



**A Rohilla Horseman**

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### **Presentation:**

Manuscripts should be typed in Times New Roman 12pt, double spaced.

Quotations should be typed in 11pt, single spaced and separated from the text by a one-line space. References should be given as endnotes, using the 'insert endnote' function, and used sparingly. Illustrations should be supplied as JPEGs and full details of provenance given.

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Watercolour of a Rohilla horseman from 'Views by Seeta Ram from Cawnpore to Mohumdy Vol. IV' produced for Lord Moira © The British Library Board

### **Back cover:**

A view one of the entrances to the cave temple on Elephanta island, a short distance from Bombay (Mumbai), Maharashtra, taken by an unknown photographer in the 1870s. © The British Library Board

See inside back cover for membership, subscription and general enquiry details.

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# EDITORIAL

Moving On! I would like to begin by thanking our outgoing Editor for her contribution and for continuing the evolution of the Journal for the last three editions. Sadly however, her resignation set us the challenge of finding a replacement for the Spring edition of the Journal but unfortunately, we have been unsuccessful in our quest so far, however in true FIBIS fashion we have pooled our skills and produced this edition for your entertainment and enjoyment. We all know how key the Journal is to you, our 1,600+ members, and I would like to thank the Trustees and our Contributors for their work, at very short notice, in ensuring this edition maintains and builds on the the quality of the publication and articles which we are committed to continue in the coming editions. They all have our sincere thanks.

We are continuing our search for an Editor to take our Journal's content and presentation to the next level and invite anyone who has any experience and /or enthusiasm to match our ambitions to contact us and accept the challenge by joining our team and help the only genealogy society that is still growing to continue to do so.

Our award-winning Website together with our vibrant Facebook and Twitter accounts not to mention our award-winning Blog are all continuing to grow while fast becoming a 'must visit' for genealogists and family historians interested in British India. We continue to look for ways in which we might move the Journal into a digital edition for those members, particularly our many overseas members, who want such a service. In addition, we are looking at ways in which we might add to our Guides and our Fact Files while we are increasing our presence at many more Family History Shows following the demise of WDYTIA Live.

We hope you find the content of the Journal interesting and if the Family History stories inspire you please feel free to submit an article or two based on your experience and research for consideration to be included in future Journals.

Additionally, if you would like to be a part of our friendly, exciting and growing society then consider joining our fantastic volunteers' (research, transcriptions, etc) or the editorial team that we are currently putting together in order to help guide the Journal into the future generation of communications. If you are interested, then please contact the Chairman or talk to any of the current Trustees listed inside the front cover for a friendly and confidential discussion.

Happy reading.

PATRICK A SCULLY



## Richard Seyer 1786 – 1833:

### AURANGABAD 200 YEARS ON.

John K Palmer

As the taxi sped back to Aurangabad after a long hot day visiting the caves at Ellora, my wife and I panned to the left simultaneously and said, “There it is!”. Unknowingly, we had just passed the Cantonment cemetery and were taken by a tall needle like column pointing skywards. I recognised the monument from photographs on the FIBIS websites but had little idea of the scale. The 12-metre pillar forms the centrepiece of the cemetery. We returned the next day and stopped just before the entrance arch to take in the imposing structure that dominates the surrounding cemetery. I knew then that we had found the grave of my great-great-grandfather Richard Twine Seyer.



*Seyer Monument image location.*

© British Library Board

*“Sacred to the memory of Richard Twine Seyer, Lieutenant Colonel of the Bengal Army, Commander of the Aurungabad Division of Regular Troops. During life his strict Integrity, Benevolent high Talents, and Urbanity won him Universal respect and esteem. His death was recorded by Government as a public loss. This monumental tribute to his sterling worth is erected by his Brother Officers who, as a further testimony of their affection dedicate a mural tablet to his memory within the Church of his Native Parish in England Obiit 20<sup>th</sup> April A.D. 1833”.*

Nearby we found the caretaker of the cemetery and when I told him who I was - he said “Nobody has been to visit before” - for which I apologised.

I knew little of the detailed history of India and Great Britain covering Richard's service but being there and seeing the monument made me want to understand more. Not only about Richard and what he did to generate such "affection" from his brother officers, but of the times and of Britain and India's story.

We received such a friendly welcome in Aurangabad and were treated so well that I want to give some background to others and to portray what I found in a balanced and fair manner.

This article is the start of the story of Richard Seyer and gives, I hope, some understanding of the world he lived in and how he shaped his behaviour in that environment.

My background I'd first heard of Richard from my father and his sisters who would very occasionally mention "the Colonel" and talk about the military spears and pennants they had seen as children. Unfortunately, the only item passed down was a cutting of his obituary from the Delhi Gazette. There was never a suggestion of any Indian ancestry.

It was not until the early 1990s that I found a link when I asked my Auntie, who lived next door to where the Indian Office records were stored, to go and look for Richard's Will. It was a surprise for all of us to discover that my great-great-grandmother had an Indian sounding name that looked like Keiklimach. Confirmation that she was Indian only came recently when finding the baptismal records from Aurangabad which also showed that her other name was Rukhmah.

Leaving home Richard Seyer sailed from Portsmouth at 4 am in the morning of the 31<sup>st</sup> March 1801 on board the 608 tonnes East Indiaman, the Sir Stephen Lushington. The ship had a crew of eighty sailors. With Richard were nine other East India Company cadets for Bengal, fifty-one recruits from the British Army and nineteen passengers, of whom three were women.

The ship was a three decker, about 130ft in length and 33ft wide and armed with 28 six and nine pounder guns as detailed in her letter of marque issued in 1796.

We can track this voyage from the meticulous ship's log held with the East India Office records at the British Library. I was drawn to these documents from reading Richard Morgan's excellent research guide on "British ships in Indian Waters".

After stopping at Madras, they landed at Diamond Harbour on the Hooghly river near Calcutta on 23<sup>rd</sup> August. It seems that Richard's four and a half months voyage would have been one of the faster ones.

When Captain Gooch safely delivered his returning passengers to England on 12<sup>th</sup> July 1802, he was rewarded with a pay of £168-13s-6d for his 16 months service.

## How did Richard come to be on that ship?

Richard Twine Seyer was born in Bristol on Monday 2<sup>nd</sup> January 1786 and baptised on 12<sup>th</sup> May in St Michael on the Mount Without Church, the church where many of the family were baptised or married. Inside there is a memorial plaque to Richard paid for by the men of his regiment in India. Sadly, the church was badly damaged by fire in October 2016, but the plaque is still there.

His father William was a merchant and the son of a cleric and former headmaster of the Bristol Grammar School – the Reverend Samuel Seyer. His uncle was another Samuel Seyer, a schoolmaster, cleric and well-known historian who wrote *Memoirs, Historical and Topographical, of Bristol and its Neighbourhood* in 1821.

When Richard's father died on 10<sup>th</sup> July 1793, his mother Sarah was left with the seven-year-old Richard (the eldest) and his four younger sisters. What were his prospects?

The East India Company provided opportunity for a career, but you had to be recommended by one of the directors. Richard's family obviously had some connections as he was put forward by Sir Stephen Lushington (a director and politician) on the advice of a Mr Waring.

There were strong links between Bristol merchants and the East India Company. Although much of the slave trade came under the auspices of the Royal African Company and then the African Company of Merchants, the HEIC traded some of the goods that they imported from India and subsequently sold them in Africa and the Americas. Richard's father is referenced as being a commission agent for loading a ship and it is probably through these links that he received his nomination.

John Bourne in his Ph.D. thesis "The Civil and Military Patronage of the East India Company" quotes an example of the types of interview that applicants had to go through.

*"How old are you?"*

*'Fifteen on 30 November last', he replied*

*"Are you ready to die for your king and country?" his interrogator demanded*

*'I am'*

*"That will do"*

Starting out in the East India company was not cheap and topical accounts reveal that his family would have purchased his uniform and supplies and paid the fare to India. The fare alone would have been in the region of £100, so we could understand that Richard could be regarded as an investment. Some cadets also had letters of recommendation to take with them for contacts already in India.

Richard first joined the 16<sup>th</sup> Bengal Native Infantry regiment at an entry level for an Officer-Cadet. The East India Company Register for 1801 shows that he had been promoted to an Ensign on 31<sup>st</sup> October 1800 before he sailed.

## What did the future hold for Richard?

Richard had an eventful life in India. He was promoted to Lieutenant after two years' service when he transferred to the 6<sup>th</sup> Bengal Native Infantry regiment (BNI) with whom he would stay for more than ten years. Several of his fellow officers from those days reappear throughout his life, including John Ludlow and Richard Pitman.

His service record indicates that he was involved in operations in Bundelkhand which is a region about three hundred and fifty miles north east of Aurangabad.

In 1811 he was assigned to the escort to the Resident (the HEIC chief political agent) in Scindia.

Subsequently Richard, with the 6<sup>th</sup> BNI and John Ludlow, was part of the British forces involved in the Anglo-Nepal War of 1814-1816. This was the first encounter between the British and the Gurkha state and the British suffered several embarrassing defeats and setbacks during the two years of war. Richard was slightly wounded at Kalunga where Major-General Gillespie was killed. He was one of Ludlow's officers in the attack on Jaitak and Jampta but was cut off and very seriously wounded on 29 December 1814 and only rescued when Ludlow returned for him.



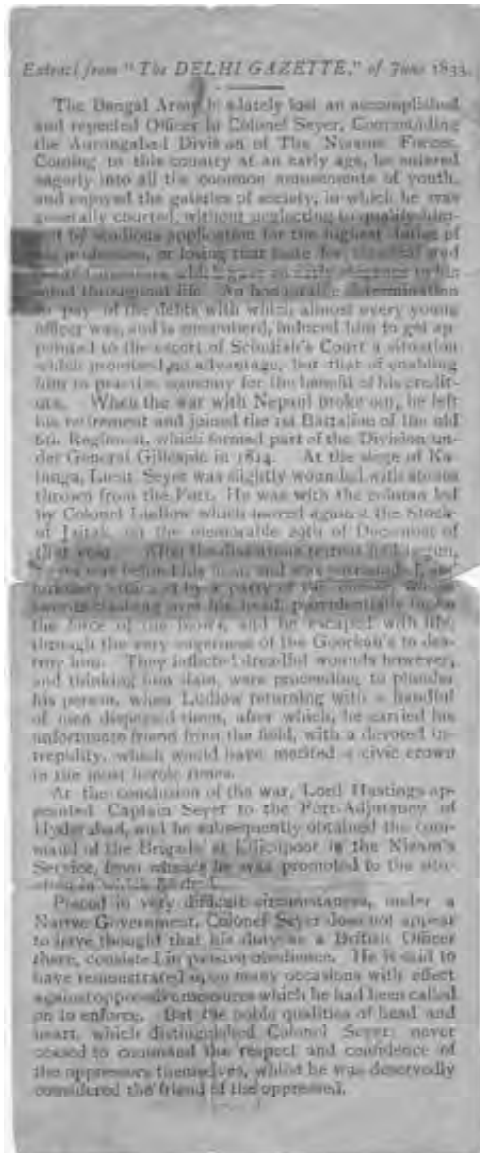
© British Library Board  
*The Ridge and Fort of Jytock*

After a period of recuperation, he re-appeared in February 1816 as aide-de-camp to Sir Jasper Nicholls. He met Nicholls near Sitapur on 18<sup>th</sup> February 1816 and was made Commander of the Guide and Intelligence Department (Nicholls' journal still exists and mentions the meeting).

His obituary in the Delhi Gazette in June 1833 states that he was appointed by Lord Hastings to the Fort Adjutancy at Hyderabad. I can find no references for this, but it would make sense because he was seconded to the Nizam's service in June 1817 while still attached to the 28<sup>th</sup> BNI.

## What do we know of Richard as a person?

Starting with his obituary that appeared in the Delhi Gazette in June 1833, we can deduce that he certainly stood up for his principles.



"Placed in very Difficult circumstances, under a Native Government, Colonel Seyer does not appear to have thought it his duty as a British Officer there, consisted of passive obedience. He is said to have remonstrated on many occasions with effect against the oppressive measures which he had been called upon to enforce. But the noble qualities of head and heart, which distinguished Colonel Seyer, never ceased to command the respect and confidence of the oppressors themselves, whilst he was deservedly considered the friend of the oppressed."

He was well-educated, judging by his success with learning languages and the fact that he was put in charge of the Intelligence Services towards the end of the Anglo-Nepal War. He was well-read as his own library attests (the auction of his private effects in Aurangabad in 1833 included over 700 books). Vincent Jacquemont, a French botanist, met him in 1832 and commented:

*"My host, Colonel Seyer, is a man of great merit, in his private, as his professional character. He literally crammed me with information; and when I left him, he filled my bags with books of the most valuable description."*

Original cutting from the Delhi Gazette in June 1833

His military administration was very efficient as he took charge in the reforming of the Ellichpoor Brigade and was commended for it. He went on to command a large force at Aurangabad. Richard put forward ideas to his superiors for reforming the Native Invalids division at Allahabad and championed the fairness in pay and conditions for the Nizam's European troops.

His military knowledge and skill were certainly commented upon after his death as shown by this entry in "A History of the Hyderabad Contingent" with the interesting comment regarding his "acquaintance with the armies of other countries".

"The late Lieutenant-Colonel Seyer was an irreparable loss to the Nizam's army. His acquaintance with the history of the Indian Army and the character of the soldiers of whom it is composed, his extensive military research and acquaintance with the armies of other countries, rendered him a fit person to be consulted in the management of the Nizam's, and an officer to whose sound judgment and discretion its direction might safely be left."

He also supported his own sepoy (Indian infantry soldiers) in their dispute with local money lenders albeit in a manner that might seem radical today and certainly upset the Company! This incident was reported in the Calcutta Journal on the 20<sup>th</sup> May 1820 and was not without controversy.

"Some months ago, in Amarowty, two sepoy of Davis' Reformed Horse paid a Shroff to send 300 Rupees to their families in Hindustan. The Shroff agreed to deliver the money, obtain a signed receipt and provide it to the sepoy within three months. After 42 months the sepoy demanded the receipt or their money back.

The Shroff referred the matter to Dhunraj, the great banker in Amarowty, and he required the sepoy to wait a little longer. They declined, one thing led to another, and Dhunraj eventually had them beaten by his lowliest servant.

The sepoy complained to Capt R. T. Seyer of the 28<sup>th</sup> Regiment of Native Infantry, to which the Reformed Horse is attached. He is part of the garrison we bestowed on the Nizam for his protection.

Seyer ordered Dhunraj tied and beaten through the commercial part of the town by the two sepoy. Dhunraj offered them 10,000 Rupees to forego his punishment but they entered upon their duty enthusiastically.

This caused all the other Shroffs and sowkahs to close shop. Business ceased and the Company's income is threatened. It appears to be an instance of martial law applied to commerce and illustrates a solution adopted by the Company's army officers when far from the Courts." (NB - On 9<sup>th</sup> May Seyer wrote to the newspaper that the law in Aurungabad is maintained by the Nizam, Nawab Sulabut Khan. The Nizam arranges for punishments, not the Indian army. That is Seyer's complete public explanation of the news article.



The Nizam is at this time already in arrears to the Company and is soon to be replaced.”

There is no doubt that Richard was principled, but this article highlights some of the tensions between the company’s business side and its armed forces. It shows the condescending tone of the newspaper to the local rulers.

From Philip Meadows Taylor autobiography, it seems that Richard Seyer was benevolent and helped people.

“Major Sayer [sic] had succeeded to the command of the Aurungabad Division and proved a very valuable friend to me. He assisted me in my Persian and Hindustani studies and told me to bring him my translations occasionally to look over. What could be kinder! I was a stranger to him and had no introduction; but he interested himself about me and encouraged me to work on. With his help I soon made considerable progress”.

and later:

“After dinner Colonel Sayer took me up to Mr. Martin, saying, “Allow me, sir, specially to introduce my young friend here, of whom I have had already occasion to report favourably, officially; I beg you to keep him in mind.”

“Will you take the command of my escort by way of a beginning?” said the Resident. “I shall be happy to have you on my personal staff if you are sufficiently acquainted with the native language.”

This the good colonel answered for, and I was told to prepare without further delay. I don’t know how I got away: I only remember trying to keep down a big lump that rose in my throat, and the Colonel saying to me, “Now you’ve got a start-you will never disappoint me, I know.”

Richard experienced India at a time when the way in which the British and Indians coexisted was changing. He integrated by having a long-term relationship with an Indian partner and together they had three children. In this way perhaps, he was influenced by the likes of Sir David Ochterlony who commanded him for ten years.

At the end of his Service Record it states “Died 20<sup>th</sup> April 1833 at Aurungabad (J.R) The Resident at Hyderabad in communicating this event attests to his distinguished Services in the Nepaul War, during which he was severely wounded, and to his merits whilst discharging the duties of important civil and Military situations in the Nizams’ Services and observes that he considers his death a severe public loss. The Governor General participates in the regret expressed on the occasion “of the death of this meritorious Officer.”

In his Will he makes it clear that his partner should have access to the children and that monies that Richard held for her should be repaid. His two surviving children certainly benefited from a trust fund set up from his Estate. In this way he was part of the declining numbers of British Indian

partnerships as discovered by William Dalrymple from his study of the Wills from this period.

He certainly knew Aurangabad very well having followed his friend Major Pitman there in 1818 and spending much of his remaining time there – fifteen years.

There is more to be found out and I'm still intrigued .... by the sheer size of his monument in Aurangabad and the trouble his colleagues took to arrange for a monument to be set up in his home city of Bristol.

## Reflection

Understandably, the history of Britain and India still evokes strong emotions today. One of the themes that I find myself most comfortable with is learning about all the reasoned individuals who saw their role as bringing improvement to India rather than exploiting it.

These people emerged from my study of Richard's times. Educated people such as Sir William Jones and Mountstuart Elphinstone who Richard was acquainted with, endeavoured to understand, value and care for the vast country that they came across and its culture. I hope and believe I have shown that in some aspects Richard was one of these.

## Where next?

I feel that I have only scratched the surface and realise that to go further will mean a lot of hard work. Can I justify the time? Well there is just one more fascinating journal to find and read in Cambridge.

## Thanks

As with all research there is a huge number of people who have contributed, consciously and unconsciously, to this work that I would like to thank but physically can't do so apologies to all those.

The trigger was the photograph taken by Dr Pulkeshi Kulkarni of Richard's grave in Aurangabad without which I may never have travelled to India. Many thanks to him, Harshawardhan Bosham Nimkhedkar and Valmay Young who established that work and all the wonderful contributors to FIBIS and the website.

I would like to thank Dr Bina Sengar of the University for meeting me and my family soon after arrival in Aurangabad. It was a very memorable few hours, drinking lemon and ginger tea, and laughing a lot with some of her students about the craziness of our histories.



# ARTHUR GEORGE ALLAN'S: POSTCARDS FROM INDIA 1907-1911

Sue Dawson-Smallwood

*"As we draw further away from the past and manners and customs change, until almost an impassable chasm appears to separate us from an age which our great-grandfathers might have seen, as great (if not a greater) interest attaches to the personal incidents and characters of those days as to their more familiar historical landmarks."*<sup>1</sup>

Just before Christmas 1906, my great-grandfather Arthur George Allan left his wife Annie, young children Rose and Harry, and new-born Reginald, for work in India.

Arthur was an electrician; he had installed the first lighting at Market Place at Kingston-upon-Thames, Surrey, and his work in India was to see him introducing the first electricity into much of the subcontinent. Throughout his time there, he sent hundreds of postcards back to his family at their home "Glencoe" (which still stands in Coombe Road, Kingston), many to young Harry, who was three years old when his father left.

The cards depict the diversity of early 20th century life across the Indian subcontinent – from street life and industry to architecture and landscapes – with some tantalising glimpses into the life of westerners. The personal element is especially moving, and one of the final cards to Harry, showing the Great Banyan Tree in Calcutta, is particularly poignant. Its emotional ending reads:

*"How would you like to come out here & sit along with me & have a good long chat under this tree. Wouldn't it be fine. Well au revoir my dear boy. God bless & love you. From your Loving Old Dad".*

Only five months later, on 22<sup>nd</sup> August 1911, Arthur's life was to end, apparently in a work-related incident: he was never to be reunited with his young son, nor to enjoy his chat with him under the Great Banyan Tree.

The postcards sent to Harry's siblings have disappeared. But luckily, Harry's collection (almost 300) was saved, having been kept by my mother (Harry's daughter, Nancy).

In February 2012, I took the collection to the National Maritime Museum where there was a weekend hosted by FIBIS. The interest in the cards really surprised me; as did that of Edinburgh University's Professor Crispin Bates and historian Marina Carter, specialists in Indian social history, to whom I subsequently showed them. Encouraged by this, I decided to catalogue the

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<sup>1</sup> From an introductory letter written in 1908 by **The Lord Curzon of Kedleston**, in response to Henry Elmsley Busted's reminiscences '*Echoes from Old Calcutta*'.

cards so that they - and Arthur's story - could be shared by our family.

I arranged the cards in chronological order and transcribed them. Taking clues from Arthur's messages, and with the help of my mother's still-sharp memory, I gathered as much information as possible about Arthur's journey.

The National Maritime Museum and FIBIS were invaluable, as of course was the British Library, where I found Arthur's burial certificate. found accounts of the everyday life of western 'labourers' in British India hard to come by, since every attempt would have been made to uphold the image of the 'ruling class'. Hence even the tiny peeks into Arthur's life offered up by his postcards became all the more intriguing. And chance conversations at a FIBIS day in 2016 led me to some useful reading material such as **Anne de Courcy's** *Fishing Fleet: Husband-Hunting in the Raj*<sup>2</sup> which gives some wonderful descriptions of the voyage to India itself; and of course, various accounts by **Rudyard Kipling** which brought me a little closer to getting a feel for working class life.

Some accurate narrative could naturally be taken from the postcards. Arthur boarded the S.S. "Golconda"<sup>2</sup> at Tilbury Docks. She set sail on 21 December 1906 on her usual route via Port Said, the Suez Canal, Aden, Colombo, Madras and on to Calcutta. Her passenger list includes a 'Mr Allen' (sic) travelling to Madras. The "Golconda" possessed *"an exceptional amount of cabin and deck... and was always a popular ship with travellers"*<sup>3</sup>. So hopefully Arthur enjoyed some degree of comfort; probably more so than the *"free trips available on tender"*, as he revealed to his friend Jimmy Shields - who promptly followed in February 1907.



*British India S.S. "Golconda" 1906*

<sup>2</sup> The S.S. "Golconda" was part of the British India Steam Navigation Company's fleet.

<sup>3</sup> BI: the British India Steam Navigation Company Limited by W A Laxon and F W Perry, Kendal: World Ship Society, 1994 (Caird Library ID: PBP3617).

On 3<sup>rd</sup> January 1907, we hear from Arthur that the “Golconda” has reached the Suez Canal, and in mid-January he sends a postcard from Colombo. Following this, most of Arthur’s cards are postmarked Madras, and it’s likely that he was based here until the end of 1910. However, the cards indicate trips to many more parts of the country, from the hill stations of Mussoorie and Coonoor to the gold fields of Kolar (where in 1907 he descended the Nundidroog mine shaft), as well as time spent in Bangalore – notably playing billiards at the Bowring Institute. Arthur uses the postcards to teach his children about life in India and encourages them in their postcard collecting.



*The Bowring Institute, Bangalore, 1907*

1908 begins with Arthur sending New Year wishes back to his family, and at the end of the month we find him at Madras’s prestigious Connemara Hotel, evidently enjoying a few cocktails, since he has written upside down on the back of the postcard... During this year the British completed their building of the Nilgiri Mountain Railway, of which Arthur also sends a card. His views would have appeared much as they are today: stunning but vertiginous ravines, tea plantations, and eucalyptus-covered hills.



*The Nilgiri Mountain Railway, 1908*

In April 1909, we hear that that Arthur is “*worked off my feet. Everything is exciting just at present*”. One of the more informative cards explains that he has just returned from hospital (having suffered a hand injury) and ends with the brief revelation that “*Jimmy got married today*”! Records reveal that

Jimmy Shields, aged 27, did indeed marry 19-year-old Ann Mary Lourdes at the Madras Purification Church, on 6th October 1909. The witnesses were Arthur and N. B. Grahame.

In August 1910, Arthur gives young Harry the responsibility of announcing to his family that he would be leaving India within six weeks and sailing back to England from Madras. He promises Harry that, after the final leg home he will *"if all's well, meet your dad once more"*. A card from Naples verifies the trip home and indicates that Arthur travelled aboard the Orient Line's "Omrah".

The passenger list shows 'A G Allan', described as a 'Labourer', travelling from Colombo to Plymouth and arriving in London on 29<sup>th</sup> October. As we also have a postcard of the P&O SS "Marmora", it seems that Arthur first took this vessel from Madras to Colombo, thence boarding the "Omrah". Arthur's trip home is only short-lived, however. He doesn't stay long enough to spend Christmas with his family: by 18<sup>th</sup> December 1910 he is already back in Port Said, this time heading for Calcutta. Here we find him safely returned and staying with an *'old china'*<sup>4</sup>.



*Orient Line – "Omrah", 1910*

Calcutta is where Arthur then appears to be based for 1911. However, this year would prove to be a tragic one for Arthur and his family. The final dated postcard is 10<sup>th</sup> August 1911. Less than two weeks later, Arthur's life is to come to an abrupt end. His burial certificate states that he was *'buried by warrantor's consent'*, which means that his death is unexplained. However, a work-related accident (electrocution) is probable, and is what my mother remembers being told. Arthur was buried at the Lower Circular Road Christian Cemetery, Calcutta, on 25<sup>th</sup> August.

His headstone would have been paid for by his employers at the time; stated on his burial certificate as Messrs Calcutta Electric Supply Company (now CESC). The headstone still exists. Arthur was 37 years old.

<sup>4</sup> Cockney rhyming slang for 'mate'

Arthur's postcards were the catalyst for my lifelong desire to visit India. I decided to follow his trail using the postcards as a guide, so that I could imagine as viscerally as possible the experiences and feelings that he might have had during his time there. Although aware of the obvious differences over 100 years later, I wanted to tread the same earth as my long-lost relative and see the many buildings and sights that still exist – ones that he would have strolled past every day, and of course to visit the Great Banyan Tree.

The discovery of Arthur's burial certificate also meant that I would be able to pay my respects at his graveside in Calcutta.

I compiled a list of all the places that Arthur had definitely visited and indulged myself by adding some which just captured my imagination. This resulted in a ridiculously full itinerary for a five-week trip, which would entail travelling virtually the length and breadth of the subcontinent, retracing his footsteps. Nevertheless, I set about booking numerous planes, trains and the occasional boat, packing light and preparing for take-off.

Heading off with my partner, Hally, in January 2017, we began the trip in Delhi, where we had arranged to meet a good friend, Girish Balachandran. With barely time to touch the ground, Girish's enthusiasm saw us hunting down various tombs depicted on the postcards. Girish also had a car and a passion for long-distance driving. So, by 5am on our third morning, we were packed and out, in the smog-induced darkness of dawn, to begin our drive up to Mussoorie. Daylight did somehow manage to break through the fog – created by burning sugar cane and brick-making kilns – and we finally broke into the crisp mountain air. Eventually reaching Mussoorie, Girish masterfully negotiated its bustling shopping streets and we made it in one piece up to our mountain retreat in Landour.

Three of the 'wild card' postcards had brought us all the way up here, but I felt justified in making the trek. Arthur sent the cards of snow-covered Mussoorie in 1909 – coincidentally the year that electricity was introduced here. Looking way back down to Dehra Dun, I could imagine the sense of isolation that Arthur must have felt. The cool air and stunning beauty of this hill station would have been a welcome respite from the intense heat and rigours of his work, but the distance from his family would have felt even greater.

As if by magic, it snowed overnight. The views from Landour down to Mussoorie now perfectly matched the postcard images. Having spent the evening indulging in a 1920's *'Souvenir and Guide to Mussoorie'*, it seemed that while lifestyle and attitudes are dramatically different, the look of the place has barely changed. It was strange to be sitting at the snow-logged mountainside tea house *Char Dukan*, which opened just a year after Arthur was first here. Perhaps he even went back and enjoyed a warming chai there! It was the perfect place to begin to follow his footsteps.



*Mussoorie, The Mall, 1909*

From here we set off across the country, exploring places and meeting contacts with whom I had already been communicating about my project, who all generously helped with travel, advised and accommodated us. Girish also accompanied us at various stages throughout our five weeks, but after Mussoorie we left him and flew to Kolkata to meet Kiran Naidu, who treated us to a wonderful afternoon at the Tollygunge Club; an establishment we definitely would have not been allowed into without her charming intervention. A history enthusiast, Kiran explained that Arthur would certainly have visited the club, which did not allow Indians entry until the 1960s. (Similarly, during the British Raj, signs on Mussoorie Mall expressly stated: *"Indians and Dogs Not Allowed"*<sup>5</sup>). We felt equally out of place at Bangalore's Bowring Institute, where Arthur used to play billiards. The manager, Mr Rao, was charming, but – on kindly inviting us back for cocktails that night – looked down at our feet and politely advised that the correct footwear would be necessary.

Seeing old colonial clubs like this really helped to build a picture of Arthur's life here. However, as far as connecting with Arthur was concerned, one of my main desires was to reunite him with Harry beneath Calcutta's Great Banyan tree. It was quite a trial to reach the botanical gardens in Howrah, although exciting to pass many of the buildings so familiar from the postcards: Howrah Station, Writer's Building, Government House, the River Hooghly – and amazing to finally find myself standing in front of this magnificent tree, now over 250 years old, whose image I had come to know so well. It was an emotional moment to see the tree in real life. Beneath it I left a framed photo of Arthur, Harry and the Banyan postcard, so that they could at last have their long-awaited chat.

<sup>5</sup> source: <http://www.namastedehradun.com/interesting-facts-about-mussoorie> - Motilal Nehru (Father of Jawahar Lal Nehru) frequently broke the rule almost every day. The signs no longer exist.





*Harry Allan (left), Arthur Allan (right) and the Great Banyan Tree postcard, 1911*

The next day was even more poignant – visiting Arthur's graveside. Thanks to Hally's navigational skills, we arrived punctually at the Lower Circular Road cemetery for our appointment with Mr A.K. Biswas, secretary of the Christian Burial Board. Impressed by my pre-trip communications, he had reciprocated by efficiently preparing the relevant 1911 Field Book containing the record of Arthur's interment and showing the location of his grave.

I was pleasantly surprised to find that Arthur's grave lay in a bright and prominent position, alongside the cemetery's main pathway. The grave was in poor condition and the headstone chipped at the edges and half-fallen from its base. But Arthur's name could still be read loud and clear. A quiet moment with Arthur was not to be had, however, as our visit seemed to be quite an event for the cemetery workers, all of whom gathered closely round while we cleaned the grave, onto which I placed Arthur's photo and flowers, and lit candles.



*Arthur Allan's gravestone, Lower Circular Road Cemetery, Kolkata*

The following day found us standing inside Kolkata's main GPO. It was eerie to be standing in the same place that Arthur sent many of his postcards. Likewise, in Chennai's main GPO (this following a 27- hour southbound train journey and the help of an auto-rickshaw driver who miraculously managed to weave his way there through thousands of people protesting against a ban on their traditional bull-taming contests, *Jalilikattu*). If it was as difficult for Arthur to buy stamps here as it was for us, I'm not surprised it's where he tells us he imparted '*a few bad words*'. From there we headed over to The Connemara Hotel<sup>6</sup>. Although inaccessible due to building work, it was fun imagining Arthur relaxing here with a gin or two... But it was frustrating to be just a few months too early to see the finished renovations: the rooms, lobby and banquet halls are being recreated to look how they would have done at the time when Arthur was there.

Having enjoyed some coastal respite in Pondicherry and Mahabalipuram, we next flew west to meet Girish in Goa, from where we headed off toward Bangalore. From there we made a 3-hour drive north-east to Kolar Town, and eventually managed to find the Dundidroog mine shaft in the Kolar Gold Mine Fields. The structure is now dilapidated - but it was still exciting to be standing in front of the very shaft that Arthur descended in 1907. Today, the Fields constitute a collection of disused mines 'guarded' by ex-employees; one of whom helpfully confirmed that we had correctly identified the shaft - and then told me that his sister lives in the UK, and unbelievably just a stone's-throw away from Arthur's family house.



*Nundidroog Goldmine, Kolar, which Arthur descended in September 1907*

We next took a fortuitous detour to Ootacamund, where by pure luck we managed to buy the final two book tickets for the Nilgiri Mountain Railway toy train from Ooty to Coonoor. This short trip was pure joy - I daydreamed of Arthur being here back in 1908, enjoying these same views of eucalyptus trees, tea plantations and mountains dotted with houses and farms.

<sup>6</sup> Now Vivanta by Taj - Connemara, Chennai



After visiting Kerala and Kochi, it was finally back to Delhi to prepare for our return to London. Reflecting on the plane home, I felt a tinge of sadness leaving Arthur alone back in India. But, knowing his sense of adventure, I hoped that he had somehow enjoyed a nostalgic trip with us – his story brought back to life almost 120 years on.

What became of Arthur's young son – my grandfather – Harry? Leaving school in 1917, aged 14, he began an apprenticeship at civil engineers and building contractors Holland Hannen & Cubitts in London's Kings Cross. He married Gertrude Keeble on the 20<sup>th</sup> June 1931. They lived in Rosemont Road, New Malden, Surrey, with their two daughters Nancy and Peggy. In 1953, he began work nearer home, at Firmston Brothers, New Malden, and finally he worked as a timber buyer for boat builders Tough Bros. of Teddington, until his retirement in 1957.

While the postcards make it tempting to romanticise Arthur's time in India, his absence and untimely demise had clearly cast a darker shadow upon Harry, who was a very strict father, rarely showing affection toward his family. In September 1973, after spending a lonely 16 months following Gertrude's death, Harry died of a stroke. No children were allowed at either of their funerals. Harry rather poignantly insisted that they were no place for children.

The result of my research and travels culminated in a self-published hard-back book entitled: *"To Dear Harry Boy - Postcards from India 1907-1911"*. The project was a delight to work on, and it's all thanks to Arthur's wonderful cards to Harry which have brought back to life this part of our family's history. The postcards are not only a treasured family heirloom, but also constitute a rich visual documentation of India during the times of the British Raj.



*The resulting book: "To Dear Harry Boy - Postcards from India 1907-1911"*

If you are be interested in seeing the complete set of postcards? Then please view them at the following link:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TgjV1FmSgcc&t=3s>

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# WALTER FRANCIS SHORE:

## THE LOST GRAVE

Iain Richard Shore

Walter Francis Shore (always known as "Frank") was born in St Boswells, Roxburghshire, on 4 October 1869, the third son of William Shore, Huntsman to the Duke of Buccleuch. He grew up around, and developed a love of, horses, and became a keen and successful amateur jockey, winning many prizes, often as far afield as Ireland. He was educated locally, and then at the New Veterinary College, Edinburgh, now part of Edinburgh University. He won the prize for Practical Chemistry in 1885, and qualified at the young age of 19. The English census for 1891 shows him living in Manchester as a "Veterinary Surgeon". In 1895 he travelled to India, immediately after taking part in, and winning, the Meath Hunt Cup on "Son of a Gun", owned by Mr E. C. Hamilton.

This voyage was as a result of having joined the Army as a vet and been commissioned as a Lieutenant, AVC. He was almost immediately sent off to the campaign in the Tirah and the Punjab Frontier, where the main transport was not the horse, but the mule. His main posting was to the Army Remount Depot in Saharanpur, in India. There, he steadily progressed to Major, becoming Senior Veterinary Surgeon, and also Procurement Officer, travelling to Argentina and Australia to buy horses. All this was in the days before the First World War. Frank was an unconventional dresser, preferring horsey tweeds to flannels, and always smoking cheroots in gold-bound holders. He wore a gold Longines wristwatch before they became the norm. I have a picture of him at the local tennis club in India, everyone in whites, him in a hacking jacket, dreadful trilby and cigar in mouth: conversely, in his wedding photograph in 1915, he is in tropical white uniform and looks quite the Officer and Gentleman.

Frank Shore was my grandfather.



*Frank Shore*

When I was growing up, my father used to pique my imagination with stories of how he never knew his father. Tragically, Frank had died two days after my father was born, in the magical (to me) place called “Saharanpur”, in India, in what was then and now called “UP”. The Indians love acronyms, even though these days the letters stand for something different: from “United Provinces” before 1947, to “Uttar Pradesh” now. I remember his mother, my grandmother, well: she died when I was ten, at the relatively young age of seventy, her health ruined by coming to Britain for the first time in her mid-forties. As was not uncommon in those days for young widows, particularly those with very young children, she had remarried two years after my grandfather’s death. The groom this time was the Divisional Paymaster-General, Lt.Col. Keith Hungerford Jackson, the wedding taking place in Mussoorie, at the Anglican Church. The church register confirms the event, and that my father’s elder (by one year) sister, aged three, was a witness!

My own father knew no other father except for Keith, except that he was always told about his “true” father, who had died. For me, as a young boy, this was fascinating. There were photographs of my grandfather as a mature man, but none as a young man, and just one wedding photograph, in which he was already 46 years old. My father knew next to nothing of his father’s family, only being in touch with one first cousin, whom my grandmother had introduced him to. Despite his extensive military service in Northern India from 1937-1944, he had never visited his father’s grave, and didn’t even know exactly where it was.

He died in 2002, and I inherited all the photographs, artefacts and documents, along with an eight-foot-long “jeziah”, taken from the battlefield of the Tirah “Expedition” in 1897.

In 2014 my wife, Kshama, and I decided, both of us having recently retired, to go to India. This was for two main reasons.

The first was to scatter my late mother-in-law’s ashes at the Triveni Sangam (the holy confluence of two earthly rivers, Ganga and Yamuna, and one mythical river, Saraswati, together creating one of the most sacred places for Hindus, the site of the Kumbh Mela) in Allahabad (now renamed, awkwardly, “Prayagraj”), her declared wish.

Secondly, to locate, if possible, my paternal grandfather’s grave in Saharanpur. He had died there, aged 47, on 6<sup>th</sup> December 1916 after a short and severe illness. Unfortunately, we have long generation gaps in our family! My own father was 40 when I was born..... hence the effluxion of such a long time since the event of my grandfather’s death. Memories fade, and older family members pass on.

My grandmother had moved away to Darjeeling, right over to the east of the country, after her husband's death to live with her father's cousins, before her remarriage in 1918. As far as I was aware, nobody had visited the grave, if it still existed, or even that area, since he died.

The main Army involvement in Saharanpur was at that time and still is today is the Remount Depot, of which my grandfather was both Commanding Officer and Senior Veterinary Surgeon at the time of his death. The report on his sudden death, written by his deputy, was damning in its condemnation of the Indian Army in forcing my grandfather to fill three jobs at once, his being also equine procurement Officer for the entire Indian Army at the same time as his other two jobs. The fact that he was Commandant of the Depot, however, was of incalculable value, as shall be seen later.

After an interesting visit to Allahabad, during which time we were taken under the wing of the Sethi family, we travelled by train, via Delhi, to Saharanpur. This city, not on the tourist map, is wholly industrial and busy. We had been asked, while elsewhere in India, why we were going there. The inevitable statement was: "but you won't find any decent hotels there"..... a statement which is uncomfortably close to the truth..... we couldn't even get a taxi, so had to board a shared tuk-tuk..... well, the fare was less than 10 pence! We found a church, but there was no graveyard, and only a young lad doing odd jobs, who didn't seem to understand what we wanted. While wandering around the town, a chemist, opening his shop, called, amusingly, "Lovely Chemist", noticed us looking lost, and asked if he could help. Kshama, her Hindi coming back with amazing speed, explained our predicament. Mr Kapoor, whom we had never previously met, called his brother Praveen, who gave up his Saturday for us, and took us in his car first to one locked cemetery, then to another, near St Thomas's Church: at this one, there was a notice, and a caretaker.



*The cemetery sign*

After we got him to unlock it, we found a large, walled, somewhat overgrown cemetery with a good, concrete central pathway and small, open chapel. Various trees were dotted around. A peaceful place, despite the proximity of the railway to the end wall. But boy, the graves!

There were hundreds! Luckily, the inevitable group of young boys had followed us in, out of curiosity, and were watching our every move, with the caretaker and Praveen prompting us. The brainwave was to use the little boys..... In true Sherlock Holmes style, "one hundred rupees to the boy who finds this grave!", and off they all ran. It took no more than ten minutes with the increased manpower, when the caretaker's son found it, the slab cracked across and a peepul tree growing through it. The cross had fallen from the stepped base, but someone had laid it carefully on the slab, albeit in three pieces. The inscription was obscured by the foliage of the (rather stunted) peepul. But it was the right one: Lt Col Walter Francis Shore, AVC. A very emotional moment..... So, we cleaned it up, and photographed it with the cross balanced on top. The next question, posed by Praveen, was "what next? Are you going to just leave it like that?".



*The broken grave*

So, we headed for the road in town where the stonemasons are. Luckily, Saharanpur is a city with clearly demarcated trade boundaries. Praveen spoke to a couple on the phone, and one could fit in with our fairly whistle-stop timetable: the following day was Sunday, and we were to leave on Monday.....We chose a slab of grey granite and turned up at the cemetery at 08.00 the next morning, just before the stonemason's truck arrived. He had visited the graveyard during the previous evening, measured the existing slab, cut the new one to size, and had made a cross to match.

They first removed the stepped base, then the two halves of the original slab, broke up the foundations to provide a key, and set new concrete and hardcore in place, having removed the root of the peepul tree. The old base was used as a bottom, on which the new base, cut slightly smaller and beveled, was set, followed by the original stepped base with the inscription. The new cross was laid horizontally on the slab and cemented in place. It was done! And all on a Sunday before lunch: and the stonemason received a very handsome tip! Total price for the job: £75.00.

During these proceedings, we had attracted quite an audience of locals, many of them members of the congregation, all fascinated by what we were doing, and that we were honouring our ancestor.

Before we left, the caretaker said to us what a shame it was that it was not quite 100 years since my grandfather had died..... A good reason to return to commemorate the centenary? Praveen promised to tend the grave with his family in the meantime.



*The Restored Grave*

So, two years later, after having had a chance to do more research and having negotiated the inevitable and seemingly interminable red-tape of Indian Bureaucracy in December 2016 we returned. This was after having visited the very helpful Brigadier (Military Adviser) at the High Commission in London, who greatly facilitated our progress by obtaining permission for us to visit the depot at Saharanpur to present certain memorabilia to the Mess.

These items were: my grandfather's veterinary prize medal from the New Edinburgh Veterinary College, his inscribed silver cigarette case and his gold-bound tortoiseshell cigar holder in a silver etui. In the only unguarded and unposed photograph we have of him, he has a cigar clenched between his teeth. We had also contacted the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, who had tried, and failed, to locate the grave, the priest at St Thomas's and our friends the Kapoors.

The intention was to have a ceremony of commemoration in the churchyard, led by the Priest, Father Daniel Masih, and a presentation at the Remount Depot.

On this occasion, my sister, Suzie, accompanied us. She had not been back to the land of her birth since 1945, when my father was posted away from India. We were worried that she would find India difficult, but she loved it! Having booked a different hotel (The Royal Residency, Saharanpur) on this occasion, which did seem rather better, we met up with Kenei Sekhose, the

representative from the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, who, being a Christian from Nagaland, was very different in all regards from most Indians!

A slight distraction was that the hotel receptionist was a portly young man bearing a striking resemblance to Alan Carr (Chatty Man). Serious giggling ensued, especially as his speech and mannerisms mirrored Alan's: so, we ended up calling him Alan. We explained to him why, and he was vastly flattered. After a congenial evening chatting with Kenei over a few beers, we parted to meet again the next day.

In the event, the commemoration started with the visit to the Depot. The Army (at the Centre in Delhi) had not realised that my grandfather had been the Commandant at the Depot: the wedding picture of my Grandparents shows the "Happy Couple" on the lawn in front of a large house: still, to this day, recognisably the Commandant's house..... once the Depot Commandant realised the importance of my Grandfather's status as his direct predecessor, albeit a century earlier, everything was stepped up a gear: cars were laid on, a motorcycle escort, a presentation to all the Depot Officers on the immaculate lawn in front of the Mess, the grand arrival of the Commandant and his wife, speeches, the presentation of the items, and lunch, followed by a tour of the breeding and training facilities with a handsome young captain, Rishi Sharma.

He was the one who had been tasked with sorting it all out, as well as doing his day job. It was very well done. We are so grateful to the Indian Army for giving us such a wonderful and memorable day.



*The Presentation to the Army*

To return to reality, away from the pristine grounds of the cantonment, where not a blade of grass was out of place, to the dirt, smells and bustle of Saharanpur, but this time in the Commandant's beflagged Jeep. We could



then prepare for the next day, at which Captain Rishi Sharma and an army photographer would be present.

On a cold, foggy morning the next day, we arrived at the churchyard, to find it all set up with chairs, a table, and lectern. What lot of chairs there were, as well..... visions came to mind of a ceremony for just ourselves, but we need not have worried.

By the appointed time, there was standing room only, including the country director for the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, Captain Sharma from the Army Remount Depot, Father Daniel, the entire Parish committee, the Kapoors, and many members of the congregation. After a service of readings, prayers and speeches, we adjourned for a break, followed by lunch at the hotel restaurant, which exceeded our expectations. It really was excellent.



*The service/decorated grave*

Following this, the Commonwealth War Graves Commission announced that they would erect a standard CWGC headstone at the head of the grave and would take over maintenance from the church (i.e. Us, paying the church!). We are grateful to them, to the Indian Army, to Brigadier Rajesh Jha in London, to Colonel Maan, the Commandant at the Depot in Saharanpur, and to Captain Rishi Sharma; to the St Thomas Church Committee, to Father Daniel Masih, to the Kapoor family, and to the owner and staff at the Saharanpur Royal Residency Hotel.

As Colonel Maan said, “He was one of ours, and we cannot forget that”.

All in all, a happy resolution to a family “mystery”.



# HENRY REGINALD CORBETT (1891-1973)

KIMBERLEY JOHN LINDSAY.

Henry Reginald Corbett was born in India (probably Calcutta) on 28<sup>th</sup> September 1891. His Irish father was Michael Corbett (noted in 1917 as 'deceased'), formerly 'Pay Master' 48<sup>th</sup> Royal Irish Rifles. Originally from Galway, Ireland, the Corbetts were a 'Domiciled British' Anglo-Indian family of Calcutta, long associated with the East Indian Railway with its imposing Howrah Station. Indeed, Henry's address in 1916 was '8/a Church Road, Howrah', this being a large city situated on the western shore of the Hooghly River, across from Calcutta itself.

Henry Corbett was initially a youthful Volunteer with the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion Calcutta Volunteer Rifles, Indian Defence Force, serving with them for five years and two months, from 1910 to 1915. Corbett was listed in the 1911 "Thacker's Directory", as being employed as 'Customs Preventative Officer, New House, East India Railways'. (Apparently the iron gate of the Customs House faced Clive Street and the East Indian Railway Company was situated to its northern side.) In Railway employment, it was virtually compulsory for all employees, both European and Eurasian, to enlist in a Railway Volunteer Regiment.

During the course of 1915 he transferred to the East Indian Railway Volunteer Battalion, serving with them for fifteen months. This battalion was the associated auxiliary force of the East India Railway, and his change of regiment may have had something to do with Corbett becoming an East India Railways 'Guard'.

On 6<sup>th</sup> November 1916, at the Fort William depot at Calcutta, the well-built, tall (5' 11¼"), twenty-five-year-old and unmarried H.R. Corbett, relinquished the relatively safe and comfortable auxiliary forces, to voluntarily enlist 'for the duration of the war'. He was sworn in as a Gunner with the 25<sup>th</sup> Motor Machine Gun Battery (Calcutta Volunteers), naming his grandmother, Mrs E. Corbett, of 161 Tikline Ghat, Howrah, Calcutta, as next of kin. The swearing-in procedure was officiated by Major Alec D. Snow, commanding 1<sup>st</sup> Garrison Battalion, Lincolnshire Regiment.

Gunner Corbett's regimental number was originally a very low one, namely 35. However, a later reorganisation added three digits, his number changing to 96335. A fellow Volunteer, with the number 34, was Charles Nida, a young "box-wallah", who had toured India since 1913, selling garments for Gore & Co., Bombay, 'gentleman's outfitters'. Handsome, intelligent and a shrewd observer, Nida subsequently wrote an account of his adventures, calling it "Chota Sahib".

25<sup>th</sup> Motor Machine Gun Battery was envisaged as a mobile unit armed with ‘obsolescent’ Maxim machine guns mounted on motor cycles, and patriotically financed from Calcutta. This was the idea of the Commanding Officer, a Captain called Heilgers (Nida usually used disguised names, but not in this case). A “Burra Sahib”, Capt F. W. Heilgers who subsequently won the Military Cross with another machine gun unit [not confirmed], was initially fully occupied with handing over his business, as head of a Calcutta merchant house.

The C.O. was assisted by two subalterns (one of them a tea-planter from Ceylon). The so-called Battery began training with some thirty Other Ranks, who had forsaken their jobs to enlist, but new recruits had to be advertised for in the Calcutta newspapers and larger businesses. Finally, the full complement of sixty-six officers and men was reached, including engineers, planters, banking and insurance men, shipping clerks and ‘three time-serving privates from the regular army’ drafted to complete the numbers! Several of the Volunteers were referred to as ‘CB’ (country-born), born in India of British parents, and ‘were shunned by the more class-conscious members’.

Training continued in Calcutta (weekends free) for several weeks, and the men were gradually sorted out according to their ability as motorcyclists, machine gunners, mechanics, map-readers, signallers, cooks and so on. Previously, only the three officers had known how to ride a motor cycle.

Preparatory to more intensive training, the unit was paraded in full kit beside their motor cycles, and inspected by the Governor of Bengal, Lord Carmichael. This was reported favourably in “The Statesman”, Calcutta’s most prominent newspaper. In December 1916, 25<sup>th</sup> Motor Machine Gun Battery (Calcutta Volunteers), entrained for the army camp at Rawalpindi, on the North-West Frontier.

A few of the Volunteers contracted malaria during their week of “square-bashing” at Rawalpindi, a place which was also unfamiliarly cold. The unit then departed for Campbellpur, further north, a small town on the Rawalpindi-Peshawar road, where a Gunnery School had recently been set up. Weapons training on all kinds of arms was carried out, the Maxim finally being replaced by the air-cooled and lighter Vickers.

Because of his proficiency as a ‘Number One’ with the Vickers, Corbett was promoted from Gunner to Acting Bombardier on 11 March 1917, along with five others (including Nida). The motor cycles were also tested to the limit on the Campbellpur to Peshawar trunk road, until one member of the unit hit a beggar and failed to report it. The C.O. then put the road beyond Nowshera out of bounds. However, the racing continued on the weekends, when the C.O. and his officers were either away on shikari or spending their time on a houseboat on the Jhelum River.

At the end of winter, having completed the Campellpur Gunnery School course, the unit entrained for Bombay; however, the train took three days to cover the route in the sweltering heat of June. Once in Bombay, it took a few days before their troopship was ready to disembark. This left the members of 25<sup>th</sup> Motor Machine Gun Battery time to celebrate leaving India, to go on Active Service to an unknown theatre of war.

The overcrowded ship sailed out of Bombay harbour, in the teeth of the monsoon, and many members of the unit were seasick. The next morning the C.O. held a parade, and announced that the unit's destination was Egypt, preparatory to joining the Army in Palestine.

Three days later, the ship 'tossed its way into Aden', for re-bunkering with coal, anchoring off-shore. A locust plague enveloped the ship, lasting for an hour or so, before the swarm moved inland. At that time of the year - the end of June - the Red Sea was 'like an oven'. Finally, the ship reached its destination and docked at Port Tewfik. The 25<sup>th</sup> M.M.G.B. was housed in a camp at Heliopolis, outside Cairo.

Officially, on 2<sup>nd</sup> July 1917, A/Bdr. Corbett, of the 'Indian Section' of 'M.M.G. 25' was posted on active service to the Egyptian Expeditionary Force. Corbett was subsequently promoted from Acting Bombardier to 'Corporal' (not Bombardier). At about this time, at the highest level, Allenby replaced Murray, after the campaign in Palestine had met with temporary failure at Gaza.

According to George Nida's account, 'a detachment from headquarters' arranged for the unit to conduct a mock battle, to find out if the unit was battleworthy. Unfortunately, everything went wrong. Among other things, the motor cycles were found to be completely unsuitable, and several injuries were incurred through crashes and equipment failures, the unit not getting even half-way to its intended point of attack. After two weeks of consultation with Calcutta, regarding the financing of more suitable motor cycles, a decision was reached to disband the unit forthwith. Amazingly, in the middle of wartime, the personnel of the defunct 25<sup>th</sup> Motor Machine Gun Battery were given the opportunity to return to India and their civilian occupations. No pressure was 'exerted', but it was an ignominious end.

Surprisingly, only about the half of the battery decided to carry on with their part in the war. These less faint-hearted members wanted to play a more active part and volunteered for the Tank Corps, but there were no vacancies. The C.O. then responded to a request for suitable officer cadets from headquarters and recommended several of the remaining volunteers for commissions.

On 18<sup>th</sup> September 1917, Corbett, Corporal № 96335, Henry Reginald, of 25<sup>th</sup> Battery, M.M.G.S., made an application 'of an N.C.O. who desires to be considered for appointment on probation for a commission in the Indian Army Reserve of Officers.' This application made reference to his deceased Irish father and his military connection, and named his brother Frederick Michael Corbett, of 8a Church Road, Howrah, India, as next-of-kin. The following day his application was recommended by Capt F. W. Heilgers, erstwhile officer commanding 25<sup>th</sup> Motor Machine Gun Battery.

On 26<sup>th</sup> September, at № 27 Central Hospital, Police Schools, Abbassieh, Cairo, Corbett was medically examined by three doctors, who considered him 'fit'. Tall, well-built, with good hearing, teeth and vision, the 'Varicocele left side' discovered, was apparently of no importance. On 2<sup>nd</sup> Oct 1917, Brigadier H. G. Casson, commanding Delta and Western Force, signed Corbett's application, adding, 'I consider № 96335 Corpl. H. R. Corbett to be a suitable candidate for appointment to a commission in the Indian Army Reserve of Officers.'

On 11<sup>th</sup> October 1917, at Abbassia, a lieutenant-colonel on the staff of the Brigadier General commanding Delta and Western Force, Egyptian Expeditionary Force, signed the following: 'The attached applications of the undermentioned NCOs of the 25<sup>th</sup> Battery M.M.G.S., for commissions in the Indian Army Reserve of Officers, are forwarded and recommended. 96305 Sergt. A. Kelly. 96315 A/Bdr. D. T. Morgan. 96335 Cpl. H. Corbett. 96306 A/Sgt. E. C. J. (sic) Cunningham.'

[It is of interest to note how these four progressed: -

2<sup>nd</sup> Lieut. A. Kelly, first commission 25<sup>th</sup> Dec 1917 (IARO), joined 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 28<sup>th</sup> Punjabis (formed at Jhelum on 13<sup>th</sup> August 1918) as a Company Officer on 25<sup>th</sup> August 1918.

2<sup>nd</sup> Lieut. H. R. Corbett, first commission 25<sup>th</sup> December 1917 (IARO), joined 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 69<sup>th</sup> Punjabis (formed at Ambala) as a Company Officer on 26<sup>th</sup> August 1918.

2<sup>nd</sup> Lieut. E. C. T. Cunningham, first commission 25<sup>th</sup> December 1917 (IARO) joined 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 41<sup>st</sup> Dogras (formed at Jubbelpore on 16<sup>th</sup> October 1917) as a Company Officer on 5<sup>th</sup> February 1918.

There is no trace of D. T. Morgan in the January 1919 Indian Army List...]

These candidates were ordered to proceed to the nearby Imperial School of Instruction at Zeitoun (Egypt), on 25<sup>th</sup> November 1917. The Zeitoun infantry course lasted for four weeks and all were eventually commissioned. The four former members of 25<sup>th</sup> Bty., M.M.G.S. who wanted to become pilots (Bertram Eric Turner, Sgt Arthur Macdonald, Charles Henry George Nida and his friend William Price – later killed in an air crash), went on to the RFC training squadron at Heliopolis, perhaps after finishing the Zeitoun course.

The Zeitoun course finished, Henry Corbett embarked for India on 25<sup>th</sup> December 1917, 'having been approved by the Selection Officer and passed by the Medical board in Egypt, for a commission into the Indian Army (Reserve of Officers)'. He was transferred to the General List with effect from his date of embarkation.

On 25<sup>th</sup> December 1917, Corporal Henry Reginald Corbett was officially discharged from the Motor Machine Gun Corps, after service of one year and forty-nine days - being appointed to a commission as a 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant, Indian Army Reserve of Officers (I.A.R.O.). This document, marking his change of corps and appointment to commissioned rank, was made out at the Machine Gun Corps headquarters, York St., London.

Being Indian born, with experience on the Railways and no doubt having a good knowledge of Urdu (as he stated), the mature Corbett was obviously a suitable candidate for the I.A.R.O. Apparently, a lengthy period of further training followed in India. A group photo was taken at this stage, showing 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieut. Corbett with forty other officers, apparently on a course of instruction.

In early 1918, as a wartime measure, a second battalion of the ancient infantry regiment of 69<sup>th</sup> Punjabis, was ordered to be raised in Ambala. The first commanding officer of 2/69 Punjabis was Lt.-Col. E. H. Dunsford (himself an officer of 33<sup>rd</sup> Punjabis). The forty-year old Dunsford took up his new appointment at Ambala on 1<sup>st</sup> June 1918. (His second in command, Major H. Y. Salkeld, D.S.O., a 2<sup>nd</sup> Lancers officer, had been there since 24<sup>th</sup> May).

On 26<sup>th</sup> August 1918, 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieut. H. R. Corbett was posted to the newly-formed 2/69 Punjabis as an attached Company officer (I.A.R.O., on probation). In the same year the 2/69 moved to Delhi and was stationed in the new suburb of Raisina. Henry Reginald Corbett was promoted Lieutenant on 25<sup>th</sup> December 1918.

After the unexpected outbreak of hostilities with Afghanistan, on 6<sup>th</sup> May 1919, 2/69 Punjabis was ordered to entrain for Kohat (possibly as part of "Kurram Field Force"). The battalion was at first split up into detachments on the line of communications between Kohat and Bannu and suffered considerably from sickness. Kohat District at the time experienced not only a cholera epidemic, but also a particularly virulent form of sandfly fever.

Corbett became a Company Commander, 2/69 Punjabis, from 16<sup>th</sup> July to 19<sup>th</sup> November 1919, and held the rank of Acting Captain. He seems to have been additionally the battalion's Signals Platoon commander. After a cease fire in Jun 1919, and negotiations at Rawalpindi, the Third Afghan War ended on 3<sup>rd</sup> August 1919. Group photos probably taken at this stage, clearly show Corbett with his acting rank of Captain.

By that time, the Frontier tribes of the Wazirs, Mahsuds and others, were once again the subject of a military campaign. Capable British officers were in very short supply, the First War having so recently ended, involving widespread

demobilisation – not to mention the just-ended Third Afghan War. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that Lieut. Corbett was loaned at that time to the Supply & Transport Corps, with the resounding title, for a mere subaltern, of ‘Assistant Commandant, 5<sup>th</sup> Government Camel Corps’. At the time, he gave as his next of kin, his sister, Miss Norah Corbett of Howrah, Calcutta. This would suggest that his grandmother had died in the intervening three or four years, and that his brother Fred had either died (not uncommon in Calcutta), or moved, perhaps having joined the Army. Lieut. Corbett signed this statement at Khirgi, on 16<sup>th</sup> February 1920.

Corbett served with the Camel Corps (which was part of “Waziristan Field Force”), probably on the lines of communication, from 20<sup>th</sup> November 1919 to 3<sup>rd</sup> March 1920. On this latter date he was returned to 2/69 Punjabis, probably stationed by then at Ferozepore. A/Lt.-Col. Dunsford was succeeded by an ex-cavalryman, Lt.-Col. Birch (later wounded). Indeed, 2/69 Punjabis were to see further active service, and suffer casualties, before being disbanded in 1922. Lieut. Corbett, however, relinquished his commission beforehand, or was obliged to do so – no doubt due to the widespread cut-backs of the Indian Army.

The January 1919 East Indian Railways list shows H. R. Corbett as ‘Guard, on military duty’. However, the list for January 1922 shows Corbett to have ‘re-enlisted with the East Indian Railways on 9<sup>th</sup> July 1921, as a Guard on Rs 115, still on European leave entitlement terms’.

Reference to the April 1921 Indian Army List shows that Lieut. Corbett had been ‘Released’ from the Indian Army Reserve of Officers.

On 25<sup>th</sup> March 1924 he claimed his war medals, which were administered by the India Office. However, the very carefully typed Roll of the ‘Machine Gun Corps (Motors)’ confirming his First War medals, was made out at Alexandra Palace, Wood Green, London N22, and signed by Lt G. Drummond on 8<sup>th</sup> May 1920. The British War Medal [heavily impressed: LIEUT. H. R. CORBETT.] and Victory Medal [very lightly impressed: 2<sup>nd</sup>.LIEUT. H. R. CORBETT.], were both sent promptly to his post-war address at ‘108<sup>th</sup> Traffic Quarters, East Indian Railway, Khogole, Dinapore’.

The “Traffic” department of the East Indian Railways had twelve workshops, one of these being situated at Dinapore. The Divisional Railway Manager’s office was situated near Dinapore railway station: the area surrounding this station (called Khogole) is 10 km NW of Patna, and 500 km NW of Calcutta. In 1925, the Indian Government took over the management of the East Indian Railways, which had been previously a privately-owned British company since 1845.



Henry Corbett had married Blanche Amelia Corbett, née Perry, by this time. Also, having relinquished his wartime commission, Corbett had clearly re-joined the ranks of the Railway Volunteers. The Indian Defence Force (I.D.F.) was no more, having been replaced, in 1920, with the 'Auxiliary Force (India)' (A.F.I.).

For his campaign service, the former reserve officer would have also received, in due course, his India General Service Medal GVR with clasps "Afghanistan NWF 1919" and "Waziristan 1919-21" [LT. H.R. CORBETT, 2/69/PJBS.]. The latter clasp was almost certainly awarded on the strength of his additional service with the 5<sup>th</sup> Government Camel Corps.

An Indian Army Order of 7<sup>th</sup> December 1929 announced that 'Sergeant H.R. Corbett, 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, The East Indian Railway Regiment (A.F.I.)', had been rewarded with the silver Volunteer Long Service Medal GVR' [SGT. H. R. CORBETT, 2<sup>nd</sup> BN. EIRR. (A.F.I.)], together with another Sergeant of the second battalion (A.C. Collins), and five Privates. This award, created in 1896, was given for long and meritorious service, to warrant officers, non-commissioned officers and men, after 'twenty' years of service (war service counted 'one and a quarter years').

For almost another two decades, probably in increasingly senior positions with the East Indian Railway, he continued living at Dinapore: this city being an important hub in the network of the East Indian Railway. Indeed, he and Blanche raised a large family there: daughters Joan and Cynthia, followed by the birth of his son, Roger Perry Corbett, and finally another daughter, Hazel. In later life, Roger always talked about what a happy time they all had as children in Dinapore. It seems likely that in 1936, Henry Corbett would have been honourably discharged from the Auxiliary Force (India), having reached the age of 45.

In April 1947 (four months before Partition), Henry Corbett (55), with his wife Blanche Amelia Perry Corbett and daughters Joan, Cynthia and Hazel embarked from India for the last time. At that age, his contract may well have been amicably terminated, perhaps with a small pension or a lump sum. Be that as it may, there was clearly no future in India for a European Railwayman, retired or not. The Corbetts sailed from Bombay on a troop ship (a former Canadian Pacific liner), the large, three-funnelled "Empress of Australia", arriving at Liverpool on 6<sup>th</sup> May 1947. Their son, Roger Perry Corbett, who served with the Army in India, travelled to England at a later date.

After a lifetime in India, Henry Corbett was obliged to find employment in a post-war England where servants were virtually non-existent, even for the very rich. Having settled in Gloucester, he was most fortunate to find employment as a Clerical Assistant with the Air Ministry.

His new job was at No. 7 Maintenance Unit (7MU), RAF Quedgeley, Gloucester, a vast, long-established storage and equipment depot, extensively used during the Second War. In 1945, 7MU became, additionally, an accommodation storage site for furniture and other items. A sensation was no doubt created, when, in 1949, the commanding officer (a Group Captain), committed suicide in his room in the Officers' Mess.

After half a dozen years working in his "second job" at 7MU, Henry Corbett retired in 1954 (at the age of 63).

Apparently in continued good health, he had the great good fortune of enjoying a long retirement with his wife Blanche. Henry Reginald Corbett died (82) at his home, 11 Parkend Road, Gloucester, on 8<sup>th</sup> Mar 1973, of 'Exhaustion and Carcinoma of Epiglottis' (throat cancer). His son, Roger, from nearby Cheltenham, was present...



# FRIENDSHIP & FAMILY TIES:

Sue Paul.

Philadelphia Masfen was living in Fort St George in 1692.<sup>7</sup> She can be found in no public records and, like so many women of her time, would have disappeared into obscurity but for her friendship with Captain Thomas Bowrey and the chance survival of his personal archive. These papers have been studied by many researchers, but none have focused on the women whose lives are revealed in them.

Philadelphia's brother, Robert, was a business partner of Thomas from as early as 1680 and the two men certainly knew each other before that date. By 1692 the siblings' mother, also named Philadelphia, was living in London and had remarried a Mr Fellows. It is probable that they had been born in India. It was long before the *fishing fleets* of eligible young women hoping to ensnare a husband and, therefore, Philadelphia was unlikely have travelled to the East for this purpose. There were at least two other sisters living in England: Mrs Mary Anne Potter and Mrs John Tucker; and there may have been another who married a Samuel Allen who was in the East Indies at this time. That is the extent of the Masfen family tree as can be reconstructed from the surviving correspondence.

Unlike Philadelphia, Thomas did not have the support of close family. By the time he arrived at Fort St George at a very young age, he had lost his father and siblings, and was separated from his mother. He spent his formative years in the very masculine world of the free traders and in association with East India Company employees.<sup>8</sup> Where women are mentioned in the surviving early records of the Company, they are most often seen as a necessary problem. In England at the time, the legal status of married women was more restrictive than in any other European country.<sup>9</sup>

Despite this, Thomas grew up to be more compassionate towards women than his peers. He was to witness sati several times. On one occasion, the widow was an unwilling participant but resigned to her fate. She stood courageously by the fire but, when the time came, refused to leap into the flames. When the Brahmins moved in to force her, she took hold of one and threw herself with him headlong onto the pyre, where they both died. Thomas demonstrated some sympathy with the widow's defiance of the males in authority over her.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Philadelphia's first surviving letter to Thomas was sent from Fort St George 12 October 1692. It can be found at the British Library in IOR Mss Eur D1076 ff275-276. Most other correspondence referred to in this article are also at the British Library in IOR Mss Eur D0176 ff273-274, 278-282, 286-289, 292-293, 300-303, 335-336, 351-352, 358-359

<sup>8</sup> Full details of Thomas' life are available in as yet unpublished *Jeopardy of Every Wind: The Extraordinary Life of Captain Thomas Bowrey*, Sue Paul

<sup>9</sup> *The Making of the English Middle Class: Business, Society and Family Life in London 1660-1730*, Peter Earle, Methuen Paperback, London, 1991, pp158-159

<sup>10</sup> *A Geographical Account of Countries Round the Bay of Bengal 1669-1679*, Thomas Bowrey, Hakluyt Society, London, 1905, p204

Although it is not possible to ascribe modern-day feminist beliefs to him, it was an example of an enlightened attitude at the time when many of Thomas' contemporaries admired both the devotion of the wife who committed sati and its practical approach to dealing with the problem of widows.<sup>11</sup> Later, he went to great lengths to ensure that both his wife and mother-in-law remained financially independent.<sup>12</sup>

Thomas and Philadelphia's brother had fallen out before the former left India. Feelings had been hurt and friends taken for granted. Robert probably thought that Thomas was deserting him although his plans to return home having made his fortune had been clear for some years. Robert planned to sail for China when Thomas was expecting him to remain in the Bay of Bengal continuing to manage his business affairs. Following Thomas' departure Robert, who had not gone to China, lost everything when the Moors seized Bengal and all the English rapidly evacuated. There was a coolness in their letters for some years and Philadelphia's provided a longed-for warmth.

There is no suggestion of a romantic attachment between Philadelphia and Thomas but a great deal of evidence of a true friendship which would have been unusual if the pair had both lived in England at the time. Unfortunately, Thomas' archive is far from complete. He was not sentimental and, in the main, only papers connected to business were retained. No letters between the two survive from the time before Thomas' return to England in 1688 but a picture of their relationship can be built from the subsequent letters between Thomas and Philadelphia, her brother and her second husband although this extant correspondence is far from complete.

The first of the letters from Philadelphia, dated 12<sup>th</sup> October 1692, refers to one Thomas had sent the previous February congratulating her on her marriage to Charles Sherer and sending her his best wishes. At this time, Thomas had himself been married for just five months and she reciprocated the sentiments. It was to be his only marriage and appears to have been a love match, but Philadelphia had previously been widowed and hers may have been more a marriage of convenience. She was grateful for the kindness Thomas had already shown her three children by her previous marriage and she prayed for him to have an heir of his own. Mortality was high among the Europeans in India and most Englishmen did not survive beyond two monsoons. Death was foremost in Philadelphia's mind. She had lost her first husband, Mr Lesley.

Her brother's first wife had died in 1690. Robert had married Frances Fellows, possibly a relation of Philadelphia's step-father, at Fort St George in

<sup>11</sup> *Burning Women: Widows, Witches, and Early Modern European Travellers in India*, Pompa Banerjee, Palgrave MacMillan, New York, 2003, p91

*English Writing and India, 1600-1920: Colonizing Aesthetics*, Pramod K Nayar, Routledge, Abingdon, 2008, p53

*Widows, Pariahs, and Bayadères: India as Spectacle*, Binita Mehta, Associated University Presses, London, 2002, pp68-69

<sup>12</sup> London Metropolitan Archives, CLC 427 Ms03041/7(v) (no folios) 8 January 1710

September 1686.<sup>13</sup> Her brother had recently almost died of *the great sickness* and her one hope was that she would live long enough to see her mother again.

Charles had already taken on the costs and responsibility of her three children and now Philadelphia was caring for her brother's son, Thomas' godson named after him. Charles, like Thomas and Robert, was a mariner and free merchant but, unlike them, he was working for others rather than in business for himself. He was frequently away from Fort St George. Philadelphia's children were sent to England for her mother to care for. This became a source of some friction. Charles sent money, via Thomas, but Philadelphia's mother said she needed more. Charles had sent everything he had to spare. Robert explained that his sister had married well but had brought three children for her new husband to maintain and he may not be pleased if she should request more money for them.

Robert had himself remarried to the widow Ann Hicks<sup>14</sup> but she does not appear to have brought children to the marriage. Charles was later to demonstrate considerable tolerance of the eldest of Philadelphia's children causing us to question if Robert was truly passing on her comments or projecting his own attitudes onto Charles especially as just ten days later Robert wrote that Charles had arranged for his relatives to send £20 to Mrs Fellows.

Despite this, within sixteen months, Thomas was himself aiding Mrs Fellows and in January 1696, Charles wrote to Thomas requesting that he find a good passage to India for Robert (Robin) Lesley, Philadelphia's son. Despite Charles' constant complaints that trade was poor and how bad it was for him in particular, he was keen for Robin to learn his trade in the East Indies. Three years later, Robin and his two siblings were all reunited with their mother at Fort St George, the boys having travelled out on a separate ship from their sister. Robin had secured an apprenticeship and was doing well despite the poor economy since the arrival of the New (English) East India Company. Thomas had shown the sister *unmerited* and *unexpected favours* after the boy's departure. Throughout the correspondence there are indications that Thomas was exceeding the norm in helping his friend's children. There was also some unexpected and joyful news. After almost a decade of marriage, Philadelphia and Charles had had a son, named Samuel. Unfortunately, there was also bad news. Thomas' old friend and business partner Robert had died on a return voyage from Java. His widow had already remarried to a Mr Wigmore. Twenty months later, business was, if anything, worse.

Thomas continued to provide practical support to young Robin. When his *Rising Sun* sailed for India, he sent him three blank notebooks and a copy of his Malay-English Dictionary published in 1701. At the end of 1704, he wrote

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<sup>13</sup> *List of Marriages Registered in the Presidency of Fort St George, 1680-1800*, editor H Dodwell, Government Press, Madras, 1916, p4

<sup>14</sup> *List of Marriages Registered in the Presidency of Fort St George, 1680-1800*, editor H Dodwell, Government Press, Madras, 1916, p7

separate letters to Philadelphia, Robin and Charles to be delivered by his *Mary Galley* updating them with news from England. Demonstrating how well they knew each other, Thomas warned Philadelphia that her mother was aware that he was writing to her and, anticipating that Mrs Fellows would wish to see the replies, suggested that she refrained from writing anything about her in her letters to him. The *Mary Galley* also carried letters from Mrs Fellows and her sister.<sup>15</sup>

Unfortunately, the news that returned about Robin was not good. Having started as a model apprentice, he came under bad influences after accidentally being stranded in Malacca and making his own way to Amoy. He not only lost all his own money gambling but also that entrusted to him for trade. Having moved on to Kedah in Malaysia, he became sick and repented his folly. When he wrote to Thomas, Charles was hoping that Robin would be able to make his way back to Calcutta, where the Sherers were now living. Like most of Thomas' correspondents at this time who were suffering in the poor business climate for independent traders, Charles wished to return home together with Samuel. He was hoping that he may arrange an aristocratic patron for his son with Price Devereux, 9<sup>th</sup> Viscount Hereford. He was not setting his sights particularly high. Devereux, despite Hereford being the oldest, and thus ranked the premier, viscount of England, was an unremarkable member of the aristocracy. Charles also wanted to find a good job for himself. Philadelphia would have to be left in India because she was still too weak from a recent illness. Charles added that she was not alone. She had her children in India.

He had conveniently ignored the fact that Samuel was her son too and that Robin had not yet returned to Calcutta. Weak from illness, concerned about her eldest child and deserted by her husband and youngest child, we do not know how Philadelphia felt about the future, but it probably seemed bleak. She was to die shortly before the *Mary Galley* arrived in India. With no further news of Robin, it is not known if they were reunited before her death.

The last we hear of the Sherer family is in a letter from Charles in Kinsale dated 10 October 1705. He had left Calcutta with his young son the previous February and they had both arrived safely in Ireland. Charles wanted Thomas to advise Mrs Fellows of their safe arrival and, if possible, to send similar news to Philadelphia. He was planning to head to London before returning to India either in the Company's service or on an independent ship. His final pitiful comment was that he believed that he had wasted the best years of his life in India.<sup>16</sup>

Thomas had done all in his power to help Philadelphia and her family, but it appears to have been to no avail. However, it is only because of him that she is remembered at all.

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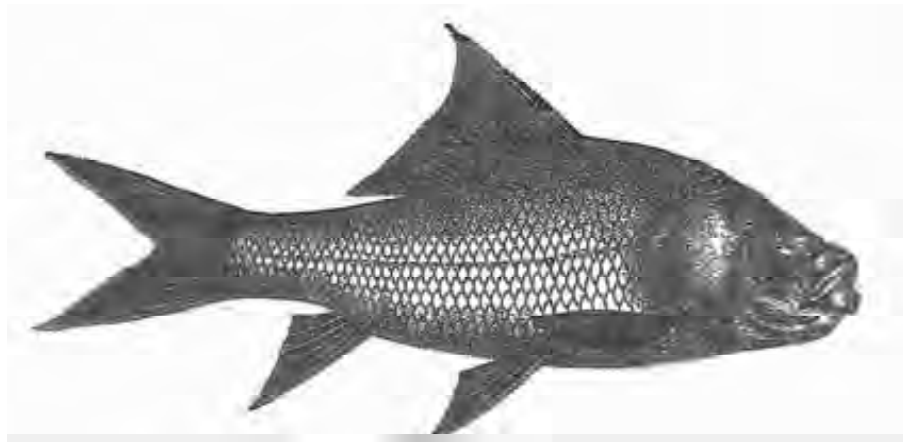
<sup>15</sup> *The Papers of ThomasBowrey (1669-1713)*, editor Richard Carnac Temple, Hakluyt Society, London, 1927, pp224-228

<sup>16</sup> London Metropolitan Archives, CLC 427 Ms24176 f1325

## Dr BABU and the CATLA – FISH:

MEGNA JUTE MILLS, WEST BENGAL

Ken Miln



Dr Babu, better known as Old Cha Cha by the jute wallahs living at Megna Compound during the 1940s, was our much-respected company doctor and a most dignified Bengali gentleman. The old man stood pole straight to over six feet. His spare frame usually supported a white cotton suit with the trouser bottoms held in place by cycle-clips: the good doctor always cycled his rounds of the mill's compound. Old Cha Cha's approach would be heralded by a series of loud squeaking noises caused, without doubt, by a lack of lubricating oil and the all-pervasive dust from the compound's cindered pathways. With his khaki-coloured topi (pith sun-helmet) held in place by a chin-strap, Old Cha Cha would have been chewing pan (a beetle-nut and lime concoction), the habitual use of which stained the old fellows' mouth a gory red and necessitated a deal of accurate expectoration.

The good doctor was, of course, fluent in English and spoke in measured, sonorous tones when discussing medical matters, but switched to a high-pitch staccato when on his favourite subject—angling on the compound's reservoir tank. It was Old Cha Cha who introduced, or beguiled, me into the mysterious craft of the Bengali angler.

This all began one hot, humid Sunday morning in May when I came upon the doctor squatting on his heels by the water's edge and staring intently at two peacock-quill floats positioned on the surface some three yards before him. Just behind the old man a chatta (umbrella), with handle bound to a nimbu (lime) tree, served to keep the searing sunlight from roasting his shiny dome; the topi dispensed with while he was thus engaged.

The scene was typical for a May month at our compound, hot and still with only the cawing of crows and the occasional deep-throated bellow from a water buffalo in the nearby Hooghly River to punctuate the silence. Water spiders danced across the water surface, merely surface-tension preventing their feather-light bodies from sinking into the muddy brew. Mud-skipper fish, with air breathing capability, jumped from the water to skip along the bank in search of minute prey. Every few moments a brightly coloured dragonfly would buzz over the surface to settle on one of Old Cha Cha's floats causing the good doctor to mutter,

"Arry! Arry! My dyna (right) float is being disturbed and shall not give proper signals from below!" The old man then gave his fishing line a twitch to dislodge the offending insect.

On his becoming aware of my approach, the doctor put his left forefinger to his lips as a sign for absolute quiet, while with a beckoning gesture from his right hand I was invited to sit by his side. As I squatted down beside my old Bengali mentor the shrill blast from a passing paddle-steamer, moving slowly up river from Calcutta, momentarily drew our attention from the two slim "detective" floats. However, within a few seconds we turned our heads to focus on the floats when, at virtually the same instant, we observed a large bubble pop on the surface and close to one float; this was followed by ominous swirls with tell-tale streaks of mud showing. While nosing around the bait, a big fish's fins were scraping along the bottom some six feet below! Old Cha Cha's jaw muscles tensed into knots and his long bony hands clamped around the rod nearest to the swirls as he prepared himself for what was to follow. As excitement reached fever pitch, my whole attention became riveted on the old fisherman who was, at this juncture, leaning forward in anticipation of a "take". It happened suddenly: one of the floats flicked madly around and then plummeted from sight; almost instantly thereafter, the good doctor struck with a swift upwards motion of the rod. The line tightened and the rod-tip curved over and downwards as if pointing a finger at whatever had taken Old Cha Cha's bait.



The good doctor unfolded his long legs to stand while "playing" his unseen adversary, by then moving off in a most deliberate manner and taking many yards of muga-line (hand-spun silk line). Our fish, for I felt at this stage of the proceedings totally involved, was in complete charge of affairs. As Old Cha Cha's archaic brass reel screeched with pain as the muga was ripped off, noticed that his line held numerous knots: the doctor had obviously used the same fishing tackle over many years, tying on lengths of new line to replace losses incurred during umpteen singular battles! Notwithstanding such trifles, and being a veritable magician in all things piscatorial, the good doctor could well handle fish which would "break" lesser mortals.

Our great fish, for all the signs pointed in that direction, forced us into a series of long hikes, during which we were obliged to negotiate a variety of obstacles including awkward nullahs (ditches), and around several branch-bound trees. Old Cha Cha would, time and again, pass his bamboo fishing rod to me through a tangle of branches to then continue "playing" our great fish. Some two hours passed, as I later learned, and the battle still very much one-sided with no sighting of the creature below, I noticed that several onlookers had gathered to witness the tamasha (rumpus).

Amongst this assembly stood several Jute-Wallahs (expatriate mill staff from Blighty), some of whom shouted words of encouragement, while others gave vent otherwise with, "Come on Old Cha Cha, let's have the burra muchli (big fish) out so that we may see what this tamasha is all about, eh!"

To which words the good doctor just produced a wide pan-stained grin of sheer pleasure, while winning back a few precious yards of muga-line.

Some minutes later, Old Cha Cha turned and beckoned to two malees (gardeners) who had left their place of work to join the crowd gathered along the bank behind us. While keeping their eyes fixed on the old fisherman, the malees moved quietly down the bank to remain close by and ready to act on any further instructions...

While matters were thus being duly determined, my thoughts ran back to the time when our good Doctor Babu had treated me for a particularly vicious bout of dengue-fever, a fever somewhat like malaria. During those long nights, during which time the fever peaked, I lay awake below the bedroom's electric punka (ceiling fan) listening to the regular swishing sound produced by the punka's whirling blades as the pushed warm, moisture-laden air upon my bed.



Although punkas did not actually cool the air, they were effective enough in keeping the ubiquitous mosquitos away from an area directly below and thereby permitting the weary patient a few hours' restless sleep. At certain intervals, while in a dreamlike state, i would hear the melancholy baying of jackals from far beyond our compound's wats: quite disturbing and eerie sounds! it was at such moments that I would long for morning when Old Cha Cha came to administer his magic powders and, far more importantly, to relate another of his wondrous fishing stories.

But I have digressed enough. Having "played" our great fish for over two hours we, the good doctor together with his young acolyte, brought the burra muchti close-in to the bank where the two malees, then standing waist-deep in water, skilfully placed a lungi (cotton garment) around the fish's bulky body. By bringing the two ends of the lungi firmly together above the dorsal fin, to form a secure sling, the malees were able to manoeuvre the big fish out of the water and safely onto the bankside.

Old Cha Cha's prize - our prize was a large catla-fish (Catla buehanani), one of the largest and most powerful freshwater species inhabiting the river-fed waterways of Bengal. Catla-fish can grow to over six feet in length while attaining upwards of 120 pounds. Our catla, as I was to learn later, weighed sixty-three pounds and measured four feet five inches. For a good number of years after the tamasha at Megna Mills Tank, an enlarged photograph of the catla-fish adorned the good doctor's dispensary wall behind and above the old man's desk. Included in the picture was, of course, Old Cha Cha complete with a wide, pan-seined grin. At his side stood a mesmerised young fisherman.

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Details of events are posted on the FIBIS Blog and via Social Media, but people can also subscribe to our events calendar. You can find our events calendar on the website at <https://www.fibis.org/events/>. To subscribe to the calendar, and have all our events automatically added to your Google Calendar whenever we add one, just click the button that says **Subscribe to our Calendar**.

## Events

October 2019

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
						1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	28	

[View all events](#)
[View calendar](#)

FIBIS hold two open meetings and surgeries in London every year. These are normally held in May/June and October/November. FIBIS also hold regional meetings and events at different locations throughout the UK, New Zealand and Australia, when possible, and hold workshops in tandem with Asian and African Studies at the University. You can also find FIBIS at various family history fairs through out the year.

- The RAJ 1st Examined a lecture series on British Jews on 11/03/2019 08.30
- Introductory to family history course in Asia and African Studies on 12/03/2019 12.00
- Regional meetings, workshops and social and cultural family history courses in Asian and African Studies on 12/03/2019 14.00
- The RAJ 2nd Examined a lecture series on British Jews on 08/04/2019 08.30
- Family Tree Live on 26/04/2019 09.00
- Family Tree Live on 27/04/2019 09.00
- The Manchester Jewish story: Jewish history and culture on 04/05/2019 12.00
- Jewish in Time on 24/05/2019 09.00
- The Community Group on 07/05/2019 12.00
- The Community Group on 08/05/2019 10.00
- BHM and Black History 2019 on 18/06/2019 19.30
- Jewish and Asian History and culture on 18/06/2019 19.30

[View all events](#)

Click button to subscribe to FIBIS Events Calendar

[Subscribe to our newsletter](#)

Details of all events we hold and attend are published on this website, Facebook, Twitter and Google Plus. FIBIS welcome any potential enquiries via the FIBIS YouTube channel for those that cannot attend in person.

# INDIA GRAVESTONES PROJECT

Nigel Penny

Our India Gravestones project has now been active for more than five years since we took up an offer from a photographer based in India who was prepared to visit cemeteries and photograph all gravestones which still contained a legible inscription. We agreed to pay him for all the photographs he sent through on the basis that we would transcribe the information, load it on our website and allow anyone access through the search facility. We also make available copies of the gravestone photos for a small donation.

Our motivation for doing this now was two-fold. Firstly, in the age of digital photography it is now possible to host a large photographic collection fully indexed and accessible on line. Secondly, we fear the condition of graveyards and of individual tombstones will continue to decline through the effects of time, neglect and damage. A record of what is there now will capture and preserve information before it is too late. In many cases, we feel this preservation of a photographic record is the only practicable form of conservation available. We were very pleased to have been awarded a grant (which has since been renewed) from The Pilgrim Trust, a UK charity with preservation of heritage as one of its areas of interest. They accepted our case that in circumstances such as these a photographic record is a valid form of conservation.

With this work we are also maintaining close links with our sister organisation, the British Association for Cemeteries in South Asia (BACSA). Their priority being the preservation and maintenance of cemeteries, but with their funds inevitably limited and the major restoration of cemeteries in decline it is probably beyond anyone's means.

In the last year alone, our photographer has sent us more than 3,000 photographs. He has visited Maharashtra centred on Pune (Poona) but including Ahmednagar and various hill stations. More recently he has been in Saharanpur, Kanpur and Allahabad. Our aim is to cover locations with army cantonments or railway centres, but which are not on the "tourist trail" and therefore have been little photographed or recorded in recent times. Having said that, 2 locations recently visited (Saharanpur and Aurangabad) are the subject of other articles in this edition.

We have found transcribing inscriptions from photographs to be a hard and slow task and I am very grateful to our volunteer transcribers for attempting it. Even with a good quality photograph words can be difficult to decipher and the use of a flowery script, damage to the stone and loss of lead lettering compounds the problem. Also, unlike a set of records, gravestones have no standard format so extracting key information such as names and dates is often very difficult. Nevertheless, progress is being made and each completed location has been uploaded to the web site and announced.

The very fact that an organisation from the UK is taking an interest in Indian cemeteries is encouraging others on the ground. Some priests in charge of cemeteries are hopeful that we can provide funds for restoration work, but while we have passed requests to our sister organisation BACSA we know that with limited resources there will be disappointment. Meanwhile, our involvement has stimulated clearance work in cemeteries to make graves more accessible.

We are also receiving offers to provide more photographs, both from interested residents and from visitors who were looking for family graves. FIBIS will be very happy to receive any such contributions and we hope we can expand this photographic collection over time so that it covers cemeteries throughout the Indian sub-continent.

## TRANSCRIPTIONS UPLOADED IN THE LAST YEAR

<u>Cemeteries</u>	<u>No. of graves.</u>
Mhow	705
Jalna	102
Nasik	46
Aurangabad	65
Ahmednagar	390
Kamptee	130
Lonavala	210
Mahabaleshwar	76
Panchgani	81
Pune – Dhobi Ghat	171
TOTAL	1,976

With more to come from Pune to follow shortly.

If you would like to volunteer to help Transcribe these or any other records please contact Nigel at [transcriptions@fibis.org](mailto:transcriptions@fibis.org).

## NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

**JOHN K PALMER** – John, following a career in IT and now interested in the people and events centred around Aurangabad, Maharashtra in the early 1800s sparked by family history.

**SUE DAWSON-SMALLWOOD** – Sue was born in Kingston, Surrey, attended Tiffin Girls School, studied graphic design at Hounslow Borough College. She has also played in numerous bands, since the age of 12, and currently is with her band “SLapPeR. Aside from a 3 years stint at a graphic design agency, in Bermuda, she has lived and worked in and around Kingston, where Arthur Allan lived with his family; hence where his descendants have maintained their roots for over 120 years.

**IAIN SHORE** -- Iain, was born in Hereford and attended Clifton College from age 7, he graduated from the Royal Military Academy, Sandhurst but out of sheer boredom he resigned his commission. After working as a dustman, farm contractor, storeman and pub manager, joined HM Customs & Excise, and spent ten years in a variety of interesting and rather secret jobs. He joined a team of tax litigation specialists', working across Europe, West Africa, North America and Australia and became an adviser to the CBI Tax Committees and on several Government working parties. He has been a speaker and panel member at numerous high-profile Tax and legal seminars retiring in 2014. Ian is married to Kshama, his hobbies are family research, travel, archaeology and military history.

**KIMBERLY J LINDSAY** - Kimberley is a Medal Collector but not just a medal collector but one who researches the receiver of the medal and the story behind the medal. Kimberly is also interested in: The Raj: IA, IARO and Politics 1897-1947. Ne also has Three AIF MCs in the family

**SUE PAUL** – Sue is a retired IT Project Manager and family historian who has written the biography of Captain Thomas Bowrey, a late seventeenth century/early eighteenth-century East Indies mariner and merchant based in Fort St George and discovered through her one-name study.

**KENNETH MILN** – Kenneth is an avid collector of medals who also researches the story behind the medals he collects.

**VALMAY YOUNG** – Valmay is the Social and Media Manager at FIBIS as well as being a Trustee.

**NIGEL PENNY** – Nigel is responsible for Transcriptions at FIBIS as well as being our main Fundraiser and a Trustee.

## NOTICES

### EDITOR & VOLUNTEERS.

Families in British India Society is seeking a volunteer for the position of Editor who at their choice could also be a Trustee. The new Editor would be supported by a small sub-committee of trustees. We are also looking for other volunteers to support our various activities in the transcription, research and other roles as well. We are reliant on all our various Volunteers in order to provide the data and information that all our 1,600+ members need or want so if you are interested in Genealogy, experienced or still learning (as we all are) then please consider volunteering to help other members as many of them have helped us all over the 20 years of our existence. Many of the roles can be done from home and if you wish to and the role needs you to travel to the British Library then we will cover reasonable travel costs. Please email [chairman@fibis.org](mailto:chairman@fibis.org). with any questions or for details. I look forward to hearing from you.

### FIBIS MEETINGS – SAVE THE DATE!

15<sup>th</sup> June 2019. Saturday – AGM and Open Meeting at the Resource for London. 356 Holloway Road, London, N7 6PA. Tel: 020 7697 4005

12<sup>th</sup> October 2019. Saturday – Open Meeting at the Union Jack Club, 1 Sandell Street, London, SE1.



# **SOCIETY INFORMATION**

## **GENERAL ENQUIRIES:**

Enquiries, by post or email, should initially be sent to the Membership Secretary: Libby Rice, 71 Manor Lane, Sunbury on Thames, Middlesex, TW16 6JE. Email: [membership@fibis.org](mailto:membership@fibis.org).

## **ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP SUBSCRIPTION:**

The cost of membership is £15 for the UK, £16 for Europe, and £18 for elsewhere abroad. Cheques (in Sterling) should be made out to 'FIBIS' and sent to the Membership Secretary (address above). Subscriptions can be paid/renewed online with a credit card or by PayPal at [http://www.new.fibis.org/products\\_page](http://www.new.fibis.org/products_page). For special arrangements for payment by Australian members: see below.

## **AUSTRALIA & NEW ZEALAND:**

For liaison with FIBIS members and with India-related family history activities in Australia or New Zealand contact: Mary Anne Gourley - [aus@fibis.org](mailto:aus@fibis.org). Members may pay subscriptions in Australian dollars (A\$35). Cheques should be made payable to 'FIBIS' and sent to 2 Arura Court, Doncaster, Victoria 3108, Australia; or can be paid direct to FIBIS Westpac Account No.15-0975 BSB 032-636; quoting your Membership No. as the Reference; or by PayPal via the FIBIS website.

## **WEBSITE:**

The FIBIS website [www.fibis.org](http://www.fibis.org) includes nearly 2 million entries of Europeans or Anglo-Indians who lived or saw civil or military service in India. Many of these names were collected thanks to transcriptions undertaken by FIBIS volunteers (see below), and many have been incorporated from the website of Cathy Day, to whom we are greatly indebted. The FIBIS website also includes an area for members' own material: for example, the results of their own researches or interesting documents or photos in their possession. Contact the Website and Social Media Manager, Valmay Young ([valmay@fibis.org](mailto:valmay@fibis.org)), if you would like to contribute.

## **RESEARCH FOR MEMBERS:**

Members are encouraged to place enquiries in the members' area of the FIBIS website, the FIBIS Facebook group 'British India Family History' and the RootsWeb India List, as well as using online searchable databases. There are also facilities for accessing LDS films via local Family History Centres. Alternatively, members should use the India Office Records, to which the best introduction is Baxter's Guide: Biographical Sources in the India Office Records (3rd edition, FIBIS, 2004). Members requiring further assistance should contact our Research Coordinator, Beverly Hallam, 32 Broughton Road, London, W13 8QW (email: [research@fibis.org](mailto:research@fibis.org)). FIBIS members seeking research assistance should quote their membership number.

## **TRANSCRIPTION PROJECTS:**

Thanks to the cooperation of the British Library, and many individual contributors, large quantities of biographical data and photographs of memorials from the India Office Records and other sources have been transcribed and uploaded to the FIBIS website. These projects are ongoing. If you would like to volunteer as a transcriber, please contact the Transcriptions Coordinator: Nigel Penny (email: [transcriptions@fibis.org](mailto:transcriptions@fibis.org)).



**Interior view of the Elephanta Caves.**

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