoccupied at the time, so I walked through the 'pictured and carpeted rooms and trod the marbled halls.' A European soldier and his wife had charge of the interior of this great building, and a few faithful Sepoys walked 'sentry-go' at the several gates, armed with the ram-rod of their fusil, which latter had been taken from them to save them from committing themselves, as their comrades had done up the country. A few long walks through the principal streets to see the churches, hospitals, colleges, schools, shops, mosques, temples, &c., &c., and a few longer drives here and there, in a two-pony carriage, also a few pleasant rides in a palanqueen *(sic)*, carried by 8 coolies on their shoulders, made the time of our stay pass quickly away, till the mail steamer was ready to take us to Madras.

Having secured a Pass-ticket to Madras on the steamer Bentinck of the P. and O. Company, went on board on the evening of the 5th June 1858, and on the 6th we were in charge of a pilot to take us down the Hoogly delta of the river Ganges, into the Bay of Bengal. Six pleasant days' voyage brought me once more within view of the horrid Surf, which I had now to cross in the usual Mussullah boat, for the sixth time during my service in India.

Safe on shore once more I made my way to the house of my wife's cousin, Quarter-Master Sergeant Delahoyde, Governor's bodyguard, paid a visit to my wife's uncle Mr. Pritchard, Veterinary Surgeon of the bodyguard, who was preparing to embark for England, and who in half an hour after my visit, left his house to go on board the same steamer I had just left. I now found my way to a European shop on the Madras 'Pall Mall' to procure a suitable outfit for myself to give me the appearance of a gentleman and officer in the gallant Madras Army.

This done, in the company of Captain Jessie Mitchell of the Madras Mounted Police, my former Sergeant-Major in the C. Troop Horse Artillery, I was ready to start on the following morning, the 13th June, to drive up to Pallavaram, 12 miles, and report myself to Major H. W. Blake of the 36th Regiment N.I., who had been appointed Commandant of the 1st. Pegu Police Battalion, to be organized for service in British Burmah.

On the 13th at my final destination, I had the pleasure to meet the Major, and I believe I made a good impression on him by my plain soldier-like way of conversation, and we continued fast friends from that date. I had now to forget my duties as an artilleryman, and study Infantry drill and manoeuvres in real interest.

Previous to my commencing my duties as Adjutant I had to go and meet my wife and family, then on their way to join me from Secunderabad, 360 miles distant, where I had left them when I started for Bengal at the beginning of the year.

The leave I had asked for being cheerfully granted, back to Madras I came again the same day, and by midnight I had the good fortune to greet my dear wife and four children at a town called Nellore, 100 miles from Madras, having travelled that distance cramped up on the top of the Government mail cart. Previous to my mounting the mail cart I had been well supplied with a stock of provisions for the journey by Mrs Delahoyde, destined to be my second wife as time revealed, for in 1860 I became a widower, and she a widow, her husband having died in Madras and my wife in Burmah. However, it was not until the 30th of March 1864, we joined

the two orphan families together, viz., 1 daughter and 3 sons each, still alive at the time I am writing, 1878, and doing well, thank God for all His mercies.

We remained at Nellore in the traveller's bungalow till the 15th, and made the best of our way in two bullock carts in 10 days to our new home in a snug little dwelling in the Cantonment of Pallavaram, a clean, healthy, pleasant place, where we passed our time very comfortably till the month of September of the same year, when our domestic happiness was again interrupted. Having raised about 550 men by enlistment, and volunteers from 40 different regiments of the Madras Native Army, the Government thought our regiment strong enough to take up the duties allotted to it in Burmah, and we accordingly prepared to embark at Madras in three transport ships chartered for the purpose, viz., the Blue Rock, Statesman, and India, all sailing vessels.

The bugles sounded loud and long at 10 o'clock at night on the 15th September 1858, and by midnight the first Pegu Police Battalion (afterwards changed to the first Pegu Sapper Battalion) was on the march with knapsack on back and haversack by the side of each sepoy. Major Blake led the van, and his Adjutant brought up the rear, both mounted on horses lent to us by our friends for the occasion, for we had to look for 'horse flesh' on our arrival at our destination in Burmah. Soon after the last of the long column of four deep cleared the Cantonment of Saint Thomas' Mount, 8 miles from Madras, a black cloud broke over our heads, and rain poured down in torrents, our path became dark as pitch, the thunder rolled and pealed over our devoted heads, and except when the lightening *(sic)* flashed, we could not see an inch in front, all was darkness, rain and tempest.

Fortunately Major Blake had a lantern to guide the leading Section, so we found our way to Madras at break of day, cold, wet and hungry, much in want of a strong 'peg' or a cup of hot coffee. Having fortified the 'inner man' on our arrival here, we commenced to embark. Every man was safe on board in a few hours, except one Native officer, whose carelessness to be present in time forfeited him his commission and was dismissed the service. We set sail, and I bid good-bye to Madras for 5 years. In ten days, the three transports arrived safe at the Irrawaddy river, opposite Rangoon city, 25 miles from the sea. I have to remark that for the first time, in this instance, Sepoys were allowed to take their families with them when ordered on foreign service. This was done with a view to encourage the men to remain in Burmah, after they were entitled to pension, and settle there for life, colonizing the country as much as possible, where there is so much spare rich soil to cultivate.

As soon as the ships had cast anchor on the 16th, a fleet of Burmese boats was along side, into which the Sepoys, 550, with their wives, sons, daughters, fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters, uncles, aunts, and other relations, too, more distantly connected, making 518 – in all 1,068, were in a few minutes closely packed, and on the following day, the 17th, our fleet of boats set sail for Shoaygheen [Shwegyin], a town on the banks of the Sittang river, about 200 miles [in fact 100 miles] from Rangoon.

During our short stay in Rangoon, the Commissariat Department had to supply each boat (numbering over 100) with sea rations to last 20 days; on arrival in Rangoon not one man, woman, or child was allowed to set foot on shore. The boats were told off into three divisions, Major Blake had the first, the Adjutant the second, and the Quarter-Master, (Mr. Clarke) the third, and all went on as 'merry as a marriage bell' on our voyage; plenty to eat, fresh water to drink, nothing to do but catch fish in the rivers and creeks of water which led across the country, or shoot wild ducks and other waterfowls found in abundance all the way up to our future home in the interior of the old kingdom of Pegu, where we arrived on the 1st October 1858 during the heavy rains.

The first important act on my arrival at Shoaygheen [Shwegyin], which signifies 'the country of gold' was the purchase of a respectable dwelling-house which cost me £150 or Rs. 1500. This was about the middle of October 1858, the first and last time I ever could say I owned household property. Settling down with my family very comfortably, I enjoyed my own house for about 3 years. Again I was compelled to forego domestic bliss in my own little dwelling. The head-quarters of the Regiment was ordered down the country to Moulmein to relieve the 32nd Madras N.I., commanded by Colonel Gordon, which regiment had been ordered back to the Coromandel Coast, Madras. So I had to abandon my beautiful dwelling. The two companies of European Artillery and also the detachment of European Artillery had also been withdrawn from garrisoning the station, so that I could not obtain supervision, and my property went to the bad. I was lucky getting Rs. 500 for it in 1866; those who lived in it always managing to withhold the rent to pay for repairs. I had a great deal to contend with during my three years' stay in Shoaygheen [Shwegyin]; all the hard work and most of the responsibility fell on me as Adjutant. The Regiment had to be drilled, clothed, and disciplined; pay had to be drawn, muster rolls and acquittance books had to be kept, and all the different records, just the same as a regular regiment with 24 officers. No less than 7 detachments were stationed out in the jungles from head-quarters; all these had to be fed, so much pay had to be recovered, for each man for extra food, guards had to be sent out in all directions, escorting the pay and rations; the sick had to be brought home, healthy men sent out to those numerous punchayats [village councils], to try prisoners, and a host of other duties to attend to; besides parades, drills and guard-mounting every morning.

The Commanding Officer was seldom at home at the head-quarters, as his time was taken up almost continually visiting his out-posts. The Quarter-Master fell sick, went on leave, and only returned to die! Poor fellow. Another Quarter-Master was ordered all the way from Madras, but in the meantime I had to do all his duties and did them too 'with a heart and will', month after month in succession. While, on the march in the dense jungles many Sepoys died, some were carried away by tigers, even the Cantonment was not safe; as one night soon after I had retired to bed, a favourite dog of mine was carried off from the verandah. We heard the rush and noise, a yelp or two from the poor creature: in a few seconds all was over; but we dared not open the door that night. Tigers were killed by the Burmese in the jungle and brought into Cantonments for exhibition, stretched out on a bullock cart. I paid half a rupee one day to let the children have a look at a dead tiger.

Then our Doctor, Munro, died, my Sergeant-Major, McDermot died, our Quarter-Master's wife and son died; and last, my own wife died, 13th March 1860, and left me with five children, and to add to my embarrassment, a baby 3 months old.

In about a year after this calamity, the station was ordered to be abandoned altogether, leaving only a few companies of sepoys to garrison Shoaygheen, so it fell to my task to dismantle the fort and drag the long, heavy guns down the hill, a long mile to the river Sittang; and then from a low jetty I managed with the assistance of the sepoys alone, and bales of sepoys' clothing, to lower those heavy guns into the bottom of Burmese boats without any accident. This work was done in July and August 1861. (I may here mention my promotion to a Lieutenancy on the 28th June of this year 1861.) The gun carriages were all taken to pieces, and packed with the guns for the arsenal at Rangoon. The ammunition in barrels, shot, shells, canister, tents, and every imaginable thing, loading 40 large sized boats. I had to make out indents on the commissariat department for those boats, and an agent had been sent down from Tonghoo [Toungoo] to pay the boatmen and otherwise assist me. The above would have been the work of the Quarter-Master, but the new one had also fallen sick soon after he joined us from Madras, and had left on sick leave to Moulmein. Hence the task fell upon me. They say, 'the more duty the more

honour', and as I had health and strength to do it, I felt proud of the thanks I received for doing my duty.

On the 20th August, the head-quarters and 7 companies embarked in boats for Moulmein. In September I settled down in Moulmein, in a rented bungalow, and sent my five children to a boarding school where they were well-cared for. Moulmein is a pleasant spot to live in, 25 miles from the open sea at Amherst. Here, there is beautiful scenery of wood, hill and dale, approaching the town, and extending as far as the eye can reach.

The Salween river is here a broad, deep stream, and since the first Burmese war in 1824, has been a British seaport, utilised for floating down teak timber from the forests in the interior, far away up among the Karen and Shan mountains. Through these, rivers force their way with the timber rafts for the numerous shipping waiting for it at Moulmein.

In former years, there were one European regiment of Infantry, two of Native Infantry, and two companies or batteries of Artillery. In 1861 the garrison had been reduced to one regiment of Native Infantry, and this had now been relieved by my regiment, the Sappers, which at once commenced to make itself useful, not only as soldiers, but as brick and tile makers, road-makers, well-diggers, blacksmiths, carpenters, tailors, gardeners, boat-men, winnowers, the women and children as servants; in fact, the regiment made itself generally useful till 1863, when the Government thought fit to disband 4 Native Regiments of the Madras Army and the Pegu Sapper Battalion in addition, as the 5th. This was done in consequence of the mutiny still causing a heavy strain on the Indian treasury; Bengal and Bombay had also to reduce their expenditure. When retrenchment is thought to be necessary, the Army suffers first, the Civil Service last. The men of the Sappers had the offer of a pension if entitled to it, or the alternative of a gratuity or present, according to length of service. Those fit for further duty, had the choice of transfer to the other Line Regiments, and so the poor fellows were all disposed of in a few weeks: the greater number we had to bring over to Pallavaram near Madras again, in a steamer and sailing vessel, before they were paid off and settled with. The steamer towed the sailing vessel over the Bay of Bengal in 8 days, leaving Moulmein on the 19th March 1868, and arriving at Madras on the 27th.

The whole of the hard work and responsibility in connection with disbanding the 1,200 men devolved upon me as Adjutant, and it was not till 1866 that I could say I was clear of all demands my official position entailed on me, between the Pay Department and the relatives of dead men claiming something or other; for instance the Pay Examiner, Fort Saint George, Madras, repeatedly called upon me to refund money that had been properly paid to the men. In one instance I had to make a lengthy explanation on paper as to how I had disposed of Rs. 80,000, and if I had not been able to prove from my books how the money had been disbursed, I would have found myself in jail. At last, I satisfied the Madras Government that the Pay Department had no further claims on the officers of the late Pegu Sapper Battalion, so I returned all the books and records, (a couple of cart loads) into the underground stores of Fort Saint George to wait there the doom of all waste paper.

Before I bid farewell to Burmah and the Pegu Sapper Battalion, I wish to say that after my wife gave birth to her seventh child Alexander, on the 28th November 1859, she gradually sank. This melancholy event occurred when away from me at the town of Sittang on the left bank of the river of the same name, 30 miles below Shoaygheen. She was under the kind care of Dr. John Alcock and his wife, and departed in peace in the presence of her children on the 13th March 1860.

It was impossible for me to be present when my wife died, as I could not leave Shoaygheen, being the only officer present with the Regiment. In a few days after her burial, my 5 children

were brought home by a European nurse, Mrs Jordan, whose husband was then doing duty with the detachment of artillery in the Shoaygheen Fort.

A tomb was built over the grave to mark the spot, and on my way to Moulmein the following year, I paid a visit to the last resting place accompanied by my eldest child, now (1878), Mrs Duncan, leaving the little children in the boat till our return, when we set sail and hurried away to our new home, resigning myself to the text 'Thy will O Lord be done.'

In Moulmein Church of England burial-ground I also buried my dear little Janet, aged 5 years; she died of measles on the 2nd June 1862, and over her grave I erected a respectable tomb with two marble slabs, one white and the other black, with gold letters guarded with plate glass. Those two slabs of marble shew my late wife's name and three of her children, - Robert died in Jaulnah, 28th August 1851, James died in St. Thomas' Mount, 2nd June 1862.

The last I heard of that tomb was from General Blake in 1872, who informed me that he had been to Moulmein and had the tomb over his wife in the same graveyard, repaired; and also had the same done to the one that I had erected to the memory of my late wife and children. This was very kind of General Blake, but he is always doing a good turn to somebody.

Having got relieved of the Pegu Sapper Battalion, I was given command of the European Artillery Veteran Company at Pallavaram. This, with my pay as Lieutenant, made me quite easy as regards subsistence, although it was not such high pay as when doing the duties as Adjutant in my late corps.

From 1863 till 1867 I continued to reside in Pallavaram, and during that time I had managed to send my daughter to a Ladies' Seminary on the blue Mountains, or as they are commonly called Neilgherry [Nilgiri] Hills, 8,000 feet high and about 300 miles from Madras, towards the Western Coast. The 3 boys had to be schooled at Doveton College, Madras, and during the time my children were away from me as above, I laid out my future plans and prepared for house keeping again with a second wife, and just doubled the number of children, viz., from 4 to 8. This was a bold undertaking, but it was the best thing I could do under present circumstances, and so it has turned out so far a good speculation with the blessing of God. At the time I write, March 1878, these 8 children are all alive and doing well; my second wife has had six children by me, her second husband, but they all died in infancy, so we are since September 1877 left childless. All are gone, some out into the world to seek a livelihood, or down in the cold grave to which we who are alive now, are fast hastening.

Passing our time quietly and I hope profitably at Pallavaram till 1866, a chance for a change of life for me sprang up in the shape of four Barrack-Masterships, vacant, viz., at Bangalore, Secunderabad, Kamptee, and Bellary. My past services in China, Burmah and the mutiny stood me in good stead, so after a little consideration, I was offered Kamptee, provided I could pass an examination in Hindustani. This being only a colloquial examination it was merely a matter of form to me. On the 10th of April 1867, I was in orders as 1st class Barrack-Master, Kamptee.

I had again to break up house for a short time and suffer all its miseries and loss. For instance, I had to send all my furniture 12 miles to Madras on carts, to be sold by a Furniture Agent there, which after paying 5 per cent commission, realized Rs. 800, not one-fourth the value.

To Kamptee I must go by rail, by road, and by water; the travelling expenses must be paid by myself, as the Government would not, or could not assist me according to regulations – my appointment being a promotion with an increase of pay. On the 26th April 1867 with my

'pockets well lined,' like Will Watch the bold smuggler,[1] I bid farewell to my Madras friends again, and was soon out of sight on my way to Beypore on the Malabar Coast, 40 miles by the 'iron horse.' This required one night and the greater part of two days to accomplish. On the 28th, we had to prepare for a sea voyage from Beypore to Bombay, and from early morn we were on the watch for the smoke of the steamer Sir John Lawrence, expected to call at the port or open roadstead of Beypore for any passengers or merchandise she could pick up on her way up the coast from Cochin to Bombay. After six days and six nights of misery on the deck of this steamer, we landed safe in Bombay on the 4th May 1867. A cabin passage was out of the question, as I would have had to pay for 10 cabins at Rs. 100 each, to accommodate my large, partially grown up family. Only one bed in each little crib of a hot cabin – for all that Rs. 100 was the established charge. It so happened we had good health, although exposed to the weather night and day all the way.

Once more on shore I hoped never to set my foot on board a ship again. I have always been a good soldier, but very bad sailor. Gathering our baggage together, we soon had it packed on carts, and hiring 5 buggies or gigs with single horse and driver, we jumped into them two and two, the little baby making three in the 5th buggy.

Formed in procession in single file with the baggage carts in the rear, we made a very imposing appearance, going through the streets of the city for fully two miles to the railway station at the Boree Bunder. Booking the heavy baggage for Nagpore, 500 miles further on, we counter-marched the procession, minus the carts, and made our way at a rapid pace to the English hotel, where we had a good bath, drank, ate, and rested, till we felt fit for the next part of the journey.

Bombay is a very expensive place to live in, especially for travellers, and as one meal (dinner) and the use of a couple of rooms for a few hours cost me about Rs. 50 or £5, I thought the best thing we could do, would be to be off by the first Bombay train, and leave sight-seeing for some future year. By 8 o'clock the same night, (viz., 4th May,) we were seated in a railway carriage with one large compartment all to ourselves and off we went right merrily in the dark night, glad to get clear of the noisy, busy city, and the heavy charges made for every little trifle we wanted.

A safe journey of two nights and one day by rail brought us to the city of Nagpore in the Central Provinces of India, and a further drive in bullock carts brought us to Kamptee on the afternoon of the 6th May 1867, where I am now writing on the 4th March 1878. The total cost of our journey from Pallavaram to Kamptee amounted to about Rs. 800 or £80, and the distance travelled over by land and water was fully 1,500 miles.

On the 7th May 1867, I reported my arrival to the Assistant Quarter-Master General, Nagpore Force, and on the 8th took charge of my duties, with three European Barrack Sergeants to assist me in looking after the Barracks and other Public buildings; they also do nearly all the office work, so I have little more to do than sign my name and give rough drafts of letters. The Government also allows me two natives, (orderlies, or peons) to carry the letters to the Post Office, and officers commanding regiments, and heads of departments, with all of whom I have dealings or correspondence from time to time. This is a daily duty, and between looking after the buildings and furniture for the soldiers and office work, my time is fairly occupied.

In a few days after our arrival, we settled down in a good sized bungalow, at a rent of Rs. 35, and in this house we remained till 1870, when we had the chance of a better dwelling for Rs. 30, and in this we still live, that is, my wife and I only, for the eight children are all gone out into the 'wide, wide world' to fight their own battle of life.

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[1] *Will Watch the Bold Smuggler*, a popular ballad first published *c*1802, and reprinted several times during the first half of 19th century. A play with a similar title appeared later in the century.

On the 28th June 1873 I was promoted to the rank of Captain, so all we have to do now is to watch over our children and continue to pray for their welfare here and hereafter. They are all very good, sober, quiet children and likely to do well.

For ten years I acted as secretary to the Kamptee Friend-in-Need Society, and since 1875 I have been in charge of the European and Native Pensioners, between five and six hundred of them. This keeps me well employed, and that is a blessing. I shall leave the remainder of my story to be told by one of my children after I am gone the way of all living. I have indeed great reason to be grateful to my Creator for all He has done for me.

My very dear brother Alexander died on the 7th September 1872. The above letter to his address, had not then been closed, the perusal of it may be of interest to his surviving children and my numerous relatives.

KAMPTEE

The 8th March, 1878 D. DINWIDDIE

The British India Steam Navigation Company

By David J Mitchell

Part One, 1856–1914

The Beginning

Quite whether William Mackinnon and Robert Mackenzie had a vision of the commercial empire that was to come from the business they founded in December 1847 in Calcutta, is a thought to mull over. These members of The Free Church of Scotland were to establish a formidable trading concern which within thirty years was well on its way to being an unquestioned success. The creation of one of, if not, the greatest shipping company to fly the Red Ensign in the history of British mercantile trading owes its start to their commercial acumen and astute political vision coupled with a fair amount of being in the right place at the right time.

It is fair to say The BI (as it will be referred to from now on) was throughout its history virtually unknown in the UK with Cunard, White Star, Orient, P&O, Union Castle, and Canadian Pacific amongst other shipping companies trading from the UK more likely to fall from the lips of those asked to name a famous line. Undeniable and undisputed is the way in which The BI played strategic and commercial roles in meeting British needs east of Suez from its founding in 1856, to the post 1945 collapse of Empire, and the years that remained until its demise in 1971. There are no points to score in this brief history. There are those who would wish to rewrite history to fit their concept of political correctness. Unfortunately I have no truck with this. Here is The BI as it was.

The early history of Mackinnon, Mackenzie & Co. was clouded by the loss of Robert Mackenzie with the vessel *Aurora* shipwrecked off the Queensland coast on the 15 May 1853. He had been to Australia to seek out trading opportunities for the business of MM&Co (as the founding company will now be referred to) that had been trading from Calcutta to the UK, Australia and China from about 1849 using owned and chartered vessels. Both he and partner William MacKinnon were born in Campbeltown on the Kintyre peninsula in Argyll, and in 1847 they set up MM&Co in India as general merchants, with Mackinnon trading from his base at Cossipore and Mackenzie from Ghazipur.

The potential commercial opportunities in the sub-continent were not going to be taken advantage of by the expansion of the railway network alone so seaborne trade around the Indian coast appealed greatly to MM&Co. Using the newfangled ‘screw steamers’ would allow ships to be in and out of port as trade demanded without having to be dependent upon the wind blowing to fill sails. This would ensure a predictable time tabled service with all the benefits of reliability to be made available to merchants and traders, taking in the small ports from Calcutta, down the Coromandel Coast, round Cape Comorin and northward up the Malabar Coast to Bombay. Indeed the decision to use the propeller as the means of propulsion was well in advance of conventional thinking. To assist in running the business Mackinnon brought relatives and friends from Scotland out to India and in 1856 came the opportunity that was to lead directly to The British India Steam Navigation Company.

At this time, The Honourable East India Company was still the effective government of Burma and it put out a tender for a contract to carry the mail between Rangoon and Calcutta. In anticipation of this expected development, The Calcutta and Burma Steam Navigation Company with a capital of £20,000 had been registered on 24 September 1856 in Glasgow and took as its emblem the Peacock of Burma. Two second hand ships were quickly acquired, *Cape of Good Hope* a 500 ton steamer rigged as a brig and the *Baltic*, a similar vessel of 536 tons and some 180 feet in length. For a colour scheme black was chosen for the hull with a

white band. The funnel also was black with two narrow bands separated by a thin black band. With the mail contract duly acquired, *Cape of Good Hope* commenced revenue earning service by sailing from Calcutta on 23 March 1857.

The regular routine of trips up and down the Bay of Bengal had barely begun when *Cape of Good Hope* was caught up in the Indian Mutiny and requisitioned by the Bengal Government to undertake trooping duties. Despatched to Colombo on 4 June 1857 she returned to reinforce Calcutta with six companies of the 37th Regiment of Foot (to become the 1st Battalion The Royal Hampshire Regiment). Thus started BI's connection with trooping that was to continue until the cessation of sea transport in 1962. The utilisation of ships to carry troops was to play a significant part in future BI ship designs with holds designed to take troops, equipment and four-legged transport.

It took seven months for the *Baltic* to reach Calcutta in July 1857, and after being joined by *Cape of Good Hope* at the conclusion of her government service, they dropped into the fortnightly mail routine. Passenger and cargo carrying trade soon developed and Rangoon was in time to become second only to Calcutta in importance with eight different mail and passenger services using the port and at least one ship going in or out every day but Sunday. The church upbringing of the founders dictated Sundays were rest days. At sea, Company service regulations required 'Divine service to be held in the saloon or on the quarter deck every Sunday forenoon at five bells, circumstances permitting.' For the non-nautical types, five bells is ten thirty. Commanders were also 'requested to say grace before meals.'

Logistics and Expansion

The bold decision to use screw propelled vessels from the start was taken with the knowledge that steam engines at that time were inefficient, consumed large quantities of coal, and stocks would have to be established at suitable locations. The Bengal coalfield provided the raw material and to meet requirements at the Burma end of the run, coal hulks were put in place at Rangoon with colliers chartered to bring in supplies. The original thinking to trade round the Indian Coast was gradually being implemented with ships venturing south of Rangoon towards Penang and Singapore, and round Cape Comorin to Bombay and Karachi. The appearance of ships at the small coastal ports brought about a commercial revolution. Commanders of BI ships were made aware they were needed by the putting up of coloured umbrellas at a vantage point on the beach. Hence the BI ships became known as 'Chatri Ki Jahaz' – the umbrella ships.

The first attempt to introduce a new regular service, Calcutta–Madras, as opposed to casual trade, in 1860, unfortunately failed, but Mackinnon's political connections led directly to a Government of Bombay subsidy to run a Bombay–Karachi mail service fortnightly, and a Bombay–Basra mail service, initially on a six weekly timetable, being awarded in 1862. To meet this need, Mackinnon returned to the United Kingdom to raise more capital and quickly succeeded. On 28 October 1862 the British India Steam Navigation Company Limited was registered in Glasgow with a capital of £400,000; the assets of the Calcutta & Burma Steam Navigation Company were absorbed into it. This entailed a change in company markings. Whilst retaining the same hull and funnel colours, the emblem became Britannia backed by the Lion, its paw on the globe, and the house flag a St. Patrick's Cross on a white ground, swallow tailed. Or in the language of heraldry, 'On a burgee argent a saltire gules.'

Further mail contracts followed, Bombay-Calcutta and Madras-Rangoon. The liner mail service from Bombay up the Persian Gulf begun in 1862, was to be one hundred and twenty years later the finale of the BI when *Dwarka* performed the last rites and brought down the curtain on this astonishing shipping company. To attend company affairs, agents were established and

appointed in major ports. Uniforms became compulsory for seagoing officers in 1863, and eventually crew alike. This visual enforcement of an organisation which knew what it was about had a profound effect upon shore side observers. As the company stature grew, the *Serang* or Boatswain would bring relatives and fellow villagers with him to make up his own crew. This arrangement fostered continuity and was maintained well after Indian Independence. It also generated an unsurpassed company 'esprit de corps' which lasted to the end of the BI. From two ships in 1856, such had been the expansion of the company into the open arms of a receptive market, that the fleet numbered twenty-one vessels at the end of 1864. This strength enabled nine ships, some with a sailing ship in tow, to transport the Indian Army contingent to the Abyssinian campaign in 1867.

A not insignificant problem in the early days was a complete lack of adequate charts, navigational aides, marked passages and unlit coasts. Therefore to eliminate future problems, the BI itself put in buoys, markers, and lights. Not until 1911 for instance, did the Government of India take over from the BI the responsibility for upkeep and maintenance of lights and buoys in the Persian Gulf. On top of this the weather had to be coped with, particularly the extreme cyclonic storms in the Bay of Bengal in the days when forecasts did not exist. Persian Gulf pirates presented another hazard. After one looting in the 1860's the Sheikh of Muhommerah who was a friend of the BI hunted the miscreants down and recovered much of the gold taken from the ship. In recognition for many years after, every BI ship fired a salute as it passed his palace near Abadan.

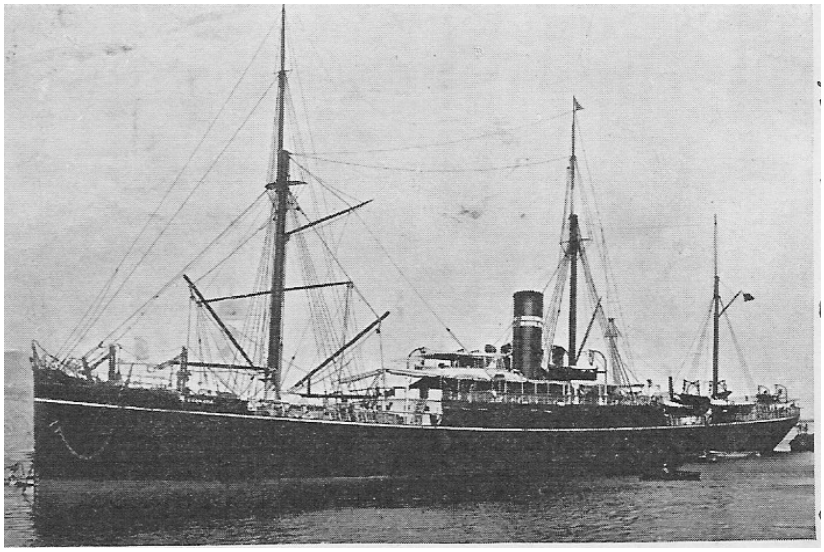
The Suez Canal-Gateway to the East

No single event in the 19th Century was to have the economic effect the opening of the Suez Canal had. With the major part of the Empire east of Suez the advantages in communication and transportation of goods were enormous. The BI soon took advantage and within three months of the opening on 17 November 1869 a fully laden *India*, built as recently as 1862, was on her way back to the UK to be re-boilered and have the engine compounded by her builders, Denny & Co. of Dumbarton. Such were the technical advances that her coal consumption would be halved making routes viable which hitherto were uneconomic. These factors of geography and economy would see the BI expand at a phenomenal rate in the next decade and a half. In the same year as Suez opened, the BI secured a major coup by taking the UK-India trooping contract from the P&O using the 1867 built *Dacca.* The mutual intertwining of government mail and trooping contracts with BI commercial interests went from strength to strength. This was more of a partnership with the BI ready at the drop of a hat to provide ships to meet the needs of Empire. By 1873 the company boasted thirtyone vessels in service. In size they ranged from the 323 ton *Moulmein* dating from 1861 to the 1764 ton *Patna* built in 1871. To be delivered in 1874 were eight new vessels, four of them giants at just over 2000 tons each.

Services between London-Aden-Karachi and the Gulf (Basra), Aden and Zanzibar connecting with London steamers, London and Zanzibar (irregular), Europe jointly with the P&O, and eastward to Singapore, all operated by 1875. The 1880 handbook listed the following 'Lines In Operation' around the coast:

1.	Calcutta, Chittagong, Akyab and Kyouk Phyoo	Fortnightly
2.	Calcutta, Akyab and Rangoon	Fortnightly
3.	Calcutta, Rangoon, Moulmein	Weekly
4.	Calcutta and Straits via Rangoon and Moulmein	Fortnightly
5.	Calcutta and Straits, coasting	Four weekly
6.	Rangoon and Moulmein	Weekly
7.	Calcutta, Port Blair, Camorta and Rangoon	Four weekly
8.	Madras and Rangoon	Fortnightly
9.	Calcutta and Bombay, coasting	Weekly
10.	Bombay and Kurrachee	Bi-weekly
11.	Bombay and Persian Gulf (also calling at Kurrachee)	Weekly

1881 saw a Bombay-Delagoa Bay (Lourenco Marques) service started and in the same year access to the Queensland coast to Brisbane was acquired. As a deliberate policy, ship construction allowed them to be suitable for all routes operated, so in the event of a trooping charter arising, continuity of services could be maintained by moving vessels around. In the years after the Abyssinian campaign and prior to 1885, a total of twentynine ships served the military in the Perak Campaign, the Russo-Turkish War, the Zulu War, the Transvaal War, Egypt, and the Gordon Relief Expedition.



B.I.S.S. Goorkha. *Built in 1882 for the London-Suez-Colombo-Madras-Calcutta Service, she lasted until 1906 and was broken up in Genoa*

In the later part of the 19th century Indian labour was extensively employed in Burma, Malaya, in the Gulf and later in East and South Africa. To cater for the movement of humanity and its possessions, the BI developed ships capable of accommodating large numbers of deck or unberthed passengers. This capacity was put to good use to meet the military needs of Empire as we have seen. Substantial commitments to irregular trooping charters did not interrupt BI's normal services, but not without signifi-cant rearrangements and improvisations to cover passenger ships taken off their regular run at very short notice. It is true to say no other shipping company on the oceans could have done the job the BI did.

Despite the founding of the BI in Glasgow, the head office moved to London in 1882, but Glasgow retained an engineering drawing office and was responsible for staff agreements until complete closure came in 1933. Further expansion into previously unknown waters came in 1884 with a Calcutta-Australia service. In parallel with new trading opportunities, on the technical side, the BI kept pace with developments. The second *India* was the first in the BI fleet to have electric light in 1881. *Loodiana*, later to be lost with all aboard in a cyclone en route from Mauritius to Colombo in January 1910, was the first ship to be engined with triple expansion machinery when delivered from Wm Denny & Bros in 1885.

The East Africa Connection

Although links with East Africa had been made as early as 1864, not until the mail contract between Aden and Zanzibar was agreed in 1872 did the BI have the incentive to look seriously at trading down this coast. Substantial traffic was slow to develop though. Despite poor support from the Foreign Office to counter German imperialism, British colonial interests in establishing a presence in East Africa led to the incorporation under Royal Charter of the Imperial British East Africa Company in May 1887. Senior BI management took up one quarter of the £240,000 share offer, and the founder William Mackinnon, was installed as President with headquarters in Mombasa. A major task was to survey the Uganda Railway from Mombasa into the interior. The I.B.E.A.C. collapsed after the UK government declined to support the company financially. This failure of an organisation, led by one of the most astute business brains of the time through lack of Government support was unfortunate. However, the error of their ways was recognised, and the railway eventually reached Nairobi and beyond with Government backing. Kenya, Uganda and post WWI, Tanganyika became British Territories.

The BI was to do very well out of East Africa over the ensuing years, trading from Bombay as a liner service, and ultimately extending to Durban as a coastal service. Later the UK-East Africa direct service became a prestige liner service. Manufactured goods from Europe went out with coconuts, cloves, rare timbers, fruit, coffee, cotton and refrigerated produce returning. The Uganda Railway was eventually built with the BI carrying most of the materials and components. From Zanzibar the BI struck out to Seychelles, Mauritius, Reunion and Madagascar putting more interconnecting red lines across the Indian Ocean, making the map appear as if covered by a spider's web.

The interest of William Mackinnon in the work of Dr. David Livingstone in Africa was such that when Livingstone's body, carried by his followers emerged from the depths of darkest Africa and arrived at Zanzibar in 1873, it was laid out in the flat above the BI agent's office. Passage to London for burial in Westminster Abbey was provided free of charge aboard *Calcutta* to Aden, from which port the P&O took over. Later in March 1887, the expedition to relieve Emin Pasha was organised by the BI agent, Smith, Mackenzie. 600 native porters and stores sailed from Zanzibar round the Cape to the Congo aboard *Madura* at no cost.

Sir William Mackinnon, Bart, died on 22 June 1893 aged 70 in London. He is buried in the village of Clackan, in Kintyre, Argyleshire; his coffin carried on the shoulders of relays of Clackan villagers. One of the mourners was Henry Morton Stanley. It is said he died a disappointed man after the failure of the I.B.E.A.C.. Perhaps his spirits would have been raised had he seen every berth in Mombasa taken by a BI ship on 16 September 1951, seven in all. A small vessel to work on Lake Victoria was ordered by the Ugandan Government, and after being hauled in pieces the 600 miles from Mombasa to Kisumu by native porters, was reassembled and launched on 4 June 1900 and named *William Mackinnon*. She lasted until July 1929. Spared the breakers torch, she was ceremonially sunk in the lake.

The Post Mackinnon Era

Some organisations would have floundered after the death of the founder, but not the BI. By 1894 the BI fleet had grown to 88 vessels of which six exceeded 5000 tons. It had surpassed the 100 mark of ships owned in the previous decade and a further nineteen would be delivered prior to the end of the 19th century. James Macalister Hall succeeded Mackinnon as Chairman for a short time, to be himself succeeded by Duncan Mackinnon, a nephew of William in 1894. By this date the East Africa operation was based on Mombasa and service agreements with P&O to the north, and Union Castle to the south, brought mutual benefits to all three companies. With the century heading towards its close, the through London - Torres Strait - Brisbane service was withdrawn after the railway up the east coast of Australia was completed. Connecting London-Calcutta and Calcutta-Brisbane services still maintained the route with sailings fortnightly from India. An irregular Calcutta-New Zealand service started in 1896, despite a government call for transports to carry troops from India to the Sudan in support of Kitchener's retaking of Khartoum. Regular services to Japan carrying Burmese rice commenced in 1898.

For the next six years the BI found itself involved in providing troop transports (39 in all) to the Transvaal, to China to counter the Boxer Rebellion (39 ships) and to Somaliland (7 ships) plus 4 others contracted. In amongst all this, commercial activities further expanded with a Nagapatam-Penang fortnightly mail service in 1900 and in 1904 a Bombay-Karachi weekly express.

The British India Steam Navigation Company Headquarters in Bombay

The BI policy of growing its own staff and management brought the advantage of continuity. In 1874 James Lyle Mackay, born in Arbroath in 1852, came out to India as an assistant with MM&Co in Calcutta. If Mackinnon's contribution to trade is viewed as profound, the effect the future Lord Inchcape had was nothing less than seismic. His business acumen soon propelled him up the managerial ladder and by the late 1880's he was effectively the Managing Director of the managing agents. When in Bombay it was not unknown for him to ride his pony upstairs and amongst the desks, much to the astonishment of the office staff. Precedent having been set, the same trick was perpetuated in the BI club in Calcutta years later, but the startled four legged beast was left in an unsuspecting individual's bedroom !

To keep things in order, Mackay set about organising MM&Co interests in goods and services as distinct from shipping whilst taking advantage of opportunities to expand as they presented themselves. Coal lands were bought in 1900, and by 1903 the number of ships owned since 1856 passed the 200 mark. Tonnages continued to rise and the largest ships were now of 6000 tons plus. An irregular Calcutta-Japan service commenced in 1907 whilst rivals on the same

route, A P. Carr, along with their coal interests were bought out in 1912. The following year, Archibald Curry & Co. Pty. Ltd. came into the BI fold. By now James Lyle Mackay had been elevated to Lord Inchcape, and in 1913 he succeeded Duncan Mackinnon as Chairman and Managing Director of the BI. In December the Indian mail contracts were renewed for another ten years from 1 January 1914. Round the corner though were two events that individually would have world wide consequences, but for different reasons.

1914: Amalgamation and War

For a long time the BI and P&O had cooperated to their mutual advantage with the BI taking mail from the P&O steamer at Aden for East Africa, Bombay for the Persian Gulf, Calcutta-Rangoon, Madras-Straits Settlements, Ceylon and all the minor Indian and Burmese ports. Each made a contribution to the other in tangible ways. Mazagon Dock in Bombay was a shared docking and repair facility, and the BI shipped coal not only for its own use, but also to keep the coal dumps topped up for the P&O mail steamers which had to have security of supply. The BI provided feeder services to the P&O throughout the east.

On 27 May 1914, the day after the BI annual general meeting, right out of the blue, the BI and P&O announced a proposed merger. Nothing of this was known in the financial corridors of London as no new capital needed to be raised. Clearly, the Chairman of the BI, and his opposite number at the P&O, Sir Thomas Sutherland, had arrived at the conclusion that a merger would benefit both companies significantly. By October the deed was done, with the combined value of shares exchanged valued at £15,000,000 and a shipping empire in place which had a near monopoly of the main passenger and cargo lines from the UK via the Mediterranean to the east and Australia. The BI was to trade as before with its own identity, and a joint board comprising twelve P&O and eight BI directors, under the Chairmanship of Lord Inchcape, came into play. As was said at the time: ‘The P&O had acquired the BI, but Inchcape had acquired the P&O.’ As all this came to fruition a cloud settled across Europe. Of 126 ships in the BI fleet at the outbreak of World War I in August 1914, twenty-five would be lost.

Part Two appears in the next Journal