

Chapter Nine:

Bestowal of Favours I

‘as he had your Hon^r protection & countenance’¹

Patronage provided by men like Robert Cowan, gave much needed aid to junior members of the East India Company service, and simultaneously helped to repay patronage debts. It enabled the disparate members of the Factories to form cohesive links through mutual trading arrangements, and benefited recipients and providers by allowing cargo and destination diversification, as well as spreading financial risk. There were, of course, gradations in the dispersal of such largesse, dependent on the size of the debt owed by the provider, personal feelings, and prevailing circumstances in the public and private trading spheres. This chapter will explore some non-kin associations made by Cowan, the reasons behind his actions, and the amount and type of aid he asked from others, and what he gave and denied to his own, and other people’s clients. Chapter Ten will investigate Cowan’s major kinship patronage investment that affected his decisions on whether or not to accept some prospective clients. These two chapters will show the importance, both long and short term, of reciprocal patronage for both kin and non-kin members of the East India Company service.

¹ Cowan to James Macrae, 18 January 1727, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1C.

Cowan, and others in positions of power in India, granted patronage either directly or through third parties in the network. The men discussed depict the type of long-term aid given by him to non-related recipients, and these serve to illustrate a practice that occurred in all the other factories run by the East India Company. The first of these men was William Henry Draper. The Draper family was another complicated patron/client/kinship group. Draper, like so many others, had a somewhat chequered career in the Company. He rose through the ranks to become a Senior Merchant, and in 1726 'at the desire of his Friends' he was appointed Land Pay Master and Pay Master of the Breach, a situation noted by the Company as being 'a Post of very considerable Trust'.² Draper was sent as Chief of Persia in 1727, and was later suspended on charges of 'Embezzeling the cash', but after clearing his name he was reinstated to the Service. He became Mayor of Bombay in 1728.³ In 1734 a Hugh Draper was granted a posting at Bombay, and Cowan and Henry Lowther were instructed to give him assistance by John Drummond at the 'request of Sir William ...'.⁴ As Cowan had told John Gould Jr. that Sir William Strickland, the then Secretary of War, was William Henry Draper's 'chief dependence' it is more than likely that he was the gentleman referred to in both of these cases, and that the two Drapers were related.⁵ According to Cowan, Draper had 'always had my countenance', and he had also obtained Lowther's aid by 1727.⁶ In return, their client had occasion to stoutly defend both patrons in 1734. Draper had

² OIOC, E/3/115, *Original Drafts of Despatches to Bengal, Madras and Bombay, 1725-51*, President and Council Bombay, London, 13 April 1726, para. 65.

³ OIOC, E/4/450, *Bombay Abstract Letters Received, Bombay General Letter*, 13 January 1727, para.45: 'Mr William Henry Draper to succeed (in Persia) Chief when he returns'; P.B.M. Malabari, *Bombay in the Making: Being mainly a History of the Origin and Growth of Judicial Institutions in the Western Presidency, 1661-1726*, T. Fisher Unwin, London, 1910, p.433; G.W. Forrest, (ed) *Selections from the Bombay Secretariat*, Government Central Press, Bombay, 1887, Vol. II, pp.33, 47.

⁴ G.K. McGilvary, 'East India patronage and the political management of Scotland', PhD thesis, Open University, 1989, p.316; NAS, *Abercairny*, GD 24/Sect.1/464/N-O, ff.78-8, Hugh Draper to John Drummond, 5 February 1734

⁵ Cowan to John Gould Jr., 20 January 1732, PRONI RCP D654/B1/2C; Cowan to Henry Lowther, 18 March 1731, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1G. Cowan advised Lowther of political appointments in England including 'S^r W^m Strickland Sec^y of Warr'; G.P. Judd, *Members of Parliament 1734-1832*, Archon Books, Hamden, Connecticut, 1972 (1955) p.346.

⁶ Cowan to William Henry Draper, 18 October 1727, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1C.

specifically written to Sir Matthew Decker stating ‘in vindication of their Conduct in order to wipe off some aspersions that had I believe very unjustly been cast upon that of Govr Cowan’s particularly.’⁷

The second man was Henry Kellett who had been in the East from at least 1724, and was by 1728 the Chief of Mahim, a subordinate factory to Bombay.⁸ Cowan told Henry Cairnes that Kellett had been under his protection since his arrival in India, and advised him that he ‘behaves very well, you should write to him as he tells me he does frequently to you.’⁹ Cowan expressed his gratitude to Kellett for caring for his own ‘marine affairs’ and also asked him to adjudicate in a pay dispute which threatened to involve Cowan, with the risk of possible damage to his reputation.¹⁰ Henry was ‘uneasie’ about his own situation a couple of months later, and Cowan wrote that he was ‘really at a loss’ on ‘how to advise’ him. The problem seemed to stem from Kellett’s relationship with William Phipps, because Cowan bluntly recommended that he ‘keep in favour w^h him’.¹¹ Henry had other members of his family in India in 1730, when two sisters and a brother arrived with the sanction of John Gould, Jr.¹² Captain Ralph Kellett was listed as a resident of Bombay, and Commander of the *Mary* later in that decade.¹³ Henry Kellett suffered a couple of life threatening illnesses in 1729 and

⁷ NAS, *Abercairny*, GD24/1/464/N/76, Bombay, 5 February 1734, Draper to John Drummond; Cowan to William Henry Draper, 18 October 1727, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1C. Cowan had obviously asked Lowther to provide patronage for Draper, as he advised the latter of Lowther’s efforts on his behalf.

⁸ Cowan to Henry Kellett, 13 March 1724, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1B; Cowan to John Hunter, 25 February 1728, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1C; Forrest, *op.cit.*, p.47. Kellett was listed as Seventh in council in the second half of 1728.

⁹ Cowan to Henry Cairnes, 9 September 1726, *ibid.*

¹⁰ Cowan to Henry Kellett, 28 June 1724, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1B.

¹¹ Cowan to Henry Kellett, c. October 1724, *ibid.*

¹² Cowan to John Gould, Jr. 20 January 1731, PRONI RCP D654/B1/2B. From Cowan’s letter it would seem that the sisters may have remained in India, but the brother returned with Capt. Beresford. Henry Kellett hoped that Gould would continue his ‘kindness’ to his young brother.

¹³ Forrest, *op.cit.*, Vol. I, p.171.

1731, which Cowan did not expect him to survive.¹⁴ However, as Cowan left him a legacy in his will, dated 1735, it seems that Kellett's constitution was far stronger than Cowan realised.¹⁵

Both Kellett and Draper pandered to their patron by asking him to stand as godparent to their sons, and even went so far as to name them after him. Draper called his boy Cowan Henry Draper, but Kellett went one step further, and named his son Robert Cowan Kellett. Cowan remembered both of these boys in his will to the extent of £62/10/0 and £125/0/0 respectively.¹⁶ Clearly two names gained a better return than one. Cowan became godfather to his client Charles Whitehill's son in 1728.¹⁷ Cowan was also asked by Daniel Taudin to 'stand as Godfather' to his child, but Cowan said that he would only do so if the baby was a boy and gave his reason as: 'I'm not fond of girls'.¹⁸ Cowan did, however, stand as godfather to one girl. He bequeathed Wilhelmina Paauw the sum of £1,000.¹⁹ Her father, Arnoldus, another of Cowan's clients, had left an estate in 1731 of about £6,250 with some jewellery valued at about £187. Cowan felt that the orphan's needs were far greater than those of his godsons.²⁰ Paauw was made

¹⁴ Cowan to Henry Lowther, 15 May 1729, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1D; Cowan to William Phipps, 8 September 1731, PRONI RCP D654/B1/2C. 'Poor Kellett lies at the point of death. He cannot I fear survive many days, we have had a most sickly season...'

¹⁵ Cowan to Henry Lowther, *loc.cit.*; Cowan to William Phipps, *loc.cit.*; TNA, DEL 10/113, *The Will of Robert Cowan*, 4 January 1735. The bequest was Cowan's gold watch, and he left a 'Table diamond ring' to Henry's wife, Johanna.

¹⁶ *ibid.*

¹⁷ Cowan to Charles Whitehill, 31 January 1728, PRONI RCP D/654/B1/1C.

¹⁸ Cowan to Daniel Taudin, 13 August 1729, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1D; H. Furber, *Bombay Presidency in the Mid-Eighteenth Century*, Asia Publishing House, Bombay, 1965. pp.38-39. Taudin evidently did not produce a son, as he only left legacies in his will for two daughters, and there was no mention of a godchild by the name of Taudin in Cowan's Will; Cowan to John Hinde, 12 September 1729, *ibid.* This sudden dislike of girls might well have stemmed from the news of the end of Cowan's engagement with Elizabeth Gould.

¹⁹ TNA, DEL 10/113, *loc.cit.*, Cowan to Henry Lowther, 14 May 1730, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1F. 'You will ere long this reaches you be undeceived that Mrs & not Mr Paauw is dead.'; Cowan to Archibald Grant, 12 September 1731, PRONI RCP D654/B1/2C. Advising of the death of Arnoldus Paauw on 20 May 1731; OIOC, E/4/450, *op.cit.* 12 September 1731, para.104. Arnoldus Paauw 5th in Council dyed 26th [May].

²⁰ Cowan to William Phipps, 8 September 1731, & 'Account of Jewels sent home on the *Stretham*', 20 January 1732, PRONI RCP D654/B1/2C.

Assistant to the Bank sometime before March 1725, with a gratuity of £50 per annum paid to him the following year.²¹ He was appointed General Storekeeper, with a recommendation in 1728 that he be placed on the Board at the 'next Vacancy'.²² Arnoldus took his place 'as youngest of Council' in January 1729.²³ At this time he was also classified as a Junior Merchant, at an annual salary of £30.²⁴ The Directorate announced in February of that year that he was 'a person very well recommended to Us for his Capacity and Diligence, particularly in the Business of the Mint and the Bank wherein we recommend him still to be employed.'²⁵ Cowan used Paauw, with Hugh Bidwell, in negotiations with the Portuguese in late 1730 to ensure solidarity against attacks by the Marathas.²⁶ William Phipps also thought highly of Paauw, as he made him one of his attorneys for his affairs when he left India.²⁷ In notifying the Directorate of Paauw's demise, Cowan generously described him as a man of 'uncommon qualifications'.²⁸

Martin French, a military captain based in the Persian Gulf, was Cowan's closest confidant in the East. Why he chose French for this role is not clear, but a connection from Ireland is likely, as there was a prominent merchant and banking family of that name in Galway. The family traded to Portugal, and Martin had a cousin

²¹ OIOC, E/4/450, *op.cit.*, *Bombay General Letter*, 16 March 1725, para 74, & 25 January 1726, para. 111.

²² *ibid.*, 30 September 1728, para. 127.

²³ *ibid.*, 8 January 1729, para 98. Cowan promoted Henry Lowther to the Chiefship of Surat, thus causing a vacancy in Council.

²⁴ Forrest, *op.cit.*, Vol. II, p.47.

²⁵ OIOC, E/3/115, *Original Drafts of Despatches to Bengal, Madras and Bombay 1725-51*, 27 February 1729, para 62.

²⁶ W.S. Desai, *Bombay and the Marathas up to 1774*, Munshiram Manoharlal, New Delhi, 1970, pp.83-84.

²⁷ Cowan to William Phipps, 26 January 1730, PRONI RCP D654/B1/2B. Cowan was named as the other attorney.

²⁸ Cowan to Edward Harrison, 12 September 1731, PRONI RCP D654/B1/2C.

resident in Lisbon.²⁹ Cowan solicited, and received, William Phipps's aid for French in 1724.³⁰ At that time French had been posted to Bandar Abbas, and Cowan advised him that Phipps would appoint him 'youngest in Council' whilst he remained in the Military, thus giving him the opportunity to exert himself in the 'company's service in a double capacity.'³¹ Cowan said he would have preferred to have French with him in Mocha, but he felt that his prospects were better at Bandar Abbas. French expressed his gratitude for Cowan's efforts thus:

I have been almost all my life a stranger to good fortune till I had the Honour to be known to you but thank God and my good friend Mr Cowan I have not been a little successful since my arrival in the Gulf, for I can now tell my Benefactor that I have got 10000 Rup^s [£1,250] fairly & honestly, with which I hope to work through a troublesome world.³²

Such obsequiousness was lacking in the rest of French's correspondence. However, another ingratiating response came in 1729 when John McKenzie congratulated Cowan thus:

Honoured Sir, With great joy I embrace the opportunity to Congratulate your succession to the Chair in which I wish you to flourish with all the desired happiness and prosperity; for as the Sun by its warming Beames enlivens the vegetable world after there long confinement with cold frosty weather So that I am ane emblem of the same has been supported and preserved by the influence of your generous and bountiful assistance beg liberty to inform Your Hon^r that it's a duty incumbent upon me always to acknowledge your favours and returne Your Hon^r hearty thanks with a constant endeavour to

²⁹ L. M. Cullen, *Anglo-Irish Trade 1660-1800*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1968, p.92; Cowan to Martin French, 12 April 1725, PRONI RCP D/654/B1/1C. Cowan said that William 'left your cousin French well at Lisbone in Sept 1723.'

³⁰ Cowan to William Phipps, 15 April 1724, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1B; Cowan to Robert Newlin, 16 April 1724, *ibid*. Cowan recommended French to the new Chief of Gombroon at the same time; Cowan to John Fotheringham, 16 January 1727, & to Thomas Waters 17 January 1727, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1C. He also sought, and gained, patronage for French from Fotheringham and Waters.

³¹ Cowan to Martin French, 16 April 1724, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1B.

³² French to Robert Cowan, 21 November 1725, PRONI RCP D654/B1/4A, 15A-G; Cowan to Martin French, 18 October 1727, 27 March 1728, & 2 April 1729, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1C; Cowan to Martin French, 8 October 1729, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1E. This income was derived from private trade dealings, some of which involved Cowan and other Company servants

serve Your Hon^r with the best of sincer affections and prayers wishing you to life health and prosperity . . .³³

Cowan must have been delighted to receive such encomiums especially as the copies of these letters would surely have impressed those in power in Leadenhall Street.

Included in a patron's obligations was the defence of his client when and if that was required. Cowan and Phipps had to unite in 1726 to protect French from attacks by East India Company servant Isaac Housay. Cowan stated that Housay's 'Conduct in regards to you is in no ways acceptable to his Hon^r & I believe he has signified as much to him in his letter.'³⁴ French was suspended, but Cowan confidently assured him that he would be reinstated as Phipps was still his 'well-wisher.' Cowan pledged that he would endeavour to move him to Basra, as he thought it was not worth his while to return to military service in Bombay.³⁵ For his attempts to discredit French, Housay was recalled by Phipps from Basra in January 1727, and he subsequently sailed to England in October 1728.³⁶ Cowan notified French of his proposed appointment in January 1727, and by the end of the year stated that he hoped to be able to increase his allowance, and to send him a 'Junior Servant' to assist.³⁷

Justifying his sponsorship of French to Henry Lyell, he praised his client's successful recovery of R^s100,000 [£12,500] for the Government in 1727, and for good

³³ McKenzie to Robert Cowan, 26 January 1729, PRONI RCP D/654/B1/5J.

³⁴ Cowan to Martin French, 17 March 1726, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1C.

³⁵ Cowan to Martin French, 20 October 1726, *ibid*.

³⁶ OIOC, E/4/460, *Correspondence with India. Abstracts of Letters Received from Bombay, 1726-1731*, 13 January 1727, para. 45. '... it has induced our recalling Mr Isaac Housay and sending thither Mr Thomas Waters to Supervise and bring them into better order', i.e. the affairs in the Gulf of Persia.

³⁷ Cowan to Martin French, 17 January 1727 & 8 December 1727, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1C.

trading results that year through his 'prudent management'.³⁸ To James Macrae he described French as a 'verry sensible Judicious man & has hitherto acted to the general satisfaction.'³⁹ He wrote to French in October 1728, just prior to becoming Governor of Bombay, to say that he believed that French's allowances had been augmented, but if this was not the case, he said 'as soon as I get into the Chair I shall order you a reasonable Competency.' He signed this letter 'Your truly Affect^c friend'.⁴⁰ He was as good as his word, because on 8 January 1729 he said that French's allowance was 'insufficient for his expences', and ordered that he receive a very generous '100 Tomands p.annum'.⁴¹ Later that year he notified French that the Court of Directors had, instead, given him an allowance of '½ p Cent on all goods sold at Bussorah & not consigned to you', and where this applied, he was not to charge more than '50 Crux p month for your Expences as it was first settled.'⁴² This was a more realistic amount, akin to the 'reasonable Competency' promised a year earlier. Why did Cowan feel the need to provide French with such largesse, and what did he expect in return for this generosity?

In repayment, Cowan wanted French to be the safe conduit for his letters to and from William Phipps, after the latter had returned to England. He said in 1729 he expected letters from Mr Phipps 'every three months by way of Aleppo so you must be verry Careful of forwarding them to Gombroon as soon as they come to hand', and,

³⁸ Cowan to Henry Lyell, 22 December 1727, & 20 March 1728, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1C.

³⁹ Cowan to James Macrae, 18 April 1728, *ibid.*

⁴⁰ Cowan to Martin French, 18 October 1728, *ibid.*

⁴¹ OIOC, E/4/450, *op.cit.* President Cowan at Bombay, 8 January 1729, para. 112. The Oxford English Dictionary gives the value of a tomand in 1698 at £3, therefore 100 Tomands p.annum was the equivalent of £300.

⁴² Cowan to Martin French, 8 October 1729, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1E; I am indebted to Dr. I.B. Watson for the following information: 'Crux' = Cruzado. At this time, the silver Portuguese Cruzado was worth approximately 2s 6d, providing French with a maximum annual expenses allowance of £78/0/0.

later, that a letter for Phipps was to be forwarded as quickly as possible through the Mediterranean ports.⁴³ He wanted his correspondence with Phipps kept from prying Company eyes, and that was why he used French to receive and despatch his mail to the former Governor. The importance of this correspondence was evident from his concerned comments in 1731:

I am verry much disappointed in not receiving any letters from Mr Phipps Mr Horne writes me that he had letters from London to the 14th Aug^t I still hope I shall receive some from you before the Rains⁴⁴

Cowan wanted these letters channelled through trustworthy hands. His experiences with the fickleness of other Company servants had obviously led him to be extremely cautious in his choice of agents. He delegated other tasks to French that included finding a pair of 'hansom horses' fit for his new chaise.⁴⁵ He asked for more horses the following year, but tried to rescind the order, saying he could get them cheaper in Surat. On both occasions the horses arrived as gifts, and Cowan admonished French's generosity: 'I desire you'll charge me with their cost I expect no such presents were you much better able to make them than you are and without any you may depend on all the good offices I can do.'⁴⁶ This was a clear example where Cowan considered his client had more than repaid his patronage debt through services already rendered.

When there was a threat of a reduction in trade through Basra, Cowan promised French that 'the Company will continue your Residency, and whenever it is with drawn

⁴³ Cowan to Martin French, 8 October 1729, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1E; Cowan to Martin French, 9 February 1731, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1G. Aleppo was an important trading point in Northern Syria, strategically placed midway between the sea and the River Euphrates.

⁴⁴ Cowan to Martin French, 29 March 1731, *ibid.*

⁴⁵ Cowan to Martin French, 17 January 1727, & 27 March 1728, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1C.

⁴⁶ Cowan to Martin French, 2 April 1729, *ibid.*, Cowan to Martin French, 24 February 1730, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1E.

you will be intitled to some other Employ in the Service.’⁴⁷ He continued to promote the interests of French, and to express his gratitude, Cowan later sent him a ‘gold repeating watch made by the best Master in England.’⁴⁸ Martin French was of far more use to Cowan and Phipps out of India than he would have been in Bombay or Surat. French remained in the Gulf after Cowan returned to England, but died during an epidemic that devastated that region in 1738.⁴⁹

From the beginning of his time in India, Cowan was greatly indebted to James Macrae, but it did not stop him from asking for his assistance in the endless round of reciprocal patronage. One of his major requests was for patronage for his friend Robert Lennox. Macrae originally declined to help Lennox because he had arrived in India in 1726 without the Company’s permission. He later changed his mind, and first thought of sending him to Surat, but, by the end of 1727, he had established Lennox at Fort Marlborough in Sumatra. Lennox addressed Cowan as ‘Dear Bob’, and designated him as his ‘old acquaintance’.⁵⁰ He also told Cowan he had been appointed to Council, and added, ‘what is a great pleasure to me in getting of money is, that it is got there with very little trouble.’ He said he received ‘a tolerable allowance’, and added that he hoped ‘to lay by 1000 pannum it is a good beginning and I am satisfied.’⁵¹ Two months later his initial euphoria had abated somewhat as he described Fort Marlborough as ‘a very melancholy place to live in.’⁵² Cowan dutifully expressed his gratitude to Macrae:

⁴⁷ Cowan to Martin French, 9 February 1731, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1G.

⁴⁸ Cowan to Martin French, 13 April 1731, *ibid.*

⁴⁹ K.N. Chaudhuri, ‘The English East India Company and Its Decision-Making’, in *East India Company Studies: Papers presented to Professor Sir Cyril Philips*, eds K. Ballhatchet & J. Harrison, Asian Research Service, Hong Kong, 1986, p.111.

⁵⁰ Macrae to Robert Cowan, 5 August 1726, PRONI RCP D654/B1/4B.

⁵¹ Lennox to Robert Cowan, 7 October 1727, *ibid.*

⁵² Lennox to Robert Cowan, 17 December 1727, *ibid.*

I am glad you have so handsomely provided for my friend Mr Lennox, had he come this way my best offices should not have been wanting to serve him but I look upon him to be settled much more to his advantage than any thing I could have done for him.⁵³

At this point Cowan was still unconfirmed in his own position of power, and it was very difficult for him to make substantial promises for the careers of others while his own was still in abeyance. Never loath to remind a patron of his ongoing responsibilities, Cowan was again barracking for Lennox with Macrae in early 1728.

I hope his conduct will secure to him the continuation of your Hon^{rs} favour & protection, by which in a little time he may gett a competency & live easy. I know he has a cappacity to equal any Post & I can not doubt of his gratitude & respect to his Benefactor
⁵⁴
 ...

He was absolutely delighted eight months later when he heard the news that ‘honest Bob Lennox’ had been confirmed as Deputy Governor at Fort Marlborough. He thought that the opportunities provided to Lennox in this appointment would ‘...justifie your further favouring him as opportunity offers & he continues to merit.’⁵⁵

Cowan’s confidence in the viability of Sumatra as a place wherein Lennox could make his fortune waned somewhat over the next fifteen months, and he suggested that Lennox be recalled before Macrae’s retirement, in order to be recommended to his successor at Madras. Such a placement, as it was closer to Bombay, would also enable Governor Cowan to ‘serve him’, as he told Macrae that he had ‘a particular regard for him’.⁵⁶ Their association stems from Ireland, as Lennox’s father was Alderman James

⁵³ Cowan to James Macrae, 18 January 1727, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1C; Cowan to Mrs. Stirling, 19 January 1727, *ibid.* Lennox had been made Resident at Mocho Mocho, and Third in Council at Fort Marlborough.

⁵⁴ Cowan to James Macrae, 25 February 1728, *ibid.*

⁵⁵ Cowan to James Macrae, 8 September 1728, *ibid.*

⁵⁶ Cowan to James Macrae, 20 December 1729, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1E.

Lennox of Londonderry.⁵⁷ James Lennox and John Cowan were involved in land dealings in Ireland in the late seventeenth century, and this alone would have spurred Cowan to do his best for Robert.⁵⁸ Robert Lennox was one of Cowan's oldest friends and, as such, merited a substantial amount of support. Cowan's request went unheeded as Lennox was still listed at Fort Marlborough in December 1730, as Second in Council.⁵⁹ Macrae had decided that Lennox stood a better chance of advancement where he was, and this was proved to be the case, as he became Deputy Governor of Benkulen in 1736, a position he held for ten years.⁶⁰

Cowan contacted John Hinde, who was stationed in Bengal, about Captain Robert MacNeale who was recommended by Hinde's 'Cuzⁿ Jack Gould'.⁶¹ MacNeale was promoted from Third Mate to Master by his Captain, Benjamin Braund. This was shortly after Cowan had mentioned him to Hinde.⁶² According to one of the General Letters from Bombay, Braund promoted MacNeale to 'accommodate the owners of the William'.⁶³ It is not known who the multiple 'owners' were, although one of them was Cowan, and it is likely that Henry Lowther was another, as he had received a dividend of £182 in March for a trading venture of the *William* to Basra.⁶⁴ Cowan was

⁵⁷ J. Agnew, *Belfast Merchant Families in the Seventeenth Century*, Four Courts Press, Dublin, 1996, pp.218, 231-232.

⁵⁸ See Chapter 1, p.37-39.

⁵⁹ OIOC, E/3/115, *Original Drafts of Despatches to Bengal, Madras and Bombay 1725-51*, 4 December 1730, para.41; H. Furber, *Rival Empires of Trade in the Orient, 1600-1800*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1976, p.279.

⁶⁰ J. Bastin, *The British in West Sumatra (1685-1825)*, Kuala Lumpur, University of Malaya Press, 1965, p. xli.

⁶¹ Cowan to John Hinde, 2 August 1728, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1C; Cowan to John Gould, 15 April 1723, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1A. John Hinde was eventually based in Bengal, having arrived in Surat in 1723 '3^d Supra Cargo of the Samuel'; Cowan to Mrs Cairnes, 12 January 1727, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1C: 'I hear your Cuzⁿ Jack Hinde do's very well at Bengall & is universally beloved'.

⁶² OIOC, E/4/450, *op.cit.*, *Bombay General Letter*, 30 September 1728, para. 100. 'Captain Braund to accommodate the Owners of the William spared them his Third Mate for a Master, Robert Macneal'; For Cowan patronage of Braund see Chapter 8, p.293.

⁶³ OIOC, E/4/450, *op.cit.*, *Bombay General Letter*, 30 September 1728, para. 100.

⁶⁴ Cowan to Henry Lowther, 15 March 1729, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1C.

‘the only owner remaining’ by April 1729, and as he thought it as ‘a verry weak and indifferent ship,’ he decided to sell it.

The sale did not eventuate, and Cowan continued to use the *William*, but, unfortunately, in November 1729 it was attacked by pirates.⁶⁵ After a brave defence of his ship, Captain MacNeale was captured, and held prisoner for a lengthy period.⁶⁶ His date of release is unknown, but he was still captive in February 1731.⁶⁷ Cowan showed a considerable amount of concern for the Captain’s well-being, and this was probably because he had given MacNeale implicit instructions that if a shipment of pepper was not available within eight days, he was to load the vessel with ‘rice or what ever else you can find at Onore,’ and to return to Bombay without waiting for a convoy.⁶⁸ This haste to get the ship back to Bombay cost MacNeale his freedom, and Cowan and his co-investors their cargo.⁶⁹ According to Cowan, the pirates attacked with four grabs and twenty gallivats. The *William* managed to defend itself for two days and nights, but succumbed before Cowan’s ‘three ships’ could rescue it.⁷⁰ MacNeale gallantly endeavoured to make his escape but was recaptured, returned to Culabo, and, according to Cowan, was ‘very ill used wounded and is now loaded with irons.’⁷¹ MacNeale informed Cowan that his captors had

⁶⁵ Cowan to John Deane, 16 December 1729, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1E. The pirates were the two sons of Angria.

⁶⁶ Cowan to Henry Lowther, 3 September 1730, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1F; Cowan to William Cowan, 10 December 1729, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1E; Cowan to Henry Lowther, 8 January 1730, 17 January 1730 & 12 February 1730, *ibid*.

⁶⁷ Cowan to Henry Lowther, 4 February 1731, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1G.

⁶⁸ Cowan to Robert MacNeale, 1 October 1729, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1D.

⁶⁹ Cowan to John Hinde, 20 December 1729, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1E. Cowan referred to Hinde’s investment in the ship through respondentia; Cowan to William Phipps, 26 January 1730, PRONI RCP D654/B1/2B. Cowan wrote to William Phipps that he lost approximately £1,250 on the ill-fated voyage of the *William*.

⁷⁰ Cowan to John Deane, 16 December 1729, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1E.

⁷¹ Cowan to John Hinde, 15 June 1730, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1F. Resolution of this matter by direct action may well have been out of Cowan’s hands as he stressed in this letter that unless he received new gallies from England he would be unable to rescue MacNeale.

heard that your H^r has been my very good friend, which puts them in Expectation of a Large Ransom, which oppinion I have Endeavoured to Confute, in hopes of obtaining my Liberty the Easier and am in some hopes it will have the desird Effect.⁷²

Cowan's responsibilities as a patron and employer must have morally obliged him to have at least considered paying a ransom demand to obtain his client's freedom, even though MacNeale clearly did not expect this to happen. As he was partly responsible for this situation, Cowan's comment to the free trader Robert Nesbitt that 'Things have gone a little cross with me this year' neatly summed up the situation.⁷³

At some stage MacNeale regained his liberty, and there was a return match between him and his captor, Angria, circa 1734. MacNeale detailed the bloody and gruesome encounter to Cowan:

Poor Mumford who defended the Quarterdeck and was the Death of Severalls after his right hand was cut off and his bowels dropping out and continued fighting with his left hand till cut to Pices still showing some signs of Resentment until they cut off his head.⁷⁴

'Resentment' seems to be somewhat of an understatement in the circumstances. MacNeale, by writing this in an official letter, whilst still observing the niceties of patronage protocol, wanted Cowan, and other more powerful patrons, to know exactly the type of person by whom he had been imprisoned. It would not be surprising if he had suffered resentment over his patron's somewhat casual approach to his

⁷² MacNeale to Robert Cowan, 15 May 1729, PRONI RCP D654/B1/5J (39).

⁷³ Cowan to Robert Nesbitt, 16 March 1730, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1F.

⁷⁴ MacNeale to Robert Cowan, 21 October [no year is given, but the previous letter in the batch was dated 1734], PRONI RCP D654/B1/5J (156).

responsibilities. Such experiences did not appear to daunt MacNeale's desire to be at sea, and he was still listed as a seafarer several years later.⁷⁵

The seventh member of this group was Henry Lowther. He was appointed Marine Paymaster in 1728, and President of Surat 1728 to 1736.⁷⁶ The Cowan/Lowther correspondence, which spanned almost the entirety of Cowan's fifteen-year stay in the East, is the most voluminous of all in the collection. That they were deeply involved in private trade matters is well documented in at least two other explorations of the Cowan papers, notably those of A. Das Gupta and I. B. Watson, but their relationship also involved the bestowal and receipt of reciprocal patronage.⁷⁷ Lowther was an outright opportunist who abruptly changed sides, risking the possible loss of an extremely powerful patron, in order to further his own financial gain.

Lowther first arrived in India in 1719, and he later became the agent for the controversial Commodore Matthews.⁷⁸ Cowan referred to him in this role, and stated that Lowther was to supply 'provisions for the Kings Shipp's'.⁷⁹ Whilst in England in 1725 Lowther had gained the all-important patronage of John Drummond, and it was his support that he gambled with when he returned to India.⁸⁰ Lowther had promised Drummond that he would 'dive more into the bottom' of charges brought by William

⁷⁵ Forrest, *op.cit.*, Vol. I, p.171. This mention of MacNeale is undated but follows the previous entry for Covenanted Servants dated 1738. He was still based in Bombay.

⁷⁶ Cowan to James Macrae, 18 January 1728, & to Martin French, 18 October 1728, PRONI RCP D/654/B1/1C.

⁷⁷ A. Das Gupta, *Indian Merchants and the Decline of Surat, c.1700-1750*, Franz Steiner Verlag, Wiesbaden, 1979, p.202-203; I.B. Watson, *Foundation for Empire: English Private Trade in India 1659-1760*, Vikas Publishing House Pvt Ltd., New Delhi, 1980, pp.156-157, 171-173.

⁷⁸ See also Chapter 6, p.236.

⁷⁹ Cowan to George Taylor, 16 July 1723, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1B; Forrest, *op.cit.*, Vol. II, pp.23,33,47. In 1721 he was listed as a Factor, in 1723 he was promoted to Junior Merchant, and by 1728 he was Fourth in Council.

⁸⁰ NAS, *Abercairny*, GD24/1/464C/f.69, Lowther to John Drummond, 6 April 1725, Deal. Lowther thanked Drummond for 'repeated favours' and promised to continue to deserve his patronage.

Phipps against John Hope, then Chief of Surat, in order to discover the ‘truth’.⁸¹ Hope had supported the ‘interest of the late Brokers’ at Surat, thereby putting himself at odds with the Governor of Bombay. This had led to Hope’s suspension in October 1723.⁸² Instead of fulfilling his pledge to see justice done to Hope, Lowther joined forces with Phipps and Cowan shortly after his return to Bombay. His prompt appointment to a position in Council presumably helped him change his allegiance.⁸³ He also severed his association with Matthews, as it was extremely difficult to serve the Commodore, already a declared adversary of the Phipps/Cowan team, without a serious conflict of interest arising. Matthews had returned to England in 1723, and Lowther must have made a quick decision that the on the spot Phipps/Cowan combination offered better value as patrons than did the irascible, often violent, and absent, Commodore.⁸⁴ This patronage was maintained over the years as Cowan acknowledged in 1729: ‘Mr Drummond writes me who interests him self verry much in your wellfare.’⁸⁵

The earliest sign of Cowan’s desire to remain on Lowther’s good side came after a complaint by Henry about one of Cowan’s clients, Charles Whitehill, in April 1723. He alleged that Whitehill had used him ‘unkindly’, and Cowan was quick to show

⁸¹ Lowther to John Drummond, 6 April 1725, *ibid.*

⁸² Cowan to John Hope, 16 October 1723, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1B; D.L. White, *Competition and Collaboration: Parsi Merchants and the English East India Company in 18th Century India*, Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt Ltd., New Delhi, 1995, p. 86; Das Gupta, *op.cit.*, p.181. John Hope was Chief of Surat in 1723/4; Cowan to William Phipps & John Hope, 16 March 1725, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1C. It would seem that Hope was still in Bombay in March 1725 as Cowan wrote a joint letter to Hope and Phipps, but that he returned to Surat shortly thereafter; Cowan to Charles Boone, 1 January 1726 & James Macrae, 8 September 1728, *ibid.* Hope was suspended again in 1725, recalled to Bombay, and he eventually returned to England in late 1728

⁸³ NAS, *Abercairny*, GD24/1/464C/f.69, Lowther to John Drummond, 6 April 1725; Das Gupta, *op.cit.*, p.190. Lowther was made a member of Council on 27 September 1725.

⁸⁴ J. Biddulph, Col., *The Pirates of Malabar and An Englishwoman in India Two Hundred Years Ago*, Smith, Elder & Co., London, 1907, pp.168-170,178,196.

⁸⁵ Das Gupta, *op.cit.*, pp.190-191; McGilvary, *op.cit.*, p. 133; Cowan to Henry Lowther, 29 August 1729, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1D; Cowan to John Drummond, 15 July 1725, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1C. Cowan was already a well-established client of Drummond’s by this time.

his concern over this matter, and promptly administered a warning to his protégé.⁸⁶ Cowan and Lowther continued their correspondence during the latter's absence from India.⁸⁷ Cowan addressed a letter to 'Mr and Mrs Lowther' for the first time in November 1725.⁸⁸ Lowther had married Martha, daughter of 'Captn Baley' whilst 'abroad', and she accompanied him on his return to the East.⁸⁹ This 'Captn Baley' was most likely Captain Robert Baillie whom Lowther and Cowan used extensively in their private trade from May 1726 until at least February 1731, and this shrewd alliance was another example of how the kinship side of patronage was practised in the East India Company.⁹⁰ Baillie was employed initially as a supercargo, and later as Captain. At times Cowan designated that he was to act in both roles, especially if he felt that his projected profit margins could not support two commissions.⁹¹ Baillie was probably related to brothers George and John Drummond, as George recommended a 'Cousin Johny Baillie' to agents for the South Sea Company in Jamaica in 1728.⁹² Lowther later gladly offered his assistance 'in any way possible' to a soldier and packer relation of John Drummond, in a further effort to repay his patron.⁹³

⁸⁶ Cowan to Charles Whitehill, 13 April 1723, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1A.

⁸⁷ Cowan to Henry Lowther, 9 December 1723, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1B; Cowan to Robert Newlin, 1 June 1724, *ibid.*; Cowan to Henry Lowther, 17 July 1724, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1C. Lowther was away from India for about two years.

⁸⁸ Cowan to Mr & Mrs Lowther, 24 November 1725. *ibid.*

⁸⁹ A. Wright, *Annesley of Surat and His Times: The True Story of the Mythical Annesley Fortune*, Andrew Melrose Ltd., London, 1918, pp.338-339; Letters of Benjamin Francia, 1728-1729, PRONI RCP D654/B1/5AA (58). Will of Capt John Bellew (with bequests to Henry & Martha Lowther, Wm Henry Draper & wife Ann).

⁹⁰ Cowan to Robert Baillie, 10 May 1726, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1C; Cowan to Henry Lowther, 15 February 1731, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1G. To further confuse the issue, occasionally Baillie's name was given a third variation – that of 'Bayley'.

⁹¹ Cowan to Henry Lowther, 12 March 1729, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1C

⁹² NAS, *Abercairny*, GD24/1/464/f.103, Provost George Drummond, Edinburgh, 7 May 1728. A Provost was a head of a municipal corporation, or burgh.

⁹³ Lowther to Robert Cowan, 27 August 1731, PRONI RCP D/654/B1/5A (71). This client was not named.

Cowan asked Captain John Hunter to recommend Baillie to James Macrae as he esteemed him to be ‘a verry honest fellow’.⁹⁴ This was to improve Baillie’s chance of acquiring significant patronage wherever he travelled along the Indian coast. Cowan used him on many of his own private trading ventures, and although he was committed to promote this client’s interests and welfare, and admitted as much, in preference to that of others like Zacharias Gee, there was also a limit to the amount of goodwill he was prepared to expend.⁹⁵ In a letter to Henry Lowther only a couple of weeks after this reminder of Baillie’s claims upon him, Cowan was incensed that the Captain had overstepped the mark where his trading privileges were concerned. Cowan estimated that Baillie’s goods were worth approximately £2,500 which he considered was ‘too much’. He continued:

priviledges being a 10th/part of the whole and if the ship is 700 Tuns as she has been reported tis equal to 70 Tuns which I believe you will think too much for any Comm^r, he tells me you have charged him R^s 500~ for what you thought he had exceeded his priviledges.⁹⁶

Lowther’s imposition of a fine of £62/5/0 met with his approval. No matter how favoured or well connected a man was in the patronage network, he still had to obey the rules of the system. Cowan admired entrepreneurship, but he did not appreciate someone taking advantage of him. He continued on the subject of patronage, with a telling account about his own reasons for venturing to India: ‘I am verry ready to allow every one under me reasonable Incouragement but I did not come to India to be any man’s property or to learn the language’.⁹⁷ His own fortunes were always the most important to Cowan, and while he was willing to grant assistance where and when he

⁹⁴ Cowan to John Hunter, 6 April 1729, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1C.

⁹⁵ Cowan to Zachiaras Gee, 24 February 1730, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1E. Cowan denied Gee patronage because he felt that he owed his allegiance to others, and that as Gee had ‘made such good alliances in marrying yr daughters to Gentlemen of fortune...’ he was not in need of Cowan’s support.

⁹⁶ Cowan to Henry Lowther, 9 March 1730, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1F.

⁹⁷ *ibid.*

could, he was not prepared to jeopardise his own position. Baillie was said to be ‘dangerously ill of a fever’ in August 1730, and there is one further reference to him by Lowther in February of the following year, but after that he disappeared from the correspondence.

A client of George Morton Pitt’s incurred the wrath of both Cowan and Lowther. John Saunders, a free trader based in Surat since 1729, had sent three boats north in 1731 without advising the Company. He was admonished by the Latty Master, Mr. Robinson, who was the collector of the East India Company’s customs, for acting ‘in contempt of the company authority’.⁹⁸ Saunders said he was at ‘liberty to send what he pleased from the ship to what port he thought proper without being accountable to any.’⁹⁹ The dispute escalated, and caused ‘warm words’ between Lowther and Saunders, with the latter calling Lowther a ‘cheat’.¹⁰⁰ Cowan advised G.M. Pitt that Saunderson’s proceedings had been ‘intirely irregular & without much regard to the Comp^y Authority’, but it is more likely that he and Lowther were jealously guarding their own private trade routes.

Cowan was well aware that he, and his friends and clients, could be subject to censure by those who were jealous of his appointment as Governor. In March 1728 he complained to John Drummond about what he deemed as an indirect attack on himself:

[Lowther] whose Ruine they are desirous of bringing about without any provocation given them they have nothing to lay to my charge but are mortified at the honour the Company has lately done me.¹⁰¹

⁹⁸ Cowan to George Morton Pitt, 23 April 1731, PRONI RCP D/654/B1/1G.

⁹⁹ Lowther to Robert Cowan, 18 March 1731, PRONI RCP D/654/B1/5A (17).

¹⁰⁰ Cowan to George Morton Pitt, *loc.cit.* The Latty Master called Lowther the ‘only Merchant’ in Surat.

¹⁰¹ Cowan to John Drummond, 20 March 1728, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1C.

This offensive was not surprising, as one of Cowan's first acts, made while he was still president in waiting, had been to appoint Lowther as Chief at Surat.¹⁰² For someone so acutely aware of the ramifications of controversial decisions, Cowan chose to flirt with danger by making this somewhat premature appointment. The conventions of patronage demanded a suitable position be provided for Lowther, but as he was already assured of Cowan's good will, a wait of a few more months would surely not have disappointed his powerful allies in England and Scotland. Cowan added the following comments to yet another defence of Lowther five months later:

it is easy passing a Judgment on Mens actions at a distance by those who are little acquainted with the Circumstances & not much interested in the Success but we who are upon the Spott & more nearly affected know best the difficultys that gentlemen in such Stations have to struggle with.¹⁰³

Unsure of his own position at the time of the attack, Lowther requested both John Drummond and Sir Matthew Decker officially endorse him as the new 'Chief of Surat'.¹⁰⁴ This was written more than two months after Cowan had advised the Directorate that he had already appointed Lowther, and had recalled the previous Chief.¹⁰⁵ There were whispers that John Braddyll, a declared enemy of Lowther's, was to replace the latter in 1730, but Cowan summarily dismissed this proposition as 'very improbable'.¹⁰⁶ Cowan reiterated that as Lowther still enjoyed Decker's patronage, he

¹⁰² Cowan to Martin French, 18 October 1728, *ibid.*: 'Mr Lowther is appointed Chief of Surat & Mr Courtney to come down as Second of this place'.

¹⁰³ NAS, *Abercairny*, GD24/1/464/N/67, Cowan to John Drummond, 18 August 1733.

¹⁰⁴ NAS, *Abercairny*, GD24/1/464/N/23, Lowther to John Drummond, 20 March 1728.

¹⁰⁵ OIOC, E/4/450, *op.cit.*, *Bombay General Letter*, 9 January 1729.

¹⁰⁶ Das Gupta, *op.cit.*, pp.237, 24; Cowan to Henry Lowther, 29 July 1730, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1F.

was certain that he would 'exert himself' to continue you where you are'.¹⁰⁷ His confidence was justified as Lowther remained at Surat until April 1736.¹⁰⁸

Cowan must have been aware of the risks he took in order to promote his friend and ally.¹⁰⁹ His recall of John Courtney in 1728 might have been legitimate, as Cowan had expressed some concern over his pecuniary affairs. Cowan was worried that Courtney owed money, and that this could reflect poorly upon his Presidency. He voiced his concern to Lowther: 'you must be sensible what a slur it would be on me if in the beginning of my government any part of the Company's Estate should be trusted in bad hands.' Lowther, shrewdly, had already stepped in to sort out any problems, because Cowan continued: 'I am verry well pleased you have been so kind in assisting & countenancing him.'¹¹⁰ By this action, another cause for complaint by his enemies had been averted. In recompense to Courtney, Cowan made him Second in Council in Bombay, but his term only lasted for two years. Cowan reported in October 1730 that Courtney had retired after 'above thirty years in the Honourable Company's Service'.¹¹¹ Cowan may have needed to replace an aging Governor with a view to long-term continuity, but it was more likely to have been a move of personal mercantile, and patronage expediency to establish his acolyte in a position for mutual gain.

¹⁰⁷ *ibid*; Cowan to Henry Lowther, 29 August 1729, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1D. Cowan had mentioned to Lowther in August 1729 that Sir Matthew Decker had thought of offering the Chiefship in Surat to Lowther, but felt that it should have gone to a more 'nature person, namely Cowan.

¹⁰⁸ Das Gupta, *op.cit.*, p.275.

¹⁰⁹ OIOC, E/4/450, *op.cit.*, *Bombay General Letter*, para. 69. 'and have appointed Mr Henry Lowther to be Chief at Surat.'

¹¹⁰ Cowan to Henry Lowther, 19 March 1729, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1C.

¹¹¹ OIOC, E/4/450, *op.cit.*, *Bombay General Letter*, para. 69: 'Mr Courtney upon the Presidents departure by his standing becomes second in the Presidency and have accordingly called him from Surat to fill that station'; Cowan to John Gould Jr., 20 October 1730, PRONI RCP D654/B1/2B.

As Cowan developed his own extensive private trading empire, he included Lowther in many of the multifarious transactions. By so doing, he put Lowther under a tremendous obligation to provide reciprocal patronage whenever and wherever he could. Amongst those he asked Lowther to assist were William Henry Draper and James Macrae.¹¹² Regardless of how much trade Cowan was involved in with Lowther, the latter did not ever earn his full trust. The following items illustrate the situation that existed between the two men. In February 1731, Lowther wrote that he was waiting for Cowan's instructions on the price of rice, and a couple of weeks later he lamented that if he had been allowed to get an alternative boat, rather than the *Nassau*, for their projected voyage to China, they would have cleared R^s 30000 [£3750].¹¹³ Cowan was always wary of his partner's activities, especially those concerning trading with Surat merchants.¹¹⁴ Such an attitude is not surprising after Cowan's disastrous joint business venture in Portugal, but it was also very important for him to protect his own status particularly with those to whom he was indebted for his own position in the Company.

Lowther was asked to assist another of Cowan's clients, a Monsieur Nicolas Briand De La Feuillée, in 1729. This relationship can be traced back to 1725 when Cowan was based in Mocha, and De La Feuillée was the French East India Company's agent in Yemen. In 1727 De La Feuillée suffered financial ruin because of illegal trading, and from then on seemed to rely on Cowan for patronage favours.¹¹⁵ His financial problems were not quite so severe as to warrant the description of 'ruin'

¹¹² Cowan to William Henry Draper, 8 October 1727, & to James Macrae, 18 January 1728, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1C.

¹¹³ Lowther to Robert Cowan, 2 February 1731, 21 & 23 February 1731, PRONI RCP D/654/B1/5A (9 & 11).

¹¹⁴ Das Gupta, *op.cit.*, pp. 244-245.

¹¹⁵ C. Manning, *Fortunes a Faire: The French in Asian Trade 1719 - 1748*, Ashgate Publishing Ltd., Aldershot, Hampshire, 1996, p.114.

because in March 1728 he had forwarded a bale of coffee to Cowan for the purchase of a 'gould snuff box', an item that might well have been viewed as a luxury to one who was deemed to be in extreme pecuniary difficulties.¹¹⁶ This is supported by evidence that, in the following year, he owned all or part of a ship.¹¹⁷ De La Feuillée arrived in Bombay in September 1728 as Cowan's guest, but he departed from there at some stage, probably to reside at Surat, as there are mentions of proposed activities in a recommendation to Henry Lowther.¹¹⁸ Furthermore Cowan had pledged to loan De La Feuillée R^s 10,000 (£1,250) 'at interest' and asked Lowther to pay the amount 'if you can without inconveniency procure him y^t Sume I am desirous to oblidge him'.¹¹⁹ Lowther complied with this request, but by the beginning of 1730 Cowan had misgivings about the wisdom of the loan. 'I don't know what Monsr de la Feuillée has done with the 10000 R^s I lent him nor have any heard from him lately.'¹²⁰ The Frenchman made what Cowan considered to be an 'unreasonable proposal' for repayment of this debt, and this prompted Cowan to threaten that he would not 'be so forward in parting with my money here after'.¹²¹ Either by De La Feuillée's payment of the debt to Francis Dickinson, the then Chief of Mocha, or by the seizure of 'his ship', and Cowan had mentioned both of these as methods of recompense, the money was recovered later that year.¹²² Cowan and Lowther were a formidable team, and to cross them, especially in monetary matters and in such a closed community, was an act of supreme folly.

¹¹⁶ Cowan to Francis Dickinson, 3 March 1728, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1C.

¹¹⁷ Cowan to Henry Lowther, 14 September 1730, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1F.

¹¹⁸ Cowan to John Courtney, 4 September 1728, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1C; Cowan to Henry Lowther, 17 February 1729, 5 March 1729, 27 March 1729, & 11 June 1729, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1D.

¹¹⁹ Cowan to Henry Lowther, c. May 1729, *ibid.*

¹²⁰ Cowan to Henry Lowther, c. 13–17 April 1729, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1H; Cowan to Henry Lowther, 21 January 1730, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1E.

¹²¹ Cowan to Henry Lowther, 3 February 1730, *ibid.*

¹²² Cowan to Henry Lowther, 14 September 1730, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1F.

Very occasionally Cowan delegated his authority to Lowther in reference to their own trade, but that was only when he was incapacitated. One such time was in April 1729. He had already complained of gout in both feet in late March, but had still felt well enough to continue to dictate trading deals. A week later he opted to leave such decisions to Lowther, as by that time he had the inflammation in both elbows as well, but within five days he had resumed the leadership.¹²³ They were partners in trade matters but Cowan, by dint of personality, rank, or a combination of both, always remained the dominant force, and seldom allowed the guiding reins to change hands.¹²⁴ When Lowther decided to purchase his own ships, Cowan was critical of both his choice of vessel, and the amount of money he proposed to spend. Regarding his purchase of the *Nassau*, Cowan bluntly told him that it was 'one of the worst bargains you ever made in your life,' and, in his view, one that was only redeemed by a good sale of his cotton in Bengal.¹²⁵ As Cowan had purchased the *Nassau* in 1729 he must have been fully aware of the ship's worth.¹²⁶ Cowan was never enthusiastic when Lowther took any initiative in trade matters. Lowther bought the *Edward* for trading at Jedda, and wanted Cowan to take a share in the venture. Cowan told supercargo Edward Say that not only did he consider the £3,125 price for the ship to be too high, but that he 'never had any great opinion of that trade or navigation & the markets must be very brisk to make a voyage with so dear & so small a ship'.¹²⁷ After initially declining to be

¹²³ Cowan to Henry Lowther, 27 March 1729 & 3 April 1729, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1C.

¹²⁴ Cowan to Henry Lowther, 4 February 1731, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1G. This lengthy letter is a good example of the various items in which these two men traded. They included 'Mace ... pepper ... Rice ... Shugar ... tinn & teeth,' 'Ling ... Copper ... Cotton ... white & yellow cloth ... Scarlet cloth.' The latter transaction only allowed for '20p C^t on Invoyce', which Cowan considered to be a 'poor profite'. The private trade transactions of Cowan and Lowther almost warrant a separate investigation because of their size and complexity. See PRONI RCP D654/B1/1D-1G for more examples of private trade between Company servants.

¹²⁵ Cowan to Henry Lowther, 4 February 1731, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1G. Cowan also said that for the cost of building his own ship at Surat he could have built 'three ships of equal burden' at Pegu (a port city in southern Myanmar).

¹²⁶ Cowan to Daniel Innes, 20 November 1729, PRONI RCP D/654/B1/1E.

¹²⁷ Cowan to Edward Say, 28 January 1731, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1G.

involved, he condescended to join the enterprise in a 'small matter' [£1,250] to support his protégé, but bluntly stated two weeks later that Lowther would have to fund a proposed trip to China, as he was 'quite out of cash & therefore I give you this timely notice.'¹²⁸

The same situation occurred in their patronage dealings. Cowan did offer his services, when requested, to Lowther's clients, however, as he was the senior patron, he commanded and received greater reciprocal patronage than did Lowther. Sometimes Cowan asked, rather than demanded, that Lowther provide patronage, as was the case in late 1729 when he recommended Mr. Fotheringham, with the entreaty 'pray lett him have a little of your countenance'.¹²⁹ Cowan also recommended a Captain William Beresford for Lowther's attention as a 'verry good sort of man' in 1730, and although this gentleman appeared to make only the one voyage to India, he arrived, according to Cowan, with the backing of 'several of the Directors.'¹³⁰ Such support in England was a definite incentive to garner as much aid as possible for Beresford. Similarly, Cowan did not want to give anyone the opportunity to complain that they did not receive fair treatment from him, particularly when they were returning directly to England. To this effect he asked Lowther to grant a Captain Coward permission to remain in Surat if he requested it because he did not want to give 'anybody so good a handle to complain of being severely dealt with'.¹³¹ Self-protection was always an incentive to provide even a small amount of patronage.

¹²⁸ Cowan to Henry Lowther, 22 January 1731, & to Edward Say, 28 January 1731, & to Henry Lowther, 28 January 1731 & 12 February 1731, *ibid*.

¹²⁹ Cowan to Henry Lowther, 13 September 1729, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1D.

¹³⁰ Cowan to Arthur Stert, John Goddard, John Gould, Jr., and Sir Matthew Decker, 20 January 1731, PRONI RCP D654/B1/2B; Cowan to Henry Lowther, 20 September 1730, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1F.

¹³¹ Cowan to Henry Lowther, c.18–22 April 1731, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1G.

There were also times when Cowan wanted to provide opportunities for certain men whom he considered deserving but who, for whatever reason, found themselves thwarted in their chances by the role of their own immediate superiors. Such was the case with a Mr. Turner from Madras whom Cowan labelled as having the ‘carracter of a verry honest man’, but who had not been favoured by Governor Macrae nor, it seemed, was he likely to receive the approbation of the new Governor, G.M. Pitt. He suggested that Lowther grasp the chance to trade with Turner, but he was not too optimistic about a beneficial outcome without the cooperation of the Governor of Madras.¹³² Cowan could see the possibility of making money being wasted, and regretted a missed opportunity.

Cowan was explicit when it came to granting patronage, and he did not allow anyone to assume that they were entitled to privilege, even if a precedent had been set. An example of this occurred in 1730, when a Mr. Brighurst assumed that he was ‘self intitled’ to remain at Surat as Cowan had allowed a Mr. Hart to do the previous year. Cowan had only begrudgingly assisted the latter, as he had earlier indicated to Lowther his intention of withdrawing as Hart’s agent in Surat, and complained of the ‘ill offices’ of the gentlemen of ‘the other side’.¹³³ Cowan’s instructions to Lowther were to ‘undeceive’ Brighurst, and for the supercargo to either travel to Bombay or to ‘some other of the company’s head settlements.’¹³⁴ Continued patronage of some description to the Madras merchant was most likely made out of obligation to either Governor Macrae, or an even more influential patron.¹³⁵ Brighurst had been foolish to expect that

¹³² Cowan to Henry Lowther, 3 February 1730, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1E.

¹³³ Cowan to Henry Lowther, 12 March 1730, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1F; H.D. Love, *Vestiges of Old Madras, 1640-1800*, Vol. II, John Murray, London, 1913, pp.317-318. Rawson Hart was ‘for many years a free merchant of Fort St. George’.

¹³⁴ Cowan to Henry Lowther, 7 April 1730, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1D.

¹³⁵ Cowan to Henry Lowther, 12 March 1730, *ibid*.

he could simply rely on Cowan's goodwill. Another disappointed man was William Wake who transferred to the West Coast of India in 1731. Although Cowan made him Chief of Anjenjo in 1732, he had apparently desired Lowther's position in Surat.¹³⁶ Even though Wake had the backing of Sir Robert Walpole, it was not sufficient to overturn Lowther's incumbency.¹³⁷ Patronage had to be earned, or be granted as a favour to a third party. It could never be assumed to be a right.

Lowther was not without his own powerful patrons, and Cowan was well aware that he had to be seen to be aiding their protégé. Consequently he wrote to Sir Matthew Decker, after the latter had recommended Lowther, stating that they already 'maintained an intimate friendship'.¹³⁸ This was certainly true, as by this time they had known each other for more than seven years. Decker even went so far as to recommend Lowther as the replacement for Cowan when he returned to England. Lowther also told Cowan that a Lord Bingley would 'leave no stone unturned' on his behalf.¹³⁹ Henry's brother, William, visited India in 1732, but by that stage he was already amongst Cowan's correspondents.¹⁴⁰ Cowan complained to William that he was surrounded by 'sycophants', and added an acknowledgement of his already substantial patronage of Henry:

... it is a particular satisfactions that the inclination I have shown to serve him is so acceptable to you for tho I have not the honour to be personally known to you yet I am not unacquainted with S^r W^m Lowther's amiable carracter.¹⁴¹

¹³⁶ Cowan to John Hope, c. January 1732, PRONI RCP D/654/B1/2C.

¹³⁷ Lowther to Robert Cowan, 26 July 1731, PRONI RCP D/654/B1/5A (62); Desai, *op.cit.*, (unpaginated) Governors of Bombay 1668-1784. Wake eventually became Governor of Bombay, a position he held from 26 November 1742 to 17 November 1750.

¹³⁸ Cowan to Sir Matthew Decker, c.1 September 1729, PRONI RCP D654/B1/2A.

¹³⁹ Lowther to Robert Cowan, 27 August 1731, PRONI RCP D/654/B1/5A (71).

¹⁴⁰ Cowan to Charles Campbell, 20 January 1732, PRONI RCP D/654/B1/2C.

¹⁴¹ Cowan to William Lowther, 11 December 1731, *ibid.*

Even though he said he despised flattery he was not above using the same tactics for his own benefit. He told William that he was initially drawn by Lowther's 'affability & good sense', and that he trusted Henry with the Company's business, as well as their private dealings.¹⁴² Given that Lowther had returned to India with an antagonistic attitude towards both Cowan and Phipps, expediency was a more appropriate term than intimacy.

Cowan recommended his partner as a prospective client to John Deane, Governor of Bengall, as 'verry active & dilligent', and in whom Cowan had 'intire Confidence as much as transacting the Honble Company's Affaires as my privat concerns which are pretty considerable as I have launched more deeply into trade than any of my Predecessors.'¹⁴³ According to A. Das Gupta in *Indian Merchants and the Decline of Surat*, Cowan's belief in his partner's diligence and teamwork might not have remained on such a high level when the depth of Lowther's unauthorised dealings involving Company merchandise and money. became known.¹⁴⁴

As to Lowther's real personality, Cowan's own description in 1731 may be the best summation, in that it gives the reader a fairly wide scope in which to evaluate the man:

From this description youl judge Mr Lowther an Artfull Man, which I allow, but at the same time he is frank & generous in his Actions, & nobody readyer to do a good office which was what first acquired him my Esteem.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴² Cowan to William Lowther, 11 December 1731, PRONI RCP D/654/B1/2C; R. Sedgwick, *The History of Parliament: The House of Commons 1715-1754*, Vol. II, H.M.S.O., London, 1970, p.228. Sir William was Henry's older brother and inherited his father's title in 1729. He was MP for Pontefract from April 1729 to 1741. His second wife was Catherine, daughter of Sir William Ramsden.

¹⁴³ Cowan to John Deane, 12 August 1730, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1F.

¹⁴⁴ Das Gupta, *op.cit.*, pp.244 -245.

¹⁴⁵ Cowan to Edward Harrison, 12 September 1731, PRONI RCP D654/B1/2C.

Certainly Lowther's behaviour at the end of his time in India leads one to believe that his was a cunning, and even a devious nature, as may have been intimated in Cowan's use of the word 'Artfull'. After Cowan had returned to England, John Braddyll conducted an investigation into the affairs of the Surat Factory, in which Lowther was believed to have misappropriated Company money. This resulted in his dismissal from the Service, and his subsequent shipboard arrest.¹⁴⁶ Lowther made a carefully arranged, and somewhat dramatic, escape from the sub-continent by jumping ship. He returned to England in 1737, but fled to France on learning of Cowan's death. His family recorded that he had been 'sent when young to the East Indies' but that he had met with 'great losses from ill Persons whom he trusted, and withal living there in great state and pomp, he returned home without any Fortune'.¹⁴⁷ From Lowther's correspondence with Cowan, it is apparent that he had made a considerable amount of money whilst in Surat. The loss of Cowan's guiding business hand, coupled with the attacks made by Lowther's numerous enemies within the Company's Service, contributed to financial mismanagement, and that ultimately led to his ignominious exit from India. The final part that Lowther played in Cowan's life was in respect to his friend and benefactor's will. William Phipps challenged the validity of the document, and Lowther testified that as Trustee to the will he was legally entitled to carry out Cowan's wishes in respect of his Estate. This document was signed on 19 November 1738 in France.¹⁴⁸

The men mentioned above are some of those with whom Cowan came into contact during his time in India. As has been illustrated, he was generous towards some of his fellow employees, even to the extent of standing as godparent to the children of

¹⁴⁶ Chaudhuri, *op.cit.*, p.116; Wright, *op.cit.*, p.342.

¹⁴⁷ *ibid.*, pp. 338-339. According to Wright there is some discrepancy over the date of Lowther's death. In one document it was in 1743, and in another 1758.

¹⁴⁸ TNA, DEL 2/19, *Registrar of the High Court of Delegates and of the High Court of the Admiralty: Cause and Miscellaneous Papers*.

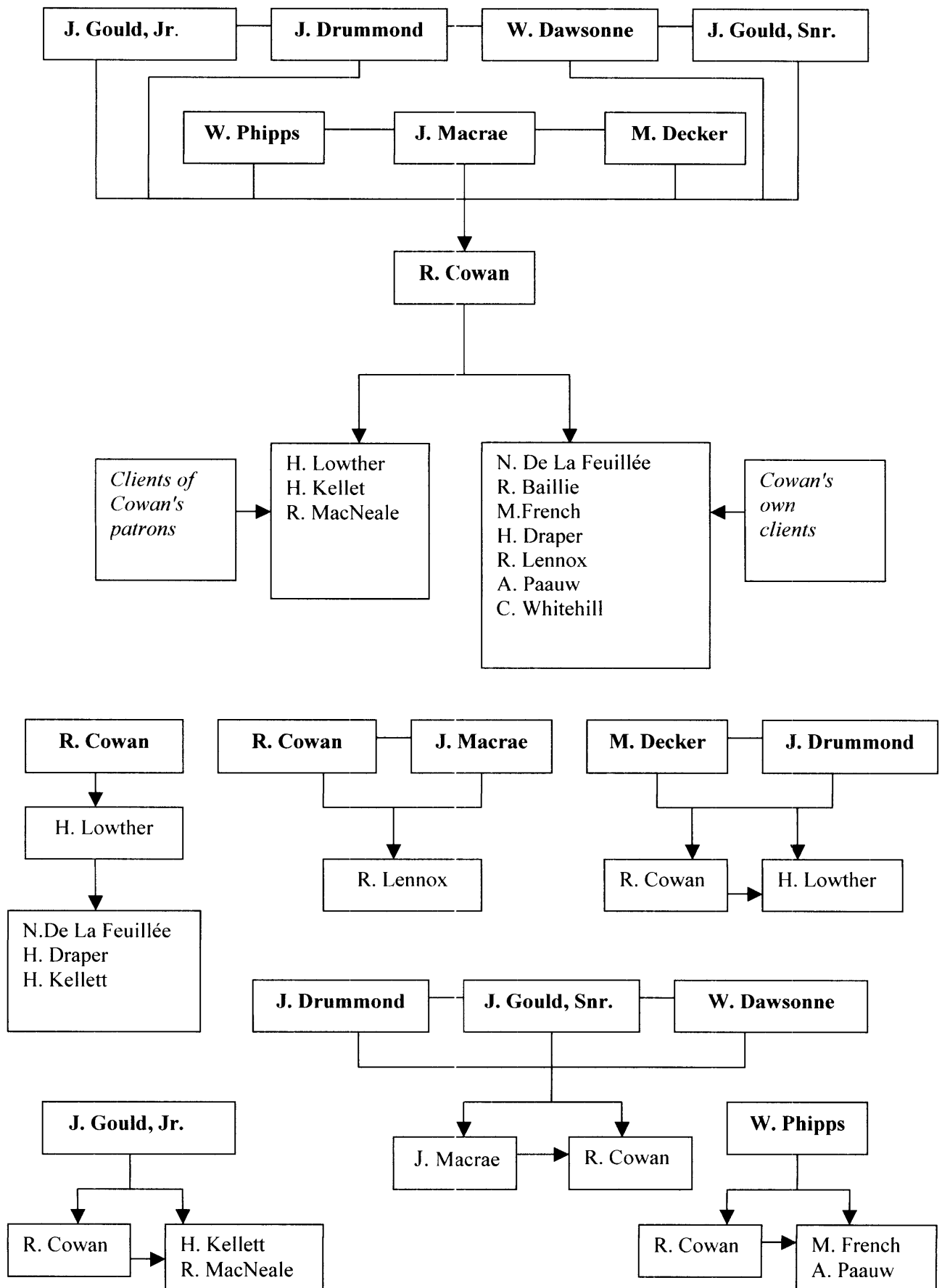
some sub-ordinates. He encouraged some to share in his private trade matters to varying degrees, and gave others countenance in the East India Company service. He was also capable, as were others in patronage positions, in denying aid if he felt it was unwarranted. The majority of his private dealings were with his cohort, Henry Lowther, and their efforts affected the other members of the group discussed above. Chapter Ten will look at the other close associate of Cowan's during his Governorship of Bombay. It will show the involvement and effort Cowan went to with regard to the patronage he granted to his half brother William. It will also show the benefits that the Cowan brothers reaped through this patron/client relationship, and the possibilities that it brought to others. There are also examples of Cowan's efforts, or lack thereof, on behalf of some of his patron's clients during his Presidency, when he was very heavily involved in both his private trade matters, his brother's employment, and in the defence of his position in the Company.

Chapter Nine Connections

Legend:

Connections: —

Patronage: —>



Chapter Ten:

Bestowal of Favours II

‘we must take care of ourselves.’¹

Robert Cowan was often asked to assist in the provision of reciprocal patronage to family members and friends of his patrons, and he, too, took advantage of the system to promote the affairs of his clients. Cowan used valuable kinship and reciprocal patronage links to assist the aspirations of his half-brother William. This action brought both positive and negative reactions. It enriched both men financially, but attracted the ire of the East India Company Directorate against Robert for encouraging unendorsed travel to India. Others included in this chapter were clients of minor patrons and their involvement was not in a familial network, but rather through trade connections. One other request, which had to be dealt with very diplomatically, came from a major patron who had ceased to support Cowan. All of these examples show just how complicated the patronage and kinship network was in the early eighteenth century.

William Cowan, Robert’s younger half-brother, sought employment in India on three separate occasions.² In 1724 Cowan advised him to apply to enter the East India Company service as a Factor.³ To commence at this rank indicated that his

¹ Cowan to Henry Lowther, 22 February 1729, PRONI RCP D/654/B1/1C.

² See also Chapter 1, pp.33-36 for details on Cowan’s immediate family.

³ Cowan to William Cowan, 8 July 1724, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1C.

brother was both an experienced and educated man.⁴ He suggested that William approach 'Mr Gould' as a prospective patron, but, if he failed to gain permission to go to India, he should consider working in Lisbon. If he decided on Portugal, Cowan assured him: 'I could give you help to begin the world with.'⁵ This 'help' could have been in recommendations for patronage, but it was more likely to have been an offer of financial aid, which belies Robert's constant complaint that he had made little monetary gain since he had travelled East.

In correspondence with Martin French, Cowan referred to William having been resident in Lisbon for several years, and said that his brother had left French's cousin well in Lisbon in September 1723. William was back in either England or Ireland by 1724.⁶ Robert's alternative plan for his brother meant a return to Portugal, not a brave new venture. William eventually achieved a passage to India, not with Gould's assistance, but through another patron of Cowan's, Gould's brother-in-law, Henry Cairnes. Cowan, immediately wrote to thank Henry for his assistance. This subject took clear precedence over every other matter in the letter.⁷ This act of patronage meant that Cowan was now even more indebted to the Cairnes and Gould families.

William visited his brother in Mocha at the beginning of December 1724, and later continued his journey to Bombay where he was assigned to work under Governor Phipps.⁸ In a letter to Phipps, Robert summarised his brother's strengths: 'he is a very good merchant & perfect Master of the Portuguese language which I

⁴ P. Mason, *The Men Who Ruled India*, Rupa & Co., New Delhi, 1985, p.22

⁵ Cowan to William Cowan, *loc.cit.*

⁶ Cowan to Martin French, 12 April 1725, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1C.

⁷ Cowan to Henry Cairnes, 8 December 1724, *ibid.*

⁸ Cowan to Captain Thomas Bronsdon, 15 July 1725, *ibid.*

hope will be of use to him.’⁹ These two qualifications support the notion that William had already worked in Portugal. Cowan encouraged his brother to make headway in his new position by learning the local language, and reminded him to always keep his President informed of his dealings.¹⁰ Cowan’s voluminous quantity of letters shows he certainly believed that it was better to write too often and risk repetition, rather than offend by lack of communication. He advised William that ‘a punctual correspondence is the life of trade’.¹¹ By July 1725 William had been hastily despatched as supercargo for Phipps’ private trade. He was allowed ‘2 per cent commission on the goods consigned him which is a good introduction for a new comer. I doubt not but he will do verry well’.¹² Robert was envious of his brother’s appointment to Bombay and felt that William was more likely to make his fortune before he did, as he considered that both he and the Company were merely marking time in the Persian Gulf.¹³

By August 1725, only eight months after his arrival, it had become apparent that William’s new career was not to his liking. Robert wrote to Mrs Macrae that his brother was ‘sickly’, and that because of his ill-health William disliked the climate ‘and every place in India.’ He wryly commented ‘I wish he had considered the difference in climes before he came abroad.’¹⁴ By the end of the year, William had decided to return to England citing health reasons. Robert voiced his regret over his brother’s failure to persevere with his career in India:

⁹ Cowan to William Phipps, 18 December 1724, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1C.

¹⁰ Cowan to William Cowan, 10 March 1725, *ibid.* Robert Cowan was fluent in Portuguese and French. It would be surprising to find that he had not mastered at least one of the local languages during his lengthy stay in the East.

¹¹ *ibid.*

¹² Cowan to Capt. Thomas Bronsdon, & to John Gould Jr, 15 July 1725, *ibid.*

¹³ Cowan to Capt. Thomas Bronsdon, 15 July 1725, & to Henry Lyell, 8 June 1726, *ibid.*

¹⁴ Cowan to Mrs Macrae, 28 August 1725, *ibid.*

it has been a great misfortune for him and disappointment to me after the charge & fatigue of coming out, his constitution will not admit of him staying in India, where I could not have been more serviceable to him than at the present I can anywhere else, he is bent on settling in Lisbon . . .¹⁵

The fact that he had been unable to monitor closely William's progress led him to believe that he should share the responsibility for his brother's problems. It must have been extremely frustrating for him to see his brother throw away what he viewed as a certain means to achieve financial security, especially as he was based in the location that Cowan deemed as one of the most likely to promote good fortune. As he voiced his disappointment at William's early departure from India, he contemplated whether his brother's career might be one spent in 'digging potatoes'.¹⁶

Despite Robert's pessimistic thoughts, William was not destined to spend the rest of his life as a farm labourer, and he gambled on a second chance of working in the East. In 1727, he reapplied for permission from the East India Company to return to India. Having already been given one placement, it is not surprising that less than two years later he was refused another position in the Service. There was an oversupply of writers in Bombay, and under such circumstances it would have taxed the powers of Cowan's staunchest supporters in the Company Directorate to provide William with another opportunity.¹⁷ In 1728 William's third application to work for the Service was also rejected.¹⁸ William remained undeterred, and later that year, with Robert's very generously paying his one hundred-guinea passage, he returned to Bombay. He made the voyage without the sanction of the East India Company, and in

¹⁵ Cowan to Henry Cairnes, 10 December 1725, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1C.

¹⁶ Cowan to Mrs Macrae, 28 August 1725, *loc.cit*

¹⁷ Cowan to John Sherman, 30 August 1728, PRONI RCP D654/B1/2A.

¹⁸ Cowan to Nathaniel Gould, 25 September 1728, *ibid*.

order to remain in India, he was to take full advantage of his kinship ties, and the patronage and protection his brother, the President of Bombay designate, could offer.¹⁹

Robert had the unenviable task to convince the Company that he planned to employ William solely in his own private trade, and assure the Directorate that under no circumstances would he attempt to place him into the Company's service. He advised Nathaniel Gould, amongst others, that: 'I design to employ him in my own privat trade in no ways interfering with the Company's.'²⁰ Cowan's concern for not causing any further offence to his patrons was clear in a letter to John Gould, Nathaniel's brother, in 1729 where he unequivocally stated that: 'My brother is gone to China.'²¹ This statement was designed to reassure the Directorate that Cowan had fulfilled his pledge. Rather than risk any ambiguity, he had sent his brother as far from India as possible. At the time, Cowan owned at least two ships, the *Fame* and the *Balls*. He sold the *Fame* the following year, but he then became sole-owner of the *William* and the *Nassau*, and Henry Lowther bought the *Mattersea* on Cowan's behalf.²² Cowan was thus was able to provide his brother with plenty of trading opportunities without even thinking of employing him in the Company's service.²³

¹⁹ Cowan to Captain Thomas Bronsdon, 25 September 1728, *ibid*.

²⁰ Cowan to Nathaniel Gould, *loc.cit.*, Cowan to Henry Cairnes, 25 September 1728, & to William Sterling, 25 September 1728, & to Edward Harrisor, 20 January 1731, PRONI RCP D654/B1/2A.

²¹ Cowan to John Gould, 25 July 1729, *ibid*.

²² Cowan to Martin French, 27 March 1728, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1C; Cowan to Richard Bouchier, 5 April 1729, *ibid*; Cowan to John Hinde, 1 November 1729, PRONI D654/B1/1D; Cowan to James Macrae, 15 May 1729, *ibid*; Cowan to Henry Lowther, 12 March 1729, PRONI D654/B1/1C; Cowan to Henry Lowther, 27 February 1730, PRONI D654/B1/1E. In this letter Cowan stated that he had also taken a quarter share in the new vessel belonging to Captain Lewis. The *Mattersea* was renamed the *Carolina*.

²³ Cowan to Martin French, 27 March 1728, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1C; Cowan to Henry Lowther, 12 March 1729, *ibid*. Cowan paid £2,450 for the *Balls*, and £2,000 for the *Mattersea*.

Cowan confided to John Sherman that his country trade ‘in our own bottoms’ was ‘pritty considerable’. This was somewhat of an understatement, as, by his own admission, the amount of his concern was a staggering £12,500 per annum.²⁴ This was before he attained the position of Governor of Bombay, and his opportunities must have increased exponentially with his improved status and growing financial security. He bought at least five ships in two years, from March 1728 to February 1730, and he purchased a quarter share in Captain Lewis’s new vessel in the same period.²⁵ To give an idea of the amount of private trade that was occurring at this time, Cowan explained in just one letter to John Deane that he was dealing with respondentia bonds from three captains, and a promissory note from a fourth. At the same time, Deane was told to debit Cowan’s account for a sum over £5,440, in a deal involving at least three members of the East India Company service. He advised Deane that he had bought ‘Iron & Shugar’ from Mr Holmes aboard the *Queen Carolina* and in return had sold him 10,000 Maunds of Toothinaigue from his own ship the *Balls* to be traded at Surat.²⁶ He also told Deane that he was sending the *Nassau* to China to sell pepper.²⁷ Patronage certainly brought its costs and vexations, but it also produced mutually beneficial partnerships.

Cowan’s message to the Company Directorate was intended to assure them that he would not use his position in an attempt to reverse their decision. He

²⁴ Cowan to John Sherman, 30 August 1728, PRONI RCP D654/B1/2A.

²⁵ Cowan to Martin French, 27 March 1728, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1C: ‘so I bought the *Fame*’ & ‘the *Balls* which ship I have bought.’; Cowan to Henry Lowther, 12 March 1729, *ibid.* Lowther had bought the *Mattersea* for Cowan, and renamed it the *Carolina*; Cowan to Richard Bouchier, 5 April 1729, *ibid.* Cowan now the sole owner of the *William*; Cowan to John Hinde, 1 November 1729, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1D. Cowan had bought the *Nassau*; Cowan to Henry Lowther, 27 February 1730, *ibid.* Cowan stated that he had bought a quarter share in Captain Lewis’s new vessel because Lewis wanted to be employed in his service.

²⁶ Cowan’s investment on this occasion was at least 85 tons of toothinaigue.

²⁷ Cowan to John Deane, 22 February 1731, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1G. Further trading examples may be seen in this batch of letters including Cowan to Henry Lowther, 22 February 1731.

apparently succeeded by the letter of appreciation he sent to Edward Harrison three years later, wherein he thanked him for ‘allowing’ William to remain in India.²⁸ Cowan’s letters to his patrons during this time do not appear markedly different to any previous correspondence, but perhaps he was just slightly keener to acknowledge their support and to offer his ‘services’ to them or their clients. After William’s permanency had been conferred, Cowan thanked not only Nathaniel Gould, but also his brother and father at the same time.²⁹ To reinforce the message, he wrote, on the same day, directly to John Gould Jr., thanking him individually for his patronage, but added the following cautionary sentence:

There will be no occasion for you mentioning anything about my brother since no notice was taken of his remaining in the Country upon the Oakham’s return they wont anymore think of him & I never designd any thing more than to employ him in my own privat Service.³⁰

Robert hoped that by simply not mentioning William in Leadenhall Street he would be quickly forgotten, and that this indiscretion would be eclipsed by a more pressing trade matter, or more newsworthy allegations of scandalous behaviour by other company servants. If Cowan’s patrons in the East India Company Directorate were involved in some of his private trading ventures, then it was not surprising that they allowed William to remain in India. As long as Cowan continued to work diligently for the Company’s interests, the only difficulties that might have arisen would have emanated from those members of the Directorate who were not his supporters. The more money that the Cowan brothers made through country trade deals simply meant

²⁸ Cowan to Edward Harrison, 20 January 1731, PRONI RCP D654/B1/2A.

²⁹ Cowan to Nathaniel Gould, 20 January 1731, PRONI RCP D654/B1/2B.

³⁰ Cowan to John Gould Jr., 20 January 1731, *ibid*.

better and faster returns to the men who had invested heavily by lending their good names to a failed businessman.

Robert's sponsorship of his brother made him more vulnerable to attacks by his enemies in the East India Company both in India and London. This was at a time when John Lambton and Thomas Waters, both of whom had been dismissed from the Service by Cowan, had laid accusations against him in London. Notwithstanding the problems caused by such former employees, even when combined with restrictions imposed upon the private trading ventures of Company servants, Cowan always maintained that they really were minor in comparison with his job of making a profit for the Company. He had said that he had 'happily' recovered the Company's debts whilst he had been the Chief at Mocha.³¹ In response to these latest allegations raised against him he stated:

privat concerns nor the waspish snarling of my Enemys do not give me half the trouble that the unhappy situation the Company's affaires are in at their several settlements does...³²

This letter was written to East India Company Director William Phipps, with the full knowledge that such loyal sentiments would be brought to the attention of those who were in need of reassurance of his good intentions. Cowan, in refuting charges made against him, added that 'the settlement under the present Administration is in a more flourishing condition than they ever knew it'³³

³¹ Cowan to Alexander Cairnes, 30 August 1728, PRONI RCP D/654/B1/2A.

³² Cowan to William Phipps, 20 January 1731, *ibid*.

³³ OIOC, E/4/450, *Bombay Abstract Letters Received, Bombay General*, 28 January 1733, para.81.

Cowan would have been extremely careful not to give any further cause for investigation into his affairs. He had received due warning from the Directorate about illegal employment and nepotism.

But We must here add that it is very unaccountable you should attempt to import your own Freinds [*sic*] upon Us in this manner contrary to our repeated Orders without vouchsafing to tell us who they are, and which way they come among you, We say your own Freinds [*sic*] because We find you are willing to be security for them which confirms Us in our Opinion that they come abroad by your encouragement.³⁴

This direction arrived in India shortly after Cowan's succession as Governor and there is no way that he would have jeopardised his own future, not even for his sibling's career. These attempted clampdowns seem ridiculous when it is patently obvious that the whole edifice of the East India Company was built on nepotism and patronage. The only satisfactory explanation is that the patrons in the Directorate felt that they were losing control of the system, and that the lower orders had acquired too much power. They did not accept the need of a Governor to fill vacant positions immediately, but they also blamed him for not informing them in 'timely notice' in order that they supply 'proper persons ... from hence.'³⁵ These particular threats must have specifically concerned Phipps' Governorship, but the message was also intended for his successor.

The situation was not an easy one to juggle given the time required for notification, and for replacement staff to be allocated, given that death, the main cause of staff attrition, struck quickly. This strongly worded memorandum must have caused

³⁴ OIOC, E/3/115, *Original Drafts of Despatches to Bengal, Madras and Bombay, 1725-1751*, 27 February 1729, para. 94.

³⁵ *ibid.*, para.64.

concern for Cowan as he had openly acknowledged he had financed William's journey to India. Hence the emphasis he gave to employing his brother solely in his own private trade. Cowan's own position, and that of the majority of Company employees, was precarious at the best of times. The problems caused by time and distance meant that each man in the Company's service in the East was vulnerable to the whims and vagaries of human nature, and patronage could be withdrawn far more quickly than it was granted. The servants' absence gave their enemies opportunities to assail the ears of men of influence, and on this, as on other occasions, Cowan needed to use all his letter-writing skills, as well as the rallied support of his trusted friends in England, to shore up his position within the Company.

Cowan's support and patronage of his brother paid financial dividends for both of them. Robert was under no illusions about his brother's change of heart, and knew that it was his promotion that was William's main motivation to return to the East. He had confided to Martin French that:

By a letter from Mr John Sherman of Lisbone I am advised of my Brother's returning again to India which nothing could prompt him to but the prospect of my advancement & thereby being in a condition to provide for him, better than when he was last here.³⁶

A brother who was the Governor of a Factory in India was far more valuable than one as a Chief in the remote Persian Gulf. William was appointed to the prestigious role of joint supercargo on Cowan's ship, the *Balls*, a role of great importance to trading ventures.³⁷ A supercargo was the officer aboard a merchant ship who was in charge of buying and selling of the ship's cargo. A good supercargo's business acumen could

³⁶ Cowan to Martin French, 9 September 1727, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1C.

³⁷ K. Degryse, 'Social Conditions and Tensions on Board the Eighteenth Century East India Ships', in *Mariners, Merchants and Oceans: Studies in Maritime History*, ed K.S. Mathew, Manohar, New Delhi, 1995, p. 342.

mean the difference between profit and loss on lengthy and often hazardous voyages through the East. These positions were much coveted, and Cowan wrote in 1732 that there were 'a great many pretenders to the supra Cargoship' on a voyage he planned to China.³⁸ The employment of a reliable and enterprising person on his ship increased the chances of better profits, not just for the Cowan brothers, but also for anyone who participated in joint venture trading. Included amongst those to profit, could well have been some of those very Directors who openly objected to the likes of William Cowan travelling to India without their express authorisation.

Involvement in lucrative trading opportunities could easily have influenced their decision not to insist on William's recall. Evidence exists to show that at least one of the Gould family was trading directly to India and that he planned to use Cowan to organise a country trade venture for the ship that he part owned, the *Oakham*. Cowan advised Nathaniel Gould in September 1728:

As you are an owner in that ship I should readily have gratified you in sending her on a Country voyage had the same been practicable, as it was not the Companys general instructions being to return that Ship loaded with pepper that cant be employd in the Country so as to earn their demurrage ...³⁹

Despite Cowan's good intentions this venture failed, but as the *Oakham* was a frequent visitor to Bombay between 1729 and 1732 it is likely that other voyages would have made up for this lost opportunity.⁴⁰

³⁸ Cowan to Albert Nesbitt, 20 January 1732, PRONI RCP D/654/B1/2C.

³⁹ Cowan to Nathaniel Gould, 25 September 1728, PRONI RCP D/654/B1/2A.

⁴⁰ Cowan to Edward Harrison, 3 January 1729, *ibid.*; Cowan to John Gould, Jr, 7 January 1730, & to Edward Harrison, 12 September 1731, PRONI RCP D/654/B1/2B; Cowan to John Drummond, 20 January 1732, PRONI RCP D/654/B1/2C.

Henry Higden, as an experienced supercargo, was initially paired with William, and his employment was part of a patronage arrangement between Cowan and Phipps.⁴¹ These two men each invested £12,500 in 'Quick Stock' on that voyage.⁴² This lucrative situation for Higden was part of the reciprocal patronage arrangement between Cowan and Phipps.⁴³ In his letter of appointment to the two men, Cowan gave them their trading and cargo instructions, a warning on their selection of merchants to deal with in Canton, and advised them of their remuneration rate: 'We allow you for your Troubles to draw five p cent commission on the neat sale at Canton in China & is equally to be divided betwixt you.'⁴⁴ The rate of commission granted on this voyage was about the standard amount for this period. This was not the supercargoes only means of income as they were allowed certain privileges with regard to their own cargo on each voyage.⁴⁵ Although they stood to make large profits on successful country trading ventures, their expectations, especially where trade in Company items to England was involved, were not always realised. Such was the case when trading allowances were suddenly changed, and one Captain/supercargo was made to forfeit his privilege of tea. He claimed that through this action he lost over £1,200 on one voyage. On this occasion the Captain was deemed to have been in the right, as the East India Company had been instrumental in organising the building of the ship, determining its voyage and the privileges granted.⁴⁶ By utilising William's

⁴¹ Cowan to William Cowan & Henry Higden, dated April 1729, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1H.

⁴² Cowan to Martin French, 27 March 1728, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1C.

⁴³ Cowan to Jeremiah Jones, 13 February 1727, *ibid*.

⁴⁴ Cowan to William Cowan & Henry Higden, *loc.cit*.

⁴⁵ See Chapter 9, p.325, for the penalties incurred by Captain Baillie on one of Cowan's voyages.

⁴⁶ I am indebted to Dr. I. B. Watson for this information which is gathered from the next two sources: Charles Lockyer, *An Account of the Trade in India*, London, 1711, p.17. Stokeham Donston to George Donston (England), 28 January 1758, Nottingham County Record Office, DDN 223c/15, p.3 of letter; & OIOC, D/10, *Memoranda of Committee of Correspondence*, A supercargo's protest concerning his private trade, 1733; Cowan to Henry Lowther, 9 March 1730, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1F. Cowan and Lowther had not hesitated to fine Captain Baillie for overstepping his allowance.

talent in this field, Cowan and any of his patrons involved in his multifaceted enterprises reaped the benefits from his business acumen.

Cowan's experiment was successful because nearly three years later William was still employed on a regular run between Bombay and Canton.⁴⁷ Robert told their mutual friend, John Sherman, that he expected William would earn a 'reasonable amount' from his endeavours.⁴⁸ Cowan also called in favours to help his brother at other factories. One such case was Hezekiah King, Chief at Anjenjo, who was obliged to assist William when he called at that port on his return from a voyage to China. On this occasion it involved King assisting with William in a 'tryall' of 'his Gold', even to the point of personally buying some of the precious metal. He intimated to Robert that this was purely a favour, as the gold was not really required at the settlement.⁴⁹ In the same letter, King advised Cowan that his wife was sending him 'a Cypruss Tree' which he added was 'a Curiosity'. That this gift was really from King himself is given away by the next sentence: 'She does not write her self for fear of being troublesome.'⁵⁰ If the gift had been of her own volition, Mrs. King would have been justified in penning a few lines to the man who could give or withhold his patronage to her husband, without the fear of such a note being an imposition. It is more likely that King had felt his somewhat limited assistance to William might be misconstrued as withholding aid, and that an unusual gift would restore the equilibrium. King's concern was exacerbated because he was beholden to Cowan over aid in dealing with the hostile actions of John Wallis. King knew that Wallis sent 'all his complaints ... to your Hon^r,' and added that 'I have the satisfaction to say that he cant justly tax me

⁴⁷ Cowan to Albert Nesbitt, 20 January 1732, PRONI RCP D654/B1/2C.

⁴⁸ Cowan to John Sherman, 30 November 1730, PRONI RCP D654/B1/2B.

⁴⁹ King to Robert Cowan, 11 February 1730, PRONI RCP D654/B1/5J. Anjenjo was a subordinate factory to Bombay on the Malabar Coast.

⁵⁰ King to Robert Cowan, *ibid*.

with any unjust actions'. He hoped that Wallis' behaviour gave Cowan 'sufficient cause' to remove him.⁵¹ King need not have worried as Wallis did not enjoy Cowan's favour, and he had been recalled by the end of the year.⁵²

Although William figured prominently in Robert's business affairs in the East, there is little reference in their correspondence to any personal matters concerning the two half-brothers. In fact William's letters generally dealt with trade matters, both their own and those of other Company servants, and with only the occasional mention of his relationship to Robert.⁵³ This would have been a deliberate strategy designed to baffle any hostile members of the East India Company. By keeping all letters in a formal tone helped to downplay the family connection. Sibling familiarity would remind unfriendly Directors of the original illegality of William's tenure in India. He remained in the East after his brother's return to England, and was named as the main beneficiary in Robert's will. William, however, died 'at Bombay' shortly before Robert's demise.⁵⁴ According to *The Gentleman's Magazine*:

Will. Cowan Esq. – at Bombay. He was half brother to Sir Robert, late Governor there and Member for Tregony, Cornwall, by whose death he came into an Estate of 80000 l and now dying a Batchelor the whole descends to his Sister, a young Lady in Ireland.⁵⁵

The amount of William's inheritance remains a matter of conjecture. K. N. Chaudhuri, in *The Trading World of Asia and the East India Company, 1660-1760*,

⁵¹ King to Robert Cowan, 30 May 1729, PRONI RCP D654/B1/5J.

⁵² Cowan to William Phipps, 26 January 1730, PRONI RCP D654/B1/2B; see also Chapter 6, p.245.

⁵³ W. Cowan to Robert Cowan, 28 April 1732 & 9 October 1733, PRONI RCP D654/B1/5J.

⁵⁴ TNA, DEL 2/19, *Registrar of the High Court of Delegates and of the High Court of the Admiralty: Cause and Miscellaneous Papers*: 'And whereas the said William Cowan dyed before the said Testator Sir Robert Cowan...'

⁵⁵ *The Gentleman's Magazine*, Vol. 7, 1737, April, p.253.

estimates that Cowan 'was on the point of remitting home a fortune of £40,000.⁵⁶

John Drummond wrote to Lord Milton that families were:

hoping that their Sons may come home as rich as two great Governours came about 3 months ago, Viz: Governour Pit from Fort St George & Cowan a Scots Irishman bred at Lisbon, from Bombay, each well worth a hundred thousand pounds.⁵⁷

In his discussion of sixteenth to eighteenth century dowries, G. Hill, in *The Montgomery Manuscripts, 1603 – 1706*, states that: 'Mary Cowan, wife of Alexander Stewart, who purchased what had been the Montgomery estates from the Colvilles, had a fortune of £150,000.'⁵⁸ If the latter amount was the true value of the Cowan brothers' estates, then it is not surprising that William Phipps challenged Robert's will. Cowan had never married, and his half brother and sister were his only surviving relatives. At the time of Cowan's death neither of his siblings had married. Should both William and Mary have died without issue before Cowan's death, then Phipps and John Gould, Jr, stood to inherit the full amount, minus legacies and 'Lawful Debts.'⁵⁹ Instead, Mary inherited the estates of both her brother and half-brother.

Apart from the help that Robert Cowan gave to William, he also had to continue to oblige his patrons, and promote the interests of the Company itself. Cowan described to Henry Lyell work that was undertaken to repair the damage caused by the 'setting in of the Rains' in early 1729, and how he was hoping that local

⁵⁶ K. N. Chaudhuri, *The Trading World of Asia and the East India Company 1660-1760*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1978, p.212.

⁵⁷ NLS, *Saltoun Papers*, MS 16560, f. 181, Drummond to Lord Milton 23 December 1735.

⁵⁸ G. Hill, (ed) *The Montgomery Manuscripts, 1603 - 1706: Compiled from the family Papers by William Montgomery of Rosemond, Esquire*, Vol. I, Archer & Sons, Belfast, 1869, pp.90-91, n.17. (Original italics.) Using the conversions offered by L. H. Officer in 'Purchasing Power of British Pounds from 1264 to 2006' at www.MeasuringWorth.com/ these three sums are the equivalent in 2006 of £5,300,240, £13,250,609 and £19,875,914 respectively.

⁵⁹ TNA, DEL 10/113, *Registrar of the High Court of Delegates and of the High Court of the Admiralty: Cause and Miscellaneous Papers*.

cultivation of the land would add to the East India Company's revenue.⁶⁰ At the same time he wrote to Edward Harrison about the Company's affairs in Persia as 'being settled on a good footing, I doubt not will be on verry acceptable terms', and of imposing 'one additional duty of $\frac{1}{2}$ pc^t on all goods imported by the Natives, which will defray the charges'.⁶¹ These examples show that no matter how busy Cowan was with his own affairs, he was still very much concerned with Company matters.

The following selection includes both familial and non-familial requests. Most are through Cowan's merchant and patron networks, but one combines both blood and marital connections. Some examples show the necessity of providing aid even when it was not always an easy or practicable thing to do. Occasionally even some of his lesser patrons, like fellow merchant Peter Delaporte, asked for favours. Cowan was able to do a good turn for at least one such man recommended to him. He told Delaporte that he had given 'Mr. Thorp' command of 'a small gally of mine about 160 Tuns and stands fair for having a larger ship as he is a verry good officer & sober man . . .'.⁶² Cowan also advised him that he had purchased firearms from Delaporte's neighbour, a 'Coll. John Johnson', which he stated was an effort on his part to encourage the latter. He added that although he had bought the firearms they were of little use in India.⁶³ Hugh Henry made a rare request for aid from Cowan in 1730 when he recommended John Houseman as a client, and John Ecclestone also asked

⁶⁰ Cowan to Henry Lyell, c. January 1729, PRONI RCP D/654/B1/2A.

⁶¹ Cowan to Edward Harrison, 3 January 1729, *ibid.*

⁶² Cowan to Peter Delaporte, 20 January 1732, PRONI RCP D654/B1/2C.

⁶³ Cowan to Coll. John Johnson, 20 January 1731, PRONI RCP D654/B1/2B; Cowan to Peter De La Porte, 20 January 1731, *ibid.*

for patronage for two of his clients in 1731. but Cowan was unable to oblige as one had returned to England, and the other was deceased.⁶⁴

Charles Boone also asked Cowan to give his assistance to Edward Say who returned to India as a free merchant in 1729.⁶⁵ Although Cowan initially lent his support to him when Say became a supercargo, it is evident from his later comments to Lowther that he entertained doubts about the man's capabilities. Cowan's apparent reluctance may have been because he knew that he had already lost Boone's support over his dismissal of Waters and Lambton.⁶⁶ On at least one occasion, however, Cowan gave preference to Say over his own protégé John Fotheringham on a voyage to Jedda, but promised to recompense Fotheringham on his return from Mocha.⁶⁷ Say must have been reasonably successful on this venture as he was still dealing with Lowther the following year. Henry had bought the ship that Say was to Captain, and Cowan was enticed, still voicing his doubts, to invest £1,250 in another journey to the Gulf.⁶⁸ Furthermore, Say was still listed as resident in Bombay and as the supercargo of the *Martha* grabb, at least two years after Cowan had returned to England.⁶⁹ In 1728, Cowan apologised to Boone because he was concerned he had 'not been able to demonstrate to the world the true regard I pay to all your commands'. This was over

⁶⁴ Cowan to Hugh Henry, 20 January 1731, PRONI RCP D654/B1/2B; Cowan to John Ecclestone, 20 January 1732, PRONI RCP D/654/B1/2C. See also Chapter 3, pp.135-136.

⁶⁵ Cowan to Henry Lowther, 29 August 1729, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1D; Cowan to John Hope, 6 July 1723, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1B. Edward Say had been resident in Bombay previously and had married a Mrs Crommelin in 1723: 'Mrs Crommelin being out of favour with the Com^r is under Mr Says roof'; Cowan to Charles Boone, 6 November 1723, *ibid*: 'Mr Say has married Mrs Cromelin at last'; Das Gupta, *op.cit.*, pp.166-167. Mrs Crommelin would seem to have been the widow of Mark Anthony Crommelin, who had been the provisional Chief at Mocha in 1720.

⁶⁶ See also Chapter 6, p.226.

⁶⁷ Cowan to Henry Lowther, 15 February 1730, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1E.

⁶⁸ Cowan to Henry Lowther, 28 January 1731, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1G; Cowan to Edward Say, 28 January 1731, *ibid*.

⁶⁹ Forrest, *op.cit.*, Vol. I, p.171.

Boone's 'Recommendatory' letter regarding 'Mr. Wallis' and Cowan advised Boone that his client had been 'appointed Second of Anjenjo'.⁷⁰

Albert Nesbitt had asked for help for his brother, Robert, and Cowan explained the difficulties in Indian country trade at that time, and his proposed remedy.

'Your brother is now herewith and lately returnd from Bengall where he had the consignment of three ships belonging to this place but that loads are so verry discouraging that there is little gott either by the supracargoes or owners. I design him next voyage to China with my brother ... that being the only profitable voyage'⁷¹

Cowan added that he would 'lett slip no opportunity to serve an old acquaintance' and this was important because, by this time, Nesbitt had allied himself to the Gould family through his marriage to the daughter of John Gould, Snr.

Cowan did not automatically grant patronage despite his own indebtedness to the system. Aid was not forthcoming if he felt that the applicant was already well provided within the network. Such was his response to a request from Zacharias Gee in 1730. Gee had arrived in Bengal in 1725 either as a ship's captain or a supercargo, and by 1728 he had purchased his own ship.⁷² Cowan had rejected an offer to trade with Gee in March 1728, saying that it was inconvenient for him to be 'concerned in any adventure with you from your side' as he was already 'very largely ingaged in trade'.⁷³ In response to Gee's later application, Cowan stated that:

⁷⁰ Cowan to Charles Boone, 25 September 1728, PRONI RCP D/654/B1/2A.

⁷¹ Cowan to Albert Nesbitt, 20 January 1732, PRONI RCP D/654/B1/2C.

⁷² Gee to Robert Cowan, 18 November 1728, PRONI RCP D654/B1/4B. Gee bought the ship from the retiring Governor of Fort William, Henry Frankland

⁷³ Cowan to Zacharias Gee, 1 March 1728, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1C.

John Fotheringham & Mr Baillie & some others depending on me – as you have made such good alliances in marying y^r daughters to Gentlemen of fortune I should think throu their interest you cant want ane Employ.⁷⁴

In other words, he advised that Gee apply to, and make use of, kin and patrons closer to home. Cowan had decided that others were in greater need of his ‘services’ than Gee and there was definitely an order of precedence when it came to the dispensation of patronage. At this time, both Fotheringham and Baillie were already in his employ, and were, therefore, entitled to primary consideration in the allocation of voyages.⁷⁵ Cowan himself was denied reciprocal patronage on at least one occasion, when the Governor of Fort William, Henry Frankland, declined involvement in a trading venture citing his own ill health, and pending retirement for his refusal.⁷⁶

Cowan did not grant patronage when he decided that to bestow it would adversely affect his own business prospects. In March 1729 Mr Newton applied for the position of supercargo on Cowan and Lowther’s newly acquired ship *Mattersea*.⁷⁷ Newton had aspired to the position of Governor of Bombay, but his only named patron was Henry Lyell, who had simultaneously conferred support on Cowan.⁷⁸ Newton’s extremely limited support base in Leadenhall Street meant that Cowan was under little obligation to assist his erstwhile rival. Moreover, Cowan’s decision, made on the grounds of economy, to employ Robert Baillie for the combined supercargo/captain position, allowed him to favour one client, whilst discretely disguising a disservice to another, and achieving this without overtly offending any

⁷⁴ Cowan to Zacharias Gee, 24 February 1730, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1E.

⁷⁵ Cowan to John Fotheringham, 6 February 1730, *ibid*; Cowan to Henry Lowther, 9 March 1730, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1F.

⁷⁶ Frankland to Robert Cowan, 17 April 1728, PRONI RCP D654/B1/4C - 5A; Macrae to Robert Cowan, 29 July 1729, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1D.

⁷⁷ Cowan to Henry Lowther, 12 March 1729, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1C.

⁷⁸ Cowan to John Gould Jr., 20 January 1731, PRONI RCP D654/B1/2B.

patrons. This was the second application for favouritism made by Newton that year. Cowan had earlier mentioned the aspirations of Mr Newton and Dick Upton to Henry Lowther. He stated that Newton's 'Schemes & prospects depend upon my approbation' and that 'Dick Upton is on the same lay.' His decision was that he would 'scarce engage with either I believe we shall find our Account in keeping our trade amongst our selves.'⁷⁹ Cowan blamed an attack of gout for a delay in replying to Newton, and said that although he had written to Lowther of the proposed voyage, and was prepared to offer the *Fame* for the journey, Cowan's letter conveniently arrived after Newton had already 'ingadged in a Voyage'.⁸⁰ Such treatment must have been galling to Newton - to be subjected to the whims of the man whom he was convinced had deprived him of his chance for a position of power. The only time Cowan seriously considered commercial dealings with Newton was when he wanted to offload their ship, the *Fame*, and coolly suggested Lowther might like to consider selling it to Newton for 'no less than 8000 Rupees' [£1,000].⁸¹

Cowan received an offer of a trade deal with a Mr. Mitchell, but declined to participate as he felt that he and Lowther could deal 'more advantageously than by being concerned with the gentlemen on the other Coast.'⁸² Not only was he refusing to lend his own support, but through his recommendations he also excluded that of Lowther and their other cronies. Cowan told Lowther a year later that 'Charity begins at home & we must take care of ourselves'.⁸³ There is no evidence to show that this was in any way a new philosophy for Cowan.

⁷⁹ Cowan to Henry Lowther, 22 February 1729, PRONI RCP D/654/B1/1C.

⁸⁰ Cowan to Jonathon Newton, 17 April 1729, *ibid.*

⁸¹ Cowan to Henry Lowther, *ibid.*; Cowan to Henry Lowther, 3 April 1729, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1H, p.49.

⁸² Cowan to Henry Lowther, 10 May 1729, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1D.

⁸³ Cowan to Henry Lowther, 20 September 1730, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1F.

The examples in this and the previous chapter show how patronage worked or was withheld during Cowan's employment in the East India Company service. That there were so many incidences in this one batch of correspondence indicates that it was something that was widely practised and well established by the second decade of the eighteenth century. It was part of the system that enabled clients to repay their patrons, whilst enriching themselves and their sponsors, by diversification of trade interests through the myriad of employees based across the subcontinent. If dividing the ownership of cargoes provided protection from loss, then spreading the areas of interest into so many different regions and through so many people certainly must have enhanced the chances of making profits for their patrons. Without patronage and kinship networks of various types, men like Cowan would not have been able to vigorously pursue their moneymaking endeavours. The clients desired to make money as rapidly as possible, the aims of their patrons in Leadenhall Street were to ensure that they, as well as the Company, took advantage of every opportunity that arose in the East. Where they could not control country trade on the Company's behalf, they turned a blind eye, and allowed the Company servants a more or less free hand. Cowan, like others before and after him, made full use of the situation.

These were some of the men involved in the reciprocal patronage network that developed around Cowan in Bombay during the early eighteenth century. The unforeseen possibilities of such assistance, is illustrated in one final example. In early 1731 Cowan sponsored a Captain Boulton, whose uncle, Captain Richard Boulton, was an East India Company Director. Cowan advised him that he would give the new arrival 'all assistance', but was unable to provide much aid as the climate did not agree with the young man, and Boulton returned to England within a few months of

his arrival. Cowan stated that he was ‘a verry good officer & I should have been glad had he continued in our service here’.⁸⁴ In turn, Boulton expressed his pleasure in ‘the Kind Treatment and Indulgence you were pleased to bestow’ and added that he wished he ‘could have continued in [Cowan’s] Service.’⁸⁵ At the time of this ‘Treatment’, Cowan was unknowingly subject to charges, which included one of extortion, brought about by Charles Boone.⁸⁶ The East India Company Committee was comprised of Matthew Decker, Josiah Wordsworth, John Drummond, Gilbert Heathcote, John Gould Junior, and Captain Richard Boulton. Apart from Boulton, all of these men were Cowan’s patrons, and, not surprisingly, there was no action taken on the charges. Although Cowan’s aid to his nephew could not have had any influence on Boulton at the time of the investigation, such a glowing testimonial would serve to dispel any lingering doubts he might have had over Cowan’s character.

The group of men discussed in Chapters Nine and Ten serve to show how the patronage network became so widespread, and linked so many people in its vast web. Cowan, like many other Company servants, was sometimes selective with his aid, especially when it did not suit his own interests. He was very generous to men like Martin French, Henry Lowther, and his own brother, whom he felt deserved patronage because of their use to him. He tried, wherever possible, to assist those recommended to him by his own patrons, but sometimes this was not always feasible. These examples of reciprocal patronage can be used to represent the general situation in the East India Company in all its Factories in the early eighteenth century.

⁸⁴ Cowan to William Phipps, c. 12 September 1731, PRONI RCP D654/B1/2C, para.29; Cowan to John Gould Jr., 20 January 1732, *ibid*.

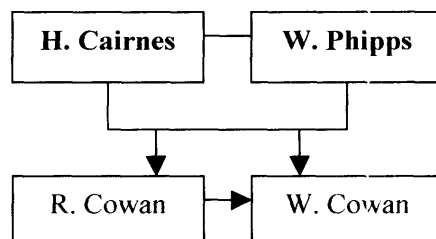
⁸⁵ Boulton to Robert Cowan, 27 September 1731, PRONI RCP D654/B1/5J, para. 77.

⁸⁶ Chaudhuri, ‘The English East India Company’, p.114. Cowan’s aid to Boulton’s nephew occurred at the same time that the committee was investigating the charges made by Boone, i.e. January 1731.

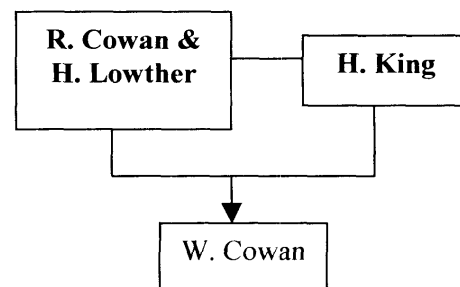
Reciprocal patronage offered aid to new East India Company recruits who were either related by blood, or marital ties to men who bestowed patronage in the traditional vertical manner. They could also be non-kin clients who had been seen as deserving, or who had, in turn, been recommended by a colleague such as a fellow East India Company Director, or as was often the case in India, another Company servant of superior, or equal rank, or, occasionally, of inferior station. The benefits to someone like Robert Cowan included a wider trading circle, and the chance to repay some of the massive debt he owed to his numerous patrons. When he was able to assist his own kin member, his half brother William, this was not as repayment out of gratitude to a patron but purely to benefit his own private trading and his brother's career. However, by increasing the volume of his trading ventures, Cowan was able to offer more opportunities for other men to join his lucrative private trading schemes. Included in those men would have been his backers from England – the majority of whom were merchants or bankers – to whom Cowan owed a vast debt for their support throughout his East India Company career. Without joint private trading ventures it would seem that there was no realistic way for Cowan to ever repay his patrons. Although he did return to England, and acquired a seat in Parliament, he died twelve days after being elected investigating. Therefore, like the vast majority of East India Company servants, he was never able to repay his debts through traditional political support. Cowan has been used to illustrate the link between the upper level of merchants, like John Drummond and Sir Gilbert Heathcote and those less significant, but nevertheless important, men at the lower end of the East India Company structure, for example Henry Kellet and Martin French. They all contributed to the enrichment of both the East India Company, and those merchants, bankers, and MPs who offered them employment and protection.

Chapter 10 - Connections

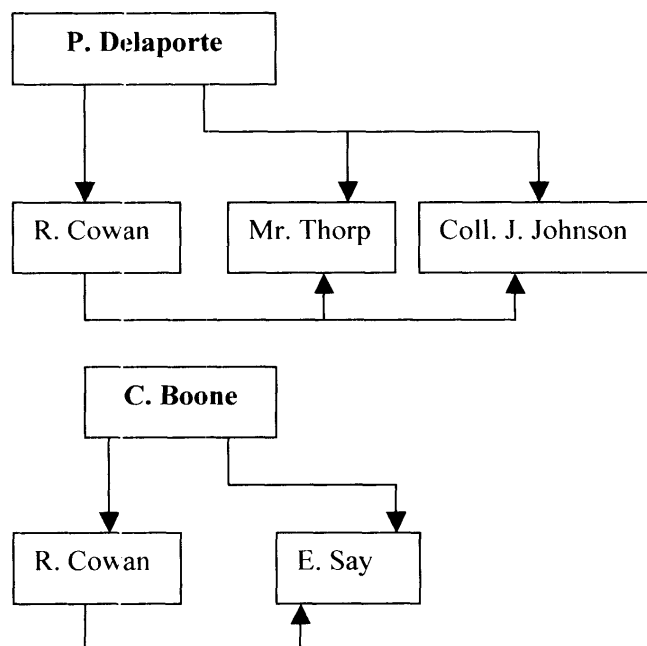
William Cowan's connections as an East India Company employee



William Cowan's connections as a private trader



Patronage Repayment



Denial of patronage

