Chapter One:

A Background of Patronage

'management based on patronage'[1]

Robert Cowan was very much a product of his time, and his story is redolent of patronage and kinship affiliations, both of which were prominent in the business world of the early eighteenth century. His family life, religious beliefs, education, and his early career choice, all had effects on his decision to work in India, but the propelling force was the over-riding benefits to be obtained under the patronage system. Cowan's correspondence has been effectively used to illustrate the extent of trade in India in the eighteenth century,[2] but his own history and career have been neglected. His contribution to the entrenchment of the East India Company in Bombay, as well as the methods he used to facilitate his rise from failed businessman to the holder of a parliamentary seat and a knighthood, have been ignored. Very little is known about Cowan's early personal history, or his life prior to his time in India and the Persian Gulf, and his untimely death, so soon after his return to England, means that he has remained an enigma. Cowan's East India Company papers have been preserved because they were returned to England as evidence in a court case over his will. In the normal course of events they would have been retained in India and might have suffered damage, been mislaid or even destroyed. The little that is known of him shows that his life was one of interest, constant intrigue, drama and he

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[1] L. S. Sutherland, *The East India Company in Eighteenth Century Politics,* Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1952, p.35.

[2] A. Das Gupta, *Indian Merchants and the Decline of Surat, c.1700-1750*, Franz Steiner Verlag, Wiesbaden, 1979; I.B. Watson, 'Indian Merchants and English Private Interests: 1659-1760', in *India and the Indian Ocean,* eds A. Das Gupta & M.N. Pearson, Oxford University Press, Calcutta, 1987, p.316.

was subject to the vagaries of fortune. It is clear from Cowan's correspondence that he used the web of family connections and patronage not only to further his career, but also to overcome the difficulties caused by his business failure in Portugal, and to assist him to eventually make his fortune. That he ultimately succeeded was due primarily to his keen business acumen. However, it was combined with the benefits he and many others, both in India and England, derived from the intricate network of relations, friends and their patrons. Any discussion of the significance of such connections must begin with a closer look at Cowan's own family history and the general acceptance of patronage, and its impact on his business careers.

Cowan's family migrated from Stirling, Scotland to Ulster in the early seventeenth century, probably under The Charter of James I, 1613.[3] The idea of the Plantation of Ulster is described in the Charter:

> ... whereas the province of Ulster, in our realm of Ireland, for many years now past hath grossly erred from the true religion of Christ and Divine Grace, ... to stir up and recall the same province from superstition, rebellion, calamity, and poverty, which heretofore have horribly raged therein, to religion, obedience, strength, and prosperity.[4]

Under the guise of religious reform and concern for the welfare of the Irish population the real aim was to provide opportunities for wealth creation to a select group of migrants. The original intention for settlement of the plantation was that the newcomers were to be of sufficient means to establish towns, and it specifically excluded those deemed to be seeking their fortunes. This proviso was designed to

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[3] The Charters of James I & Charles II to the Irish Society 1613, 1662, Public Records Office of Northern Ireland, [hereafter PRONI] FIN/8/1, pp. 217.
[4] PRONI, FIN/8/1, *ibid.*

encourage the promotion of stability and economic growth within Ireland.[5] However, it also allowed the selection process to favour those with powerful patrons. After a certain amount of reconsideration on quantities, rents and nationality balance, the eventual allocation of land was placed in the hands of the privy councils of England and Scotland.[6] The Privy Councils, in this instance, initiated the chain of patronage. It should be noted here that the Privy Councillors themselves owed their positions of power to the favour of the reigning monarch, and were, as advisors to the sovereign, clearly able to promote the interests of certain men or families. As such a climate was familiar to Cowan it is not surprising that he was willing to take advantage of any patronage that was either freely offered to him, or that he could solicit.

Seventeenth century society in the British Isles was still firmly under the mantle of paternalism, whereby the government and its appointed officers attempted to both regulate the lives, as well as supply the needs, of the general community. In their various roles as government office holders and through their position in society, Members of Parliament were capable of bestowing or withholding their favours through the patronage system. The era of *laissez faire,* where government declined to interfere in the actions of individuals, or in matters of trade, had not yet arrived. In Cowan's lifetime, therefore, paternalism and its selective and protective mantle, was still the guiding principal. The Plantation Decree of James I for Ireland was implemented at a time when connections with people in authority, whether through kinship or business, were of paramount importance.

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[5] T.W. Moody, *The Londonderry Plantation 1609-41* William Mullan and Son, Belfast, 1939, pp. 31-33.
[6] *ibid.*, pp.37-38.

Various land grants were made to individual English and Scottish settlers totalling approximately 162,500 acres.[7] In the selection process for land grants the successful men from Scotland were more likely to have been those who were involved in land management, rather than less experienced, but perhaps wealthier, townspeople, whereas connection with the mercantile communities was taken into consideration for English applicants.[8] According to Phillip Robinson, in *The Plantation of Ulster: British Settlement in an Irish Landscape, 1600 – 1670,* the main influx of Scottish settlers occurred in the period 1630 – 1641, and this was the time when Robert Cowan's ancestors arrived in Ulster from Stirling.[9] Competition for the available land must have been fairly brisk as only a quarter of the applicants were granted estates.[10]

Apart from the appointment of individual settlers from both Scotland and England, it was decided that a joint-stock London company should exist to oversee expected urban development in Derry and Coleraine, and that the company was to be administered by the following hierarchy: a governor, a deputy governor and twenty four assistants. It further stipulated that some of the assistants were to be aldermen but the majority were to be selected from commoners, and that they were to face elections for their positions.[11] This company was originally entitled 'The Society of the Governor and Assistants, London, of the New Plantation in Ulster, within the Realm of Ireland', but it eventually became known by the much less cumbersome name of

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[7] P.S. Robinson, *The Plantation of Ulster: British Settlement in an Irish Landscape, 1600 –1670,* Gill and Macmillan, Dublin, 1984, p.86.
[8] *ibid.*, pp.79-80.
[9] *ibid.*, p.107.
[10] *ibid.*, p.79.
[11] *ibid.*, pp.80-81; Moody, *op.cit.*, p.81;

the 'Irish Society'.[12] The responsibility of this society remained in the townships of Derry and Coleraine, an area of about 7000 acres, and plantation areas of over 38000 acres were offered to combinations of various London livery companies.[13] Patronage was not limited to the granting of small parcels of land to individual owners as it also offered opportunities for groups to take advantage of joint investment potential. The structure of the Irish Society was replicated in the East India Company with a Chairman, Deputy Chairman and twenty-four Directors, and Cowan was acquainted and perhaps very comfortable with the similar system.[14]

Cowan's ancestors settled into the Londonderry region of Ulster, and familiarity with the prevailing system of patronage influenced both Robert's early career, as well as his later decision to seek employment with the East India Company. His well-documented course of action of acquiring numerous powerful patrons, no doubt stemmed from his knowledge of a system that had served his family and friends well. The utilisation of any connections he had made with the Irish Society or various businesses in Belfast, Dublin and London, was the only real option that he had to achieve his ambitions. While he was not averse to taking chances when they arose, especially in entrepreneurial moneymaking ventures, the system predisposed him to tread the conventional path of advancement.

The use of family connection and patronage was clearly in evidence in the settlement, trade and politics of late seventeenth and early eighteenth century Ulster. Research by Dr. Jean Agnew has shown that kinship, whether by blood or by marriage, or even by commonality of religion, was a very important factor during this

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[12] Moody, *ibid.*, p.82.
[13] Robinson, *op.cit.*, pp.80-82.
[14] M. Moir, *A General Guide to the India Office Records*, The British Library, London, 1988, pp.23-24.

time especially in the development of trade between various centres.[15] It is not surprising, therefore, to find familiar names occurring throughout Robert Cowan's business and private lives in England, Portugal and later in India, or that many of these men had strong links with Scotland, Ulster, and the Presbyterian Church.

Information on Robert Cowan's immediate family is scanty. His father, John Cowan, was a Presbyterian merchant of Londonderry. He married twice, and by his first wife Elizabeth there were two sons, John, and Robert. There is no record of the dates of birth for these two sons, and there were at least five more children by his subsequent marriage to Ann.[16] The maiden names of both of John's wives are unknown. Robert Cowan's stepmother died on 3 September 1725, and his father on 20 April 1733. [17] All that is known of three of Robert's half-siblings is that Jenny died in either 1722 or 1723, Thomas on 27 February 1728, and Alexander on 22 July 1730. Cowan wrote to his brother William in April 1723 on hearing the news of the death of his 'grandmother & Sister Jenny the former was not surprizing she being advance to a good age, but the young & old must and do dye in Europe as well as India'.[18] Jenny was married to a Benjamin Davis, and Cowan corresponded with him, and even in 1731 continued to address him as 'brother-in-law'.[19] William and Mary, the other two children, figured more prominently in Cowan's documented life.[20] William died *circa* 1737, although the year of his birth is unknown. Mary was born in 1713 and she lived until 1788.

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[15] J. Agnew, *Belfast Merchant Families in the Seventeenth Century*, Four Courts Press, Dublin, 1996, pp.189-191.
[16] Ann's date of birth is also unknown. John died 8 April 1706.
[17] These dates are by courtesy of The Genealogy Centre, Derry, Northern Ireland, and are taken from the registers of St. Columb's Cathedral (Church of Ireland), Londonderry City.
[18] Cowan to William Cowan, 20 April 1723, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1A.
[19] Cowan to Benjamin Davis, 20 January 1731, RCP D654/B1/2B.
[20] *The Gentleman's Magazine,* Vol. 7, April 1737, p.253. The entry states that William inherited the estate of his 'half-brother'.

By the late seventeenth century, John Cowan was a successful businessman, and landowner who occupied various positions of authority within Londonderry. In various documents dated between 1713 and 1728 John was referred to as Merchant, Gentleman, or Esquire.[21] He was listed as a Burgess in November 1693 - November 1694; he was Sheriff from November 1694 until January 1695, Constable of the Staple, Burgess again from February 1695 to November 1703, and Alderman from November 1703 until July 1704.[22] In 1704 he was elected Mayor but this appointment was not approved by Council.[23] Robert Cowan remitted money to Hugh Henry allegedly for his 'ancient' father's upkeep in 1731, but the following year saw John Cowan financially stable enough to sign a lease for land with a John Joanes.[24] If John was really in need of this money for his family's living expenses, or whether Robert was prudently remitting profits from private trading ventures back to Ulster in small amounts for safekeeping will never be known, although it is strange that John Cowan should have been in need of money when he was still able to afford to retain his civic positions. The lease was signed in 1731 and John Cowan was designated as an Alderman, but this may well have been a courtesy title as there is no record of John resuming his civic duties in the records from 1720 onwards.[25] Cowan did state in his will that his legacy was to be invested in real estate, and this particular transaction

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[21] PRONI, MIC 311/Vol. 9/16, *Transcripts of Memorials of Deeds, Conveyances and Wills*, p.203, No. 7292, Mortgage between John Cowan, Esq. Merchant and Francis Boggs re house in Queen Street, Londonderry, 28 & 29 September 1713; PRONI MIC 311/ Vol. 9/15, *ibid.*, p. 307, No. 7579, 28 September 1713, A lease of indenture between John Cowan of the City of Londonderry Merchant and Alexander Hervey, Jr., for a farm; PRONI, MIC 311/15/Vol. 29, *ibid.*, p.322, No.17820, 1& 2 April 1720, Between John Cowan, Gent. and John Colhoune re freehold tenements.

[22] Information kindly supplied by the Archivist of Derry City Council from Council's Minutes. The Minutes from July 1704 to February 1720 are missing, with no further reference to John Cowan after 1720; PRONI, LA 79/2A/2, *Londonderry Corporation Minute Book,* 2 November, 1693. John Cowan was listed as a Burgess.

[23] PRONI, MIC/440/1, *Londonderry Corporation Minute Books from 1673*, 21 December 1704. I am greatly indebted to Dr Jean Agnew for supplying me with this information.

[24] PRONI, D/654/LE75/2, *Alexander Stewart's Commercial Papers,* 15 December 1731, Lease between Alderman John Cowan and John Joanes, relating to land Greenan. Signed in the presence of Benjn Davis.

[25] PRONI, D 654/LE75/2, *ibid.*, 15 December 1731. John Cowan was named as an Alderman in a Lease.

may have been the first steps towards realising that aim. On the other hand, Cowan, in giving his father the money, may simply have been repaying his father for any assistance he may have rendered him in his early trading ventures and, at the same time, ensuring that his father and half-sister were financially safeguarded. Pecuniary security, or lack of it, was a constant refrain and concern throughout Cowan's writings, and included the well-being of members of his immediate family, as well as that of friends and acquaintances.

In his role as a burgess, John Cowan was privy to personal commercial and legal advantages, as well as bearing the responsibilities for decision-making and leadership for the community.[26] As a member of the powerful Merchant Guild, John Cowan had influence and patronage at his command and the added roles of his civic positions further increased his power. These positions were keenly sought after, not only for the prestige of office and for the opportunities to confer patronage, but also to garner the perquisites that such bestowal provided.[27] According to J.H. Plumb, in *Sir Robert Walpole: The Making of a Statesman*, aldermen were 'tradesmen and merchants' and they were 'long practised in the amiable art of feathering each others nests'.[28] In John Cowan's case this meant having control over the leasing of land, as well as being able to offer employment opportunities under the Londonderry Corporation. Such positions, as those held by John Cowan, did come at a cost, as the remuneration granted to office bearers would not necessarily have covered the

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[26] D.M Palliser (ed) *The Cambridge Urban History of Britain 600-1540,* Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2000, pp.85-86.
[27] Agnew, *op.cit.,* p. 93.
[28] J.H. Plumb, *Sir Robert Walpole: The Making of a Statesman,* Vol. I, The Cresset Press, London, 1956, pp.51-52.

expenses incurred.[29] There was the expectation of some form of recompense for such large outlays, albeit from indirect and intangible means. Altruism may have played a part, but it would not have been the guiding force for aspiring office-bearers.

The beginning of the eighteenth century brought a challenge to the civic positions held by Dissenters within the Irish settlers' community. The introduction of the Test Act, which required anyone holding a position of office to renounce his dissenting religion and become a member of the established church, had a twofold aim.[30] Although the introduction of the Sacramental Test was mainly designed to deter Catholics from taking control of civic offices, to a certain extent in Ireland it was also used as a method to inhibit the Presbyterians from controlling not only local political power, but also the wealth in Ulster.[31] It was directed at the growth of Presbyterian political activism in both local and national affairs. While Presbyterians in Ulster were certainly dominant in the municipal sphere, both in positions of authority and in the mercantile arena, it is a little more difficult to believe that they were ever perceived as a real threat in the higher echelons of political power. The number of Dissenting Members of Parliament during the period 1692-1727 peaked at nine members, or less than three per cent of the seats in the Irish House of Commons.[32] Any political threat to the establishment was therefore minimal. Their

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[29] J. Kirkpatrick, *An historical essay upon the loyalty of Presbyterians in Great Britain and Ireland from the reformation to this present year* (Belfast, 1713), pp.426-427. In 1674 the mayor received £100 and the Sheriff £30 per annum; Agnew, op.cit., p.77; A. Simpson, *The Wealth of the Gentry 1540-1660,* Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1961, pp.135-136. In 1647 the expenses for Thomas Cullum, merchant, as sheriff September 1646 – September 1647 amounted to £3,348 and allowances came to £954/2/2. Regardless of duties payable by the various guilds this was expensive in what Simpson calls austere times, although he adds that entertainment was 'still considerable'.

[30] D.W. Hayton, 'Exclusion, Conformity, and Parliamentary Representation: The Impact of the Sacramental Test on Irish Dissenting Politics', in *The Politics of Irish Dissent 1650-1800*, ed K. Herlihy, Four Courts Press Ltd., Dublin, 1997, p.52.

[31] Agnew, *op.cit.,* pp.93,192; S.J. Connolly, *Religion, Law and Power: The Making of Protestant Ireland 1660 -1760*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1992, p.170.

[32] Hayton, *op.cit,* p.58.

unassailable position in the area of trading and banking, combined with their standing in local communities and the patronage they controlled, was another matter entirely. Restrictions to their acquisition of political power was a way of exerting pressure on the Dissenters which would have been more difficult, if not impossible, through an assault on their established and successful business dealings.

These Dissenting MPs were clearly powerful in their local business communities and for the Cowan family, the connection with, and influence of several of these men, was not insignificant. Among these Parliamentarians were William Cairnes (Belfast), Sir Alexander Cairnes (Co. Monaghan), Hugh Henry (Antrim) and James Lennox (Derry). All of these men had achieved positions in society whereby they could use their influence, or friendship, to assist people like John and Robert Cowan, and to utilise familial or marital ties for their own advancement in Ulster society.[33] In Robert Cowan's case they provided aid in his business career in India. The Cairnes brothers and Hugh Henry were Ulstermen and leading Dublin bankers and it is highly likely that John Cowan used their services in his trading activities. However, the ties between these men and John's eldest surviving son were far stronger. The extended Cairnes family were to play a very important role in Robert Cowan's life particularly after he took up residence in India. Cowan used Hugh Henry to facilitate some of his financial matters, and he trusted him to ensure the safe delivery of some valuable items to Mary Cowan.[34] Furthermore, Hugh Henry was also designated as one of the three trustees to Mary's marriage settlement in 1737.[35]

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[33] T.C. Barnard, 'The Government and Irish Dissent, 1704-1780' in *The Politics of Irish Dissent 1650-1800,* ed K. Herlihy, Four Courts Press Ltd., Dublin, 1997, p.22.
[34] Cowan to Hugh Henry, 20 January 1731, PRONI RCP D654/B1/2B; Cowan to Nathaniel Gould, 27 January 1732, PRONI RCP D654/B1/2C.
[35]PRONI, D/654/F/6, *Marriage Settlement between Alexander Stewart and Mary Cowan.*

There was also a history of personal transactions between John Cowan and Alderman James Lennox. The latter was not only a Member of Parliament, and a fellow Presbyterian but he was also a merchant and ship-owner. Cowan sold three portions of land in Londonderry to Lennox in 1695.[36] James was the brother of Robert Lennox, Snr, who was also a merchant and ship owner of Belfast.[37] As well as holding the office of alderman, James also was burgess and mayor of Londonderry at various times, and he was elected as MP for the County of Londonderry in 1697, although the result was subsequently declared invalid. He later contested the seat of Londonderry Borough, which he held from 1703-1713.[38] James had at least ten children but Agnew believes that only two sons and two daughters survived infancy.[39] His eldest son, John, married Rebecca Upton, of the Castle Upton gentry family, several of whom were connected with East India trade, and they, in turn, were involved to varying degrees with Robert Cowan. Lennox's younger son, Robert, who eventually became Governor of Fort Marlborough, Sumatra, was also a friend of Robert Cowan. Cowan had no hesitation in soliciting patronage for his friend from a fellow Governor in the East India Company service and the two Roberts were eventually to pursue a trading partnership whilst in the service of the East India Company.[40] The extent of the involvement of these men in Cowan's career and business interests will be dealt with in following chapters.[41]

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[36] PRONI, T/3380/2, *Irish Society Tenants*: *Description of Land in Londonderry City, 1695.*
[37] Agnew, *op.cit.* p.231.
[38] *ibid.*, pp. 231-232.
[39] Dr. Agnew has very generously provided this information, and her estimate is that Robert was born between 1693 and 1706. Some of his siblings and cousins reached their seventies and eighties and it is quite possible that he survived the rigours of the East to also live a long, and possibly prosperous life. Rebecca Upton was the second youngest child of Arthur and Dorothy Upton of Castle Upton, Co. Antrim.
[40] Cowan to Robert Lennox, 5 November 1723, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1B; Cowan to Robert Lennox, 25 March 1728, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1C.
[41] For the Uptons' involvement with Cowan, see Chapter 5, pp.193-195; for Robert Lennox see Chapter 9, pp.318-319.

Vacancies for aldermen were more often than not filled from the ranks of the burgesses, who, in turn, were generally drawn from the Presbyterian mercantile community.[42] By using this method of selection, and given that these men included merchants, ship-owners and bankers, it would suggest that the wealth of the community was in the hands of the minority. After the introduction of the Test Act, the aldermen and burgesses of Londonderry sought judicial advice about whether they were included by the legislation. They were advised that the Test applied to them.[43] Their subsequent refusal to conform to the Sacramental Test caused many leading merchants to forego their positions in the town corporations, as they held their allegiance to their faith to be of far greater importance than their municipal responsibilities. As they were still able to practice their various trades and therefore continue their successful careers, the major impact was the loss to the civic system of their valuable skills that would have affected the welfare of the general community. From the recorded dates of John Cowan's civil duties it is likely that he declined to renounce his religion, and in accordance with the other Presbyterian burgesses in Derry, it appears that he resigned from public duties in 1704.[44]

The impact of the loss of the most prominent and clearly the most successful members of the merchant communities from the corporations of relatively small towns like Belfast and Londonderry was likely considerable. The curtailing of Presbyterian influence in the corporations deprived the community of the most effective management of the development of the town, though their individual

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[42] Hayton, *op.cit.*, p.61; PRONI, LA79/28/2, *Londonderry Corporation Minute Book, 1688-1704*. 12 January 1698.
[43] Agnew, *op.cit.*, p.95.
[44] Hayton, *op.cit.*, p.64. Unfortunately the lack of complete civic records for this period does not allow for verification of John Cowan's status after this date.

fortunes were largely unaffected.[45] The forfeiture of such influence reduced their ability to bestow favour on protégés, which would have prompted Cowan to look at an overseas career, where he would be able to utilise both his talent and his connections without being hampered by his religious beliefs. Patronage was not restricted to employment, trade or political opportunities, as it was sometimes repaid in kind. In the story of Robert Cowan's successful career in the East India Company, it is evident that he considered the acquisition of patronage to be as important as the possession of talent.

Another branch of Robert Cowan's family migrated from Scotland when John Stewart was granted land at Ballylawn in County Donegal in the Plantation Settlements. The Stewart family possibly benefited from patronage of the very highest level, inasmuch as James I, in his granting of land in Ulster, was more than generous to his supporters and to many members of his own family.[46] That such patronage was extended to include the Cowan branch of the family must remain conjecture, but it is inconceivable that Cowan, living where and when he did, was unaware of the advantages such patronage could provide to an aspiring young man. The patronage solicited by, and bestowed on Robert Cowan, in his later career, is well documented and the benefits he reaped from this assistance ultimately united the Stewart and Cowan families, and, more importantly, their land. Kinship was just as relevant to Robert Cowan in the early decades of the eighteenth century as it had been to his forebears nearly one hundred years earlier.

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[45] Agnew, *op.cit.*, p.104.
[46] H.M. Hyde, *The Rise of Castlereagh*, MacMillan & Co. Ltd., London, 1933, p.6.

Developments occurred amongst the Stewart relations, which had long-term effects on both families. John Stewart's great-great grandson, Thomas, who had inherited the Stewart property, possessed neither a head for business, nor the ability to run an estate. Furthermore, he and his wife seemed to care little for living within their means, and he was forced to sell land to pay for his expensive way of life.[47] News of his profligate habits had even reached Robert Cowan in Bombay by the beginning of 1731. Cowan wrote to his brother-in-law Benjamin Davis:

> I am sorry my Cuz[n] Thomas Stewart is so bad an oeconomist, as he has so small a family. I think he may very handsomely live on his Rents without prejudicing the Estate, if he will stay a few years & has a mind to part with it, I'll give more for it than any man in Ireland.[48]

Cowan's generous offer was not to be considered, however, because after Thomas's death, circa 1731, his younger brother, Alexander, inherited the family estate.[49]

Alexander was born in 1700 and was later apprenticed to the linen industry under Isaac Macartney, merchant, ship-owner and elder of the First Presbyterian Church of Belfast. After completing his apprenticeship, Alexander plied his own European trade from London.[50] Whereas Thomas had little in the way of business or financial management skills, his brother possessed an abundance of such qualities. Thomas and Alexander were not only different in their approach to financial management, they also chose opposite sides of both politics and religion. Thomas, contrary to family tradition, had been a Tory and High Churchman, whereas Alexander was a Whig and remained within the Presbyterian Church. Thomas chose a wife who spent money as freely as he did, and who, in order to maintain her

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[47] *ibid.*, pp.8-9.
[48] Cowan to Benjamin Davis, 20 January 1731, PRONI RCP D654/B1/2B.
[49] Hyde, *op.cit.*, p.9.
[50] Agnew, *op.cit.*, pp. 236-237; H.M. Hyde, *The Londonderrys: A Family Portrait,* Hamish Hamilton, London, 1979 p.1.

profligacy, attempted to deny Alexander the Ballylawn estate after her husband's death.[51] In marked contrast, Alexander's astute choice of his first cousin Mary as his wife was to prove singularly profitable for his family. Mary was the half-sister of Robert Cowan and, became, by chance, the sole inheritor to his estate. This eventuated because William's death, in 1737, occurred at or about the same time as that of Robert, and it meant that Mary inherited three estates – those of her father and her two brothers.[52]

In a letter to Benjamin Davis in 1731 Robert advised him that John Cowan had: 'settled his Estate Real & Personal upon me, leaving it to me to take care of my brother & Sister, which I will do.'[53] As Robert was Cowan's eldest surviving son such an arrangement was in line with the laws of primogeniture. At the time he did express his concern about the value of the property that he was to inherit: 'the Estate must be greatly diminished since I left Ireland it is worth no more than 300 pounds a year . . .' and if that was the total value of the estate Cowan clearly wondered how, without attaining at least what he regarded as a competency, he was to support his two half-siblings.[54] If that £300 represented the income from his father's estate it should have been sufficient to guarantee a life of relative ease, since in the mid to late eighteenth century an income of £50 per annum was considered enough to place a man in the lower end of the middle ranks in society.[55] In 1728 when Cowan was Second in Council and Accountant in Bombay his salary was £100. By July 1730, as Governor

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[51] Hyde, *The Rise of Castlereagh*, pp.8-9.
[52] *ibid.*, p.10; Hyde, *The Londonderrys: A Family Portrait*, p.5.
[53] Cowan to Benjamin Davis, 20 January 1731, PRONI RCP D654/B1/2A.
[54] *ibid.*
[55] P. Langford, *A Polite and Commercial People: England 1727-1783*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1989, pp. 62-63.

of Bombay, his salary was shown as £300 per annum.[56] Cowan would have been able to attain what most people regarded as a competency on such a salary, which was augmented by profits gained from private trade during his fourteen year sojourn in the East, and family income awaiting him on his return to Ireland. These monies not only provided him with a comfortable retirement, but also allowed him to fulfil his father's wishes regarding provision for his half-siblings. John Cowan died on 20 April 1733 and the responsibility for his younger children was left in Robert's hands.

How did Cowan, a failed businessman, rise to the rank of Governor of Bombay? Apart from personal motivation, what were the forces that propelled him to try to attain such a goal? Was he just lucky, or extremely talented, or did he have powerful connections that assisted him throughout his career? The answers reveal that he had both his share of good and bad luck, that he was a very astute businessman and that he did have more than a little help from both family and friends. His success after such abject failure is not necessarily unique, but whereas documents belonging to many of his contemporaries were routinely destroyed, his were preserved. These papers provide solid evidence of the power of the patronage and kinship networks.

Kinship, in its various forms, was the important second part of the equation when it came to maximising opportunities in India. Whereas advantage could be taken from the traditional family definition of kin at home, such connections were less critical to someone based in the Far East. Lawrence Stone argues in *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800*, that, by the early eighteenth century, the use of kinship ties for advancement in most social or economic spheres was already in

[56] OIOC, BPP P/341/7, *Bombay Public Consultations January to December 1730-1732*, p.206. The pay period covered by this document was 2 July 1730 to 1 January 1731 inclusive.

decline. However, Stone notes that it was still important to certain sections of society and he nominated the mercantile area as one that continued to rely upon kinship ties to enhance and enforce social and economic standing.[57] Evidence from Cowan's papers show that this indeed was true and it highlights that the use of the kinship network was widespread, and more invasive and powerful than Stone acknowledged.

In the place of familial kinship the East India Company servants developed a wider network based on common trading or political interests, shared religious beliefs, or even sometimes a combination of one of these with what K. Wrightson nominates as 'fictional kinship' – that is by forging closer ties through the careful choice of godparents.[58] In many ways the form of kinship that was to play an important role in the fortunes of Cowan and many other East India Company employees was similar to that defined by Wrightson as 'neighbourliness' because of its structure and reciprocity requirements.[59] Both comprised elements of patronage, inequality, the pursuit of financial gains, dependence, employment stability, and, primarily, self-interest.[60]

Cowan's level of education remains in doubt, but he was fluent in French and Portuguese, clearly literate and numerate, and would have fulfilled most, if not all, of

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[57] L. Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800*, (Abridged Edition) Penguin Books Ltd., London, 1979 (1977), p.98; T.M. Devine 'The Social Composition of the Business Class in the Larger Scottish Towns, 1680-1740, in *Ireland and Scotland 1600-1850: Parallels and Contrasts in Economic and Social Development*, eds T.M. Devine & D. Dickson, John Donald Publishers Ltd., Edinburgh, 1983, p.166. Devine states that during this period these ties were extremely important because both personal and business reputations were highly valued and it was deemed safer to deal with trusted family and close friends rather than strangers.

[58] K. Wrightson, *English Society 1580-1680,* Hutchinson Publishing Group, London, 1982, p.48. Cowan was solicited to be godfather to at least four of his subordinates' offspring during his time in India. See also Chapter 9, pp.311-312.

[59] Wrightson, *op.cit.*, p.57.

[60] *ibid.*, p.58.

the criteria expected of men of his standing in this period.[61] He followed his father into merchant trading, in which enterprise, by the results of his efforts in India, he was highly successful, compared with his far less auspicious Portuguese business venture. It is not possible to ascertain whether Cowan ever traded in Ireland, although in 1729 he wrote of having spent time in Dublin and he indicated that he was there for long enough to acquire friends in that city.[62] Records that cite the granting of Freedom of the City to tradesmen in Belfast and Londonderry for the period, when Cowan might have finished an apprenticeship, no longer exist.[63] There is a gap in the records from approximately 1681 to 1724, and there is no mention of Robert Cowan prior to 1681.[64] There is a remote possibility that Cowan served his apprenticeship overseas because in one reference made by John Drummond to Lord Milton in 1735 he nominated Cowan as being 'a Scots Irishman *bred* at Lisbon'.[65] A background such as this could explain his proficiency in the Portuguese language.

The Statute of Artificers of 1563 ensured that apprenticeships ran for seven years, under the supervision of a master tradesman.[66] By the early eighteenth century, however, merchant apprenticeship terms had been reduced by two or three years, and

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[61] W.E. Minchinton, 'The Merchants in England in the Eighteenth Century', *Explorations in Entrepreneurial History,* Vol. X, December 1957, p.65.
[62] Cowan to James Macrae, 1 February 1729, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1C.
[63] R.M. Young, (ed) *The Town Book of the Corporation of Belfast, 1613-1816*, Marcus Ward & Co., Belfast, 1892, pp.246-300. Lists the freemen of Belfast from 1635 to 1796, but there is a gap from 1681 to 1724; Agnew, *op.cit.*, p.7.
[64] Young, *loc.cit.;* Agnew, *loc.cit.*; PRONI, LA79/29/1(1673-1686), LA 79/29/2 (1688-1704), LA 79/29/4, *Minute Books of the Londonderry Corporation,* (1720-1736). These Minute Books show a gap of a similar period to that of Belfast.
[65] NLS, *Saltoun Papers*, MS 16560, f.181, Drummond to Lord Milton, 23 December 1735. (My italics – according to the Oxford Dictionary 'bred' can also mean 'properly trained' and this could refer to his training for business.)
[66] G.M. Trevelyan, *English Social History: A Survey of Six Centuries - Chaucer to Queen Victoria,* Longmans Green & Co., London, 1942, p.191; P. Deane, *The First Industrial Revolution*, 2 nd edn., Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1979, p.220.

the number of boys indentured had also declined.[67] This is not surprising because not only was a traditional merchant apprenticeship of seven years a lengthy process, but it could also be very expensive both in initial education and the fees payable to the apprentice master. There was also the added cost involved in establishing a business.[68] The price to be paid by a parent for a son's apprenticeship in smaller towns and cities could vary from as little as £5 to a sum exceeding £100, but in London the amount required could reach several hundred pounds.[69] Alternatively, the cost of an apprenticeship could be reduced as fees were usually waived if the apprentice was employed by a family member.[70] Cowan chose a career as a merchant, and, in so doing, followed in his father's footsteps, and it is most likely that he was indentured to his father.[71] Regardless of how or where he learnt his trade it is known that sometime before 1707 Cowan had established his own business in Lisbon, Portugal, as his signature appeared on a Representation of the Portugal Merchants' Grievances in that year.[72]

The importance of these kinship ties, both amongst Presbyterians, and within the expatriate Scottish community and more specifically amongst the Ulster merchants, is clearly demonstrated in Jean Agnew's book, *Belfast Merchant Families in the Seventeenth Century*, which traces the business, religious and personal

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[67] T.M. Devine, *Exploring the Scottish Past: Themes in the History of Scottish Society,* Tuckwell Press, East Linton, 1995, p.20; Minchinton, *op.cit.,* p.63

[68] R.G. Wilson, *Gentlemen Merchants: The Merchant Community in Leeds 1700-1830,* Manchester University Press,Manchester, 1971, p.23; N. Rogers, 'Money, Land and Lineage: The Big Bourgeoisie of Hanoverian London', *Social History*, Vol. IV, No.3, 1979, p.444.

[69] P. Earle, *The Making of the English Middle Class: Business, Society and Family Life in London, 1660-1730*, Methuen, London, 1989, p.94; G.D.H. Cole & R. Postgate, *The Common People 1746 – 1946*, Methuen & Co. Ltd., London, 1961 [1938], p.69.

[70] Minchinton, *op.cit.,* Devine, *op.cit.,* p.20.

[71] Minchinton, *op.cit.,* p.62; PRONI, MIC 311/Vol.9/16, *ibid.,* p.203, No.7292. Mortgage between John Cowan, Esq., Merchant and Francis Boggs.

[72] TNA, SP 89/89, ff 3-24, *Secretaries of State: State Papers Foreign, Portugal, Portugal Merchants Representation of their Grievances, No. 1, 1707.*

connections of thirty two families in Belfast.[73] While this book does not refer to Cowan, or his immediate family, it serves to reinforce the importance placed upon such bonds at that time, and there is no reason to believe that the situation was any different in the town of Londonderry.

To be able to set up his own business in Portugal at an early age required the assistance of more than just Cowan's father. Cowan was certainly never short of influential friends in his later career, and it is likely that some of them dated from his early working life in Ulster. His father's business dealings and his official positions within the Londonderry community would have ensured that the young Cowan began his business venture with sufficient support. Some of these men remained of importance to Cowan after he travelled to India, and even upon his eventual return to England, more than a decade and a half later. These kinship bonds were important long-term relationships and were not entered into lightly. Once in place they were assiduously cultivated.

Merchants, especially those in London, had begun by the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries to hold a significant position in the ranks of society. In particular, those merchants who were successful in trading overseas gained opportunities to become very wealthy indeed.[74] Their business sphere was not limited to Europe, although various centres there were still of great importance to trade, including the strategically placed city of Lisbon. Trade was rapidly expanding into Russia, the Levant, and more particularly to India and China through the establishment and continuing growth of the joint stock venture, the English East India

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[73] Agnew, *op.cit.* p.10.
[74] J. Rule, *Albion's People: English Society 1714-1815,* Longman Group, London, 1992, pp.52-53.

Company.[75] Much of the merchants' ability to take advantage of overseas markets was due to the strength of Britain's Navy, and the protection it was able to offer to mercantile shipping.[76] Daniel Defoe stated that Britain's burgeoning success was not due to conquest of overseas nations but 'it is all owing to trade, to the increase of our commerce at home, and the extending it abroad.'[77]

Adam Smith was to expand this notion further in *The Wealth of Nations:*

> To found a great empire for the sole purpose of raising up a people of customers may at first sight appear a project fit only for a nation of shopkeepers. It is, however, a project altogether unfit for a nation of shopkeepers, but extremely fit for a nation that is governed by shopkeepers.[78]

Smith implied that those merchants who were spectacularly successful were able to attain and wield enormous political power. Defoe also illustrated this possibility by his description:

> Trade is so far here from being inconsistent with a gentleman, that, in short, trade in England makes gentlemen, and has peopled this nation with gentlemen; for after a generation or two, the tradesmen's children, or at least their grandchildren, come to be as good gentlemen, statesmen, parliamentmen, privy-counsellors, judges, bishops, and noblemen, as those of the highest birth and the most ancient families ...' [79]

To prove his point Defoe devoted a whole chapter to the genealogies of various noble families who had developed from, or, alternatively, had married into what was

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[75] D. Marshall, *Eighteenth Century England,* Longmans, Green & Co. Ltd., London, 1962, pp.12-15.
[76] E.J. Hobsbawm, *Industry and Empire: From 1750 to the Present Day*, Penguin, London, 1990 [1968] pp. 24-25.
[77] D. Defoe *The Complete English Tradesman*, Vol. I Burt Franklin, New York, 1970, (1st edition, Charles Rivington, London, 1727), p.249.
[78] A. Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, eds R.H. Campbell & A.S. Skinner, Vol. II, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1976, p.613, para. 63.
[79] Defoe, *op.cit.,* p.246. Defoe was a non-conformist, and a hosier.

increasingly seen as a respectable trade.[80] Moreover, some of the merchants he named were involved in the East India trade. For example, Rebecca Child, daughter of East India Company Director and merchant Sir Josiah Child, married the Duke of Beaufort in 1683.[81] Audrey, daughter of Edward Harrison, ship's captain, former Governor of Fort St. George, Director of the East India Company, MP, Postmaster General from 1726, and patron of Robert Cowan, married Charles Townshend, Lord Lynn. Two granddaughters of wealthy East India Company Director Sir Josiah Child married Dukes.[82] In another linkage through East India Company connections, the eldest daughter of Madras merchant John Scattergood married her first cousin William Aislabie, only son of William Aislabie, Snr., who had been Governor of Bombay 1708 to 1715. Upon his return to England, he became a Member of Parliament, and Director of the East India Company. His brother, John, was Chancellor of the Exchequer, and I. R. Christie states that they were associated with 'established landed families'.[83] Through their marriage settlements, many of these wives brought much needed financial aid to their new families. This aid was not restricted to the female side of marriage arrangements. Had time and distance not denied him the opportunity, Cowan was scheduled to join the approximately forty per cent of businessmen who married 'up' into the gentry.[84]

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[80] *ibid.*, pp.227-240; Rogers, *op.cit.*, p.446; Plumb, *op.cit.*, p.6.
[81] Defoe, *op.cit.*, p.227.
[82] *ibid.*, p.236; Cowan to Arthur Stert, 2 September 1729, PRONI RCP D654/B1/2A; Plumb, *op.cit.*, p.25.
[83] R. Sedgwick. *The History of Parliament: The House of Commons 1715-1754*, Vol. I, H.M.S.O., London, 1970, p. 411; OIOC, MSS Eur C 387/4, *Papers of John Scattergood*, p.339; P.G.M. Dickson, *The Financial Revolution in England: A Study in the Development of Public Credit 1688-1756,* MacMillan, London, 1967, p.106; I.R. Christie, *British 'non-élite' MPs 1715-1820*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1995, p.38.
[84] Rogers, *op.cit.*, p.445.

Defoe described factors and retailers, who sold goods within England, along with export merchants as 'real tradesmen, and the chief of tradesmen . . .'[85] Merchants followed what was perceived as an honourable trade, and were justifiably proud of their reputation. Those with entrepreneurial flair grasped the opportunities presented by the ever-expanding market place. This was especially true in the early eighteenth century, which has been viewed as a time of consolidation for the East India Company in its operations, and one that set the scene for the massive expansion of the latter part of the century. Robert Cowan's eventual success in India placed him firmly among those whom Defoe called 'real tradesmen'. To have achieved such success without availing himself of the advantages and protection gained by the acquisition of powerful patrons and the extremely effective kinship network is highly unlikely.

At the time Cowan left Britain to establish himself in Portugal his chances of joining the very small number of merchants included in the 'eminent' category were remote. It has been estimated that in 1688 there were only about two thousand who would have fitted this description.[86] The achievement of such wealth, of course, brought with it the opportunity to attain political power or influence particularly in London, but also, if to a lesser extent, in smaller cities and towns. The opportunities were clearly there, and particularly if knowledgeable friends, family members, or influential patrons could be called upon for assistance.

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[85] Defoe, *op.cit.*, Vol. II, p.208.

[86] R. Porter, *English Society in the Eighteenth Century*, 2nd edn, Penguin, London, 1990 (1982), p. 366. These statistics do not list any estimate of income for this group of merchants; *ibid.*, p.368. Information from the 1801 Census reveals that the average annual income for 'Eminent Merchants' was £2,600.

It has been shown that while Belfast trade was expanding by the early eighteenth century, it managed to retain some of its parochial qualities by employing Ulster Scot factors as its representatives overseas.[87] In *The London Tradesman* of 1747 the role of a factor, or mercantile agent, is described thus:

> These factors are a Species of Merchants, who deal by Commission and sell the Goods of other People consigned to them for a Customary Premium; sometimes Two *per cent* or more, according to the Nature of the Trade they are concerned in.[88]

The expansion of trade gave the Ulster merchants a larger degree of autonomy from their earlier Dublin connections. Their new found independence prompted some Ulster businesses, including those of Alexander, William and Henry Cairnes, and Hugh Henry to consider focussing their banking ventures in Dublin, and then to set up a subsidiary branch in Limerick.[89] With close ties to banking circles in London, and the entrepreneurial inspiration of other Ulster merchants and bankers, it was a logical step for an ambitious young man such as Robert Cowan to venture overseas.

Trading and banking connections established by his father, access to lucrative overseas markets, cheaper business establishment charges, ties of kinship and religion, all combined to persuade Robert Cowan to move to Lisbon, Portugal and to begin trading in naval supplies.[90] Lisbon was by that time a thriving trading port for the Atlantic, the East and the Mediterranean, and by 1711 it had been reported that

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[87] Agnew, *op.cit.*, pp.179, 182.
[88] R. Campbell, *The London Tradesman*, David & Charles Reprints, Whitstable, 1969 (1st edition, T. Gardner, London, 1747), p.287.
[89] Agnew, *op.cit.*, pp.184-185; L.M. Cullen, 'Landlords, Bankers and Merchants: The Early Irish Banking World, 1700-1820', in *Economists and the Irish Economy,* ed A.E. Murphy, Irish Academic Press, Dublin, 1984, p.32.
[90] H. Furber, *Bombay Presidency in the Mid-Eighteenth Century,* Asia Publishing House, Bombay, 1965, p.26; Minchinton, op.cit., p.63. A Director of the Royal Exchange Assurance Company, John Baker, suggested Lisbon for a young man to 'begin busyness without any assistance from his master.'

there were nearly eighty British businesses in operation in that city.[91] Its population is estimated to have been at least 125,000 and possibly as high as a quarter of a million by the beginning of the eighteenth century, and, because of its location and obvious prosperity, it supported a thriving shipbuilding and repair industry.[92] It is little wonder that some of the mercantile community of England, and, to a lesser extent, that of Ireland took advantage of the favourable trade conditions to chance their fortunes in places like Lisbon.[93]

The date of Cowan's arrival in Lisbon is not known, but by 1707 his signature was relatively high on the list of a Petition of Merchants from that city, indicating that he was already well established there.[94] His departure or business failure date is also unknown but in a statement on trade to the Principal Secretary of State, James Stanhope, it is evident that Cowan was still in residence in 1715, and by that stage was listed among the Principal Merchants of the community.[95] That he remained in Portugal for a period of at least ten years indicated that his business was doing well. Assuming that Cowan served an apprenticeship, it is unlikely that he was born after 1685. This date would have made him twenty-two in 1707. Although it was more customary for an apprenticeship to commence in the early- to mid-teen years, it was not uncommon for a boy to begin to learn his trade as young as ten. There were also alternative methods of entry into the merchant trade that included transfer from

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[91] H.E.S. Fisher, 'Lisbon, its English merchant community and the Mediterranean in the eighteenth century', in *Shipping, Trade and Commerce: Essays in Memory of Ralph Davis*, eds P.L. Cottrell & D.H. Aldcroft, Leicester University Press, Leicester, 1981, p.24.

[92] S. Fisher, (ed.), *Lisbon as a Port Town, The British Seaman and Other Maritime Themes*, University of Exeter, Exeter, 1988, pp.15, 21; A.D. Francis, *The Methuens and Portugal 1691-1708*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1966, p.12.

[93] H.E.S. Fisher, *loc.cit.*

[94] TNA, SP89/89, ff.3-24, *Secretaries of State: State Papers Foreign, Portugal,* Portugal Merchants Representation of their Grievances No.1 to Earl of Galway, Portugal, 1707.

[95] TNA, SP 89/23, ff. 246-255, *Secretaries of State: State Papers Foreign, Portugal*: Principal Merchants in Lisbon ... Statement on Trade to James Stanhope [Principal Sec of State], Lisbon, 31 July 1715.

general clerical employment from within the merchant's business, and from other allied businesses including retailers' employees. Either a traditional apprenticeship or, by gaining his merchant's credentials through an alternative method, would have allowed Cowan to be in his own business in Portugal by 1707.

At some stage between 1715 and 1719 Cowan's business venture in Lisbon failed. Cowan was devastated and later wrote of how this failure still affected his situation several years later: 'the straits I was reduced to when I left England'.[96] Cowan left £10,000 in his will to settle his affairs from Portugal and he specifically stated that this was only his share in the settlement and did not cover the debts of his partner. The company's collapse must have been at a fairly spectacular level. Over the years, Cowan always insisted that the fault lay with his business partner, Griffith Lort:

> ... first as to my unfortunate concerns with Mr Lort ... tho I believe it is very evident to you & everybody at Lisbone that he was the principall cause of all the misfortunes that attended his ill concerted Schemes & foolish engagements during my absence in Ireland & England ...[97]

Cowan seldom had a good word for his erstwhile partner and described him as a 'verry weak & obstinate man.'[98] Interestingly, Lort's signature does not appear on any of the Merchant's Petitions, and so it is likely that he only became Cowan's partner in the latter part of the second decade of the eighteenth century. Cowan generally referred to his partner as Mr. Lort, and the only time he used his first name was in a list recording letters he had written in Mocha on 15 July 1725.[99] It is likely that Lort was from the prominent Welsh family of that name, as Cowan wrote to John Sherman

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[96] Cowan to Henry Cairnes, 26 October 1723, PRONI RCP D 654/B1/1B.
[97] Cowan to John Sherman, c. 30 November 1730, PRONI RCP D654/B1/2B.
[98] Cowan to John and Nathaniel Gould, 20 January 1731, PRONI RCP D654/B1/2B.
[99] Cowan to Griff Lort, 15 July 1725, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1C.

in 1730 requesting Mr Richard Legrand contact Lort at Pembrook in South Wales.[100] However, the only mention of Griffith Lort in the documents of that family is a will, wherein he is named as a beneficiary of his brother George in 1738.[101] Although it is probable that these two men are one and the same, without any more details on the man who was Cowan's business partner it is impossible to prove the connection beyond doubt. There is evidence that a Griffith Lort served an apprenticeship and was registered as a Member of the Society of Merchant Venturers of Bristol on 18 March 1707.[102] The timing is appropriate, and when it is coupled with such an unusual name it is more than likely that this Griffith Lort was Cowan's partner in Portugal.

The contacts made whilst Cowan was in Portugal were not wasted even though he had left that country to try his luck in India. His trading there would have opened the doors to the friends and patrons who stood him in such good stead in later years. Indeed, the sustained support he received indicates that Cowan's constant assertions were at least in part correct and that the failure of the house of Cowan and Lort was due mainly to his partner's mismanagement rather than Cowan's poor business acumen. From both India and the Persian Gulf, Cowan remained in contact with, or at least had access to, thirteen Portugal merchants.[103] Between them, six were Members of Parliament, five were in the East India Company Directorate and three more were employed by the Company in India, six were on the Board of the Bank of England, two were South Sea Company Directors, and three held civic roles as either Lord

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[100] Cowan to John Sherman, c.30 November 1730, PRONI RCP D654/B1/2B.
[101] This document is listed in the International Genealogical Index at www.familysearch.org. John Owen, the Pembrokeshire County Archivist kindly advised me of the details of this item, and also checked their nominal index for any further reference, but to no avail.
[102] W.E. Minchinton, (ed), *Politics and the Port of Bristol in the Eighteenth Century: The Petitions of the Society of Merchant Venturers 1698-1803*, Bristol Record Society, Bristol, 1963, p. 210.
[103] These were Sir Thomas Cooke, William Dawsonne, Nathaniel and Peter Delaporte, Sir John and Sir Joseph Eyles, Henry Furnese, Sir Gilbert Heathcote, Thomas May, Charles Savage, Nathaniel Sedgewicke, Arthur Stert, and John Upton.

Mayor or Aldermen in London. Of these thirteen, at least nine were in Portugal at the time of Cowan's business dealings there.[104] While Cowan did not petition all of these men he understood that at some time in his employment with the East India Company he might need their assistance, and he took the time to trace their family and business ties. His correspondence shows that he was indeed a past master at networking.

Patronage in the early eighteenth century was not restricted to Parliamentarians, although they were certainly amongst the most important holders of such privilege. The East India Company ran a very close second to the House of Commons with the influence its Directors were capable of wielding. As with ties forged by common political beliefs, it paid the holders of company directorships to surround themselves with like-minded businessmen who would support them in order to maintain their positions and add to their wealth.[105] J.M. Bourne observes that 'indirect financial opportunities' were more likely than 'direct' payments of cash for the provision of patronage, but that such transactions would be difficult to trace.[106] Having gained membership of this exclusive group they were almost guaranteed a lifetime's tenure because generally only death or disqualification ended the association.

Every new recruit to the Company's service needed the protection of at least one of the Directors in order to progress through the ranks of the Service.[107] Patronage was not the sole preserve of those in the highest positions within the East India Company and men such as Cowan did not only receive the benefits from the system

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[104] The nine were: Thomas Cooke, Sir John and Sir Joseph Eyles, Sir Gilbert Heathcote, Thomas May, Peter Delaporte, Charles Savage, Nathaniel Sedgwicke, and Arthur Stert.
[105] P. Nightingale, *Trade and Empire in Western India 1784-1806,* Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1970, p.8.
[106] *ibid.,* p.63.
[107] Nightingale, *ibid.,* pp.8-9; R. Grassby, *The Business Community of Seventeenth-Century England,* Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1995, p.103.

but they were also able to bestow their own form of largesse to those in lesser positions. Apart from some classic cases of vertical patronage, Cowan's papers provide many examples of what should be termed as 'horizontal patronage'. In these instances, Cowan and others of similar rank within India gave each other assistance by offering aid either through direct reciprocal patronage, or frequently, by services extended to clients of other Company servants. This cooperative behaviour also allowed the patrons in India to solicit for favours for their protégés from their own supporters in England. As L.S. Sutherland aptly phrases it in *The East India Company in Eighteenth Century Politics* – it was 'management based on patronage'.[108] As with the advantage to be gained from kinship ties, Cowan well knew the rules involved in the patronage system, and once he was in a position of authority he, too, 'managed' on that basis.

Access to a Director in the East India Company opened further connections within the City, as not all Cowan's patrons were confined to the Company that employed him. Included amongst those who concerned themselves with his advancement were Directors of the South Sea Company, several bankers, and other merchants, tradesmen and civic leaders.[109] There were many men whose livelihoods depended on the trade generated by the East India Company, but it was almost impossible to isolate or contain mercantile patronage to one particular Company or political interest. Patronage was pervasive, and, by association, spread across several areas of the eighteenth century community. In a climate that actively condoned patronage, it was sound business practice for the Directors of the East India Company to indulge those who could enrich them through their activities in the East.

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[108] Sutherland, *loc.cit.*
[109] *ibid.*, p.36.

The Company itself was controlled by the twenty-four directors, of whom eleven senior men retained the predominant power over patronage decisions.[110] These men attended the majority of the eight powerful Company Committees, and the patronage such committees could offer was securely in their hands.[111] Cowan excelled at the patronage game because he cultivated the backing of at least five of these senior men, as well as that of several other lesser directors during most of his career in the Far East.[112] Most of his contemporaries were content to have one or two supporters within the Company. Such preferment by the Directors was accepted at that time for the pecuniary advantage of both individuals and companies, in both Government and private business dealings.[113] In return, vital political and monetary support from these influential and wealthy men could be garnered for the benefit of both individuals and the government of the day.

By and large the men the East India Company approved for service overseas were usually either recommended by, or, alternatively, connected through kinship to a serving member of the Directorate. Ghoshal notes that such preferential treatment led to what was 'practically a monopoly of certain families' over the Company's affairs.[114] The applicants for employment in the Company were for the most part young men who aspired to be merchants, and their general aim was to make at least sufficient income to retire upon. As the men were paid miniscule salaries the only way for them to achieve this was through private business ventures in country trade.

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[110] H. Furber, *Rival Empires of Trade in the Orient 1600-1800,* University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1976, p.200.
[111] H. Furber, *John Company at Work: A Study of European Expansion in India in the Late Eighteenth Century,* Octagon Books, New York, 1970 (1st edition, Harvard University Press, Cambridge Mass & London, 1948), p.12.
[112] Cowan's major patrons are detailed in Chapters 3 and 4.
[113] Sutherland, *op.cit.,* p.54.
[114] A.K. Ghoshal, *Civil Service in India under the East India Company*, University of Calcutta, Calcutta, 1944, p.22.

This was a trading area in which the East India Company declined involvement.[115] The Company's structure reflected the patriarchal nature of society of the period, and this was particularly noticeable by the way that the men employed overseas were referred to as 'servants'.[116] As such, the apprentices, or 'writers' were required to sign an agreement attesting loyalty and good behaviour.[117] This proviso was not limited to the junior ranks as Cowan had to provide a Covenant, and a bond of ten thousand pounds when he became President of Bombay. He was also required to nominate 'Persons that are to be his Securitys in England' and this was a task he allocated to his friend and patron, John Gould Jr, in 1731.[118] To begin with, however, Cowan did not have the security of employment in the Company's service as he arrived in India as a free merchant.

After the collapse of his own business in Portugal, which, if Cowan is to be believed, had failed through no fault of his own, he decided to recover his lost reputation and attain a 'competency' by a foray into the East. It must have been a difficult decision because not only was he leaving behind his own family and his fiancée, he was venturing forth into a situation which contained little but hope on which to rebuild his life.[119] The entrepreneurial freedom and the precariousness that situation offered, was not to last for long because within a very short time he had relinquished that independence and had become an East India Company servant.

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[115] Furber, *op.cit.* p.13; P. Lawson, *The East India Company: A History*, Longman Group UK Ltd., Burnt Mill, 1993, p.72.
[116] *ibid.*
[117] B.B. Misra, *The Central Administrations of the East India Company 1773-1834*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1959, p.380.
[118] OIOC, E/4/460, *Correspondence with India: Abstracts of Letters Received from Bombay 1726 – 1731*, R. Cowan, 22 January 1731, para.109.
[119] Cowan's fiancée was Betty Gould, daughter, or sister, or niece, of four of Cowan's patrons. See also Chapter 3, pp.109-112.

The Company's hierarchical pattern was replicated in the structure of the Presidencies in India. By 1728 the ranks and pay rates of the East India Company Service were established as follows. The lowest rank was that of Writer, which attracted an annual salary of £5, and was for a term of five years. Promotion to Factor followed, and at this rank, John Robinson and James Ramsden received salaries of £15 per annum in 1728.[120] During the same period John Geekie and Arnoldus Paauw, at the next level as Junior Merchants, earned £30, but there were occasional variations. For example, Francis Dickinson received an extra six shillings per annum even though he was the same rank as the other two men. This bonus payment was because he had been given the responsibility to trade with the new Governor at Mocha.[121] As a Senior Merchant, William Henry Draper earned £40 although this was increased to £62/10/0 because he, too, fulfilled an additional role. His position 'as Mayor', entitled him to be recompensed equivalent to 'the Sallary of Chief Justice'. Those men who had achieved a position in the lower ranks of 'Council', for example Henry Lowther (4th) and Arthur Upton (6th) received salaries of £50 and £40 respectively, and Robert Cowan as Second in Council and Accountant received the princely sum of £100. William Phipps, as President, was awarded £300 per annum.[122] It is apparent from the size of the salaries paid to Company Servants that this could not have been the means by which to make a fortune in India. Adding to difficulties faced by would-be entrepreneurs was the toll taken by the climate and disease. The odds against surviving for long enough to even achieve the rank of Junior Merchant, let alone that of President were high. It was common knowledge that the average

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[120] G.W. Forrest (ed) *Selections from the Bombay Secretariat.* Vol. II, Govt. Central Press, Bombay, 1887, p.47.
[121] Cowan to Sir Matthew Decker, 25 September 1728, PRONI RCP D654/B1/2A.
[122] Forrest, *loc.cit.*

European life expectancy in Bombay was 'two monsoons', hardly time enough to settle into the system, let alone reap financial rewards.[123]

Cowan's business and personal dealings illustrate how, with a little help from his friends, a man could rise above his station. Others achieved this, for example James Macrae, Edward Harrison, John Deane, and John Scattergood, but there is less documentary evidence of their lives and endeavours. Cowan was doubly successful as he also managed to regain his position in society after his spectacular financial problems. This chapter has outlined the situation that Cowan found himself in at the end of the second decade of the eighteenth century. It has shown that from his family background he would have been well aware of the advantages to be gained by the acquisition of powerful patrons, and how he could repay the privileges granted to him in his 'distress', and how to gain 'a competency' for himself.[124]

Cowan often took risks but they were generally calculated and he weighed the costs and benefits of such an action very carefully. In the end his decision to go to India was based on what he perceived as the best option to achieve his plan to retire to England with enough money to support him in comfort and style. Cowan was an adventurer but he instinctively knew, and received excellent supportive advice from friends, patrons or family members, about the best way in which to improve his fortunes. It is unlikely that he would have gained anything like his idea of a competency in the harsh outside world of the free merchants. Employment by the East

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[123] L.S.S. O'Malley, *The Indian Civil Service 1601-1930*, 2nd ed., Frank Cass & Co. Ltd., London, 1965 (1st edition, J. Murray, London, 1931), p.6; J.T. Wheeler, *Early Records of British India: A History of English Settlements in India,* W. Newman & Co., Calcutta, 1878, p.41.

[124] Cowan to Mrs Cairnes, 20 October 1723, PRONI RCP D/654/B1/1B; Cowan to Mrs Macrae, 15 July 1725, PRONI RCP D/654/B1/1C.

India Company was a far more appealing option to someone as ambitious and tenacious as Cowan. His chance of making anything resembling a fortune was still only a remote possibility, but Cowan reduced the odds that were so heavily stacked against him by using two proven aids – patronage and kinship. Patronage links, especially when combined with familial ties. were like a spider's web in the business and political world of eighteenth century England and access to the rich and powerful, however tenuous, could make or break a career. Private trade ventures were the key to wealth creation but without the status conferred by rank in the East India Company the opportunities to profit by extensive country trade were reduced by limited bargaining power in the network.

When Cowan's merchant career in Portugal failed he assessed his situation, and decided that in order to recoup his losses, and then to be able to live at the level of his wealthy friends in England, he would have to consider something radical. His decision led him to move to India. The next chapter will show how Cowan's journey to the East was fortuitous, inasmuch as it provided him with his first benefactor, James Macrae, who also supplied him with two other precious commodities, namely a basis on which to build a network of patrons, and, more immediate aid in the form of much needed financial backing. It will also cover his early career in India and the Persian Gulf in both private and Company affairs.

Chapter Two:

The First Patron

'. . . a moderate competency with credit & reputation'[1]

The acquisition of Cowan's first influential patron in the East India Company came after a dramatic incident during his voyage to India. This chapter will look at the impact of that event upon Cowan's prospects, and how this event also propelled him into the East India Company service. His first patron, James Macrae, recommended Cowan to those able to help him in India ensuring that his influence was on going even after Macrae had retired from the Company's service. It will show that Cowan initially chose to establish his credentials in both Company and private trade in the Persian Gulf rather than in India, and the reasons for that decision. Cowan went to India for two major reasons. First, and foremost, he wanted to acquire what he described as 'a moderate competency with credit & reputation,' in order to allow him to live in comfort for the rest of his life. Second, he stated that he wanted to repay his creditors, as he did not wish 'to be plagd by lawsuits & other vexations.'[2] It can only be assumed that he avoided bankruptcy or debtors' prison through the influence of his powerful friends, the Gould family.[3] Over the next few years he did settle his accounts with some creditors, although the majority were destined for a lengthy wait until probate was eventually granted on his will. Very little is known of his activities between the closure of his business in Lisbon and his eventual departure

[1] Cowan to Mrs. Macrae, 15 July 1725, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1C.
[2] Cowan to Henry Cairnes, 26 October 1723, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1B.
[3] For more information about the Gould family, see Chapter 3, pp.106-114.

in search of 'more proffitt than pleasure'.[4] What Cowan could not have known was that his voyage out to India would introduce him to his first major patron, James Macrae. Whether Cowan was fully aware prior to leaving England that the chance of making a fortune in India was extremely questionable, or of the high mortality rate amongst Company servants, is uncertain. By December 1725 he was well aware of both and such knowledge might have deterred a man with less fortitude than Cowan. He wrote to one of his female correspondents:

> 'Your cuz[n] Jack bears a verry good carracter in Bengall, if he keeps his health he cannot fail of making a fortune, but when I consider the number that dye dayly & that not above tenn in a hundred ever return to England I can't help thinking that fortunes obtained in India are dear enough bought.[5]

Not a young man by the standards of the day, Cowan was at least in the thirty to thirty-five year age group by the time he went to India, and he would not have had the bravado and invincibility of youth to sustain him through possible adversity. What he did possess in abundance was determination, and having assessed the risks facing him, he maintained his original intent. He spoke later of the standard and type of men that filled the Company's ranks:

> ... most of the Company's Servants in India come out verry young with little education or knowledge of the Worlde and are more oblidged to a Robust Constitution than any other merits for their preferm[t] the longest liven proves commonly the wisest man[6]

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[4] Cowan to N. Hamond, 5 October 1723, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1C.
[5] Cowan to 'Madam', 20 December 1725, *ibid.*, A. Farrington, *Trading Places: The East India Company and Asia 1600-1834,* The British Library, London, 2002, p.76. Farrington states that company 'servants were lucky to last for two monsoons'. He adds that in the records of the *Benjamin* on its stay in Bombay in 1690, twenty out of the twenty-four passengers died.
[6] Cowan to John Gould Jr, 20 October 1723, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1C.

Cowan did not fit the first two criteria, but he was obviously built of strong stuff, and regardless of the difficulties that might lie ahead, at some stage he settled on India as the place in which he could best recover his lost money and reputation.

He initially decided to establish himself in India as a free merchant rather than as a Company servant. After 1714 permission was required of at least one of the Court of Directors of the East India Company in order to gain employment as a Company servant, and the same rule applied to anyone seeking to become a free merchant.[7] As the requirements were the same, Cowan opted for the position he deemed most likely to suit his needs. At least some of Cowan's friends in positions of power in England used their influence on his behalf because he and two other merchants were given permission to travel to India. This was made formal by a certified letter from Thomas Woolley, the East India Company Secretary, on 11 March 1719.[8]

In the early eighteenth century free merchants were tolerated by the Company provided they only transacted what was known as 'country trade'[9]. A free trader was licensed by the Company, for a fee, to trade with various ports in India and as far afield as China.[10] Denying these merchants general trading rights to England protected the Company's monopoly, although similar qualifications were applied to Company servants who were only allowed to ship certain goods to England.[11] These

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[7] A.K. Ghosal, *Civil Service in India under the East India Company: A Study in Administrative Development,* University of Calcutta, Calcutta, 1944, p.22; G. Yogev, *Diamonds and Coral: Anglo-Dutch Jews and Eighteenth-Century Trade,* Leicester University Press, Leicester, 1978, p.71.
[8] OIOC, E/3/100, *Letter Books: Letter to Our President and Council of Bombay*, London, 9 March 1719, para.2.
[9] P.J. Marshall, 'Private British Trade in the Indian Ocean Before 1800', eds A. Das Gupta & N. Pearson, *India and the Indian Ocean*, Oxford University Press, Calcutta, 1987, p.279.
[10] C. Gill, *Merchants and Mariners of the 18th Century,* Edward Arnold (Publishers) Ltd., London, 1961, p.118.
[11] I.B. Watson, 'Indian Merchants and English Private Interests: 1659-1760', in Das Gupta & Pearson, *op.cit.*, p.303.

limitations were somewhat hypocritical as this was well after the establishment of The English Company in 1698.[12] The aim of the English Company had been to break the monopoly the original East India Company had held on Indian trade. Having won the right to participate in the market, the idea of open trade suddenly lost its appeal to the English Company, and efforts were redoubled to exclude so-called 'interlopers'.[13] The free merchants no doubt found even country trading difficult, as Company Servants were allowed to freely indulge in this trade.[14] The Company Servants had inside knowledge of what was selling and where the best prices were to be obtained. They had a vast network of Company ships' captains and supercargoes as well as the Company employees in other factories from whom they could garner such information. Both groups faced competition from Indian traders, as well as merchants from other countries, but the Company Servants had a head start over the free merchants.

Who would have profited from the restrictions placed on the free merchants? The obvious beneficiaries were the Company servants, as the East India Company itself did not participate in country trade. It is puzzling that the Company, or more precisely the East India Company Directorate, would protect the individual trading rights of their servants unless it served a purpose. The Directors may simply have turned a blind eye to private trade irregularities because they were actively involved

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[12] J. Bruce, *Annals of the Honourable East-India Company from their establishment by the Charter of Queen Elizabeth 1600, to the union of the London and English East-India Companies, 1707-8,* Vol. III, Gregg Press Ltd., Farnborough, Hants, 1968 [1810], pp.251-256; M. Edwardes, *A History of India: From the Earliest Times to the Present Day,* The New English Library, London, 1967, pp.182-183. The New English Company was formed due to pressure from the interlopers to end the East India Company's monopoly on trade. However, Government influence was brought to bear and the two companies merged in 1708-09, thus reverting to a monopoly.

[13] *ibid.,* p.249; Bruce, *op.cit.,* The chapter entitled '1698-99'gives a complete and detailed account of the establishment of the New Company and the eventual merger.

[14] P.J. Marshall, *East Indian Fortunes: The British in Bengal in the Eighteenth Century*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1976, p.231.

in such schemes.[15] P. Lawson in *The East India Company: A History*, states that in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries these men were all powerful, and certainly not averse to manipulating controls over their tenure, and, at this time, they were still not scrutinised by parliament.[16] By allowing private trade to flourish they were able to continue to pay the Company servants very small salaries, and this helped keep down costs, and maximised returns on legitimate Company business. First, the maintenance of low salaries and overhead expenses would have won approval from the shareholders, and ensured support for the Directors concerned. Second, favoured Company Servants stood to gain personally through a form of protected private trade speculation. How better to ensure that the system continued than by controlling the Company servants through obligations to patrons?

Cowan finally sailed to India in 1720 on board the *Cassandra*, under the captaincy of James Macrae. This was to prove to be an eventful voyage, and one that was to have a long-term effect on the lives and fortunes of Cowan, Macrae, their patrons, and the English East India Company. The business association forged between Macrae and Cowan clearly shows how links were formed by sheer chance, and how patronage reinforced and enhanced the effects of the various kinship networks in the East India Company service during the early eighteenth century.

Captain James Macrae was born into a poor family in Ayrshire, Scotland *circa* 1677, but he was fortunate enough to receive some form of education courtesy of his brother-in-law, Hugh McGuire.[17] Macrae went to sea in about 1692, and eventually

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[15] P. Lawson, *The East India Company: A History*, Longman Group UK Ltd., Burnt Mill, 1993, pp. 79-80.
[16] *ibid.*, pp.80-81.
[17] A. Macrae, *History of the Clan Macrae, with Genealogies*, A.M. Ross & Co., Dingwall, 1899, p.236;

rose to the rank of captain trading from England to the East. By the time Macrae took charge of the *Cassandra* he was about forty-three years old, and he had nearly thirty years of experience at sea. He was already a reasonably wealthy man, who was established in English society as befitted a veteran ship's captain, and his rank carried a considerable amount of prestige. He had a home at Blackheath, an area of London that was strategically close to all the main dockyards of the Thames. The importance of Cowan and Macrae's experience on the *Cassandra* lies in the fact that it bound the lives of these two men together for at least a decade, and was partially responsible for their successful Company and private trade careers in India. It also set the foundations for Macrae to become an influential patron of Robert Cowan, and enabled him to recommend Cowan for patronage from the powerful men in his own network.

The 380-ton *Cassandra* was attacked by pirates, led by Edward England and George Taylor, off the coast of Madagascar on 7 August 1720. After what was described as a gallant defence, the ship eventually went ashore with the loss of thirteen crewmembers. A further twenty-four were wounded, including Captain Macrae.[18] Macrae put up a spirited attempt to defend the *Cassandra,* because apart from protecting his reputation as ship's captain and the seventy-five percent of the cargo that belonged to the East India Company, he was also a part owner of the ship. The other owners were merchant Peter Hambly, and Captain Thomas Bronsdon, the shipwright who built the *Cassandra.*[19] The East India Company's contract for the

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J.E. Shaw, *Ayrshire 1745-1950: A Social and Industrial History of the County*, Oliver & Boyd, Edinburgh, 1953, p.254. I am indebted to Dr. J.S. Shaw of the National Archives of Scotland for providing me with this information.

[18] J. Biddulph, *The Pirates of Malabar*, Smith, Elder and Co., London, 1907, pp. 134 -137.

[19] K.N. Chaudhuri, 'The English East India Company's Shipping (c1660-1760), in *Ships, Sailors, and Spices: East India Companies and their Shipping*, eds J.R. Bruijan & F.S. Gaastra, Nema, Amsterdam, 1993, p.64.

maiden voyage of the ship was drawn up with these three men.[20] There is evidence of more than a mere business connection between Bronsdon and the Macrae family, because Cowan requested Mrs Macrae on more than one occasion to pass on his 'services' to Bronsdon and his daughter.[21] This indicated that the Bronsdons and Macraes met socially. Cowan maintained contact with Bronsdon and, in turn, asked him to relay messages of his regard to Mrs Macrae and 'her little family'.[22] He continued to correspond spasmodically with Bronsdon until at least 1731.

Cowan, Macrae, and the remaining survivors escaped inland and the local inhabitants sheltered them from the pirates. One report of the ensuing developments said that Cowan was sent as mediator in order to secure the safe passage of Macrae.[23] Other versions tell of Macrae's own eloquence amongst sailors of all types and state that he was in fact the chief negotiator. Alexander Hamilton wrote that:

> Captain Mackraw, being a gentleman that was well versed in conversation with men of any temper, ventured on board the pirates and they were so much taken with his address, that they made him a present of that ship which he had so bravely battered, to carry him and his crew to India.[24]

That someone was successful in this endeavour is apparent as the surviving crew were eventually allowed to leave on one of the pirate ships, the *Fancy*, with a small amount of the cargo from the *Cassandra*. Whether this was due to the negotiations conducted

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[20] *ibid.*
[21] Cowan to Mrs Macrae, 20 October 1723, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1B; Cowan to Mrs Macrae, 7 July 1725, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1C.
[22] Cowan to Captain Thomas Bronsdon, 10 December 1725, *ibid.*, Shaw, *op.cit.*, p.254 -5. Who this 'little family' consisted of is not clear as the Macraes were childless, and Macrae left his fortune to his sister's offspring.
[23] S.C. Hill, *Episodes of Piracy in the Eastern Seas, 1519 to 1851,* The British India Press, Bombay, 1920, p.58; H. Furber, *Bombay Presidency in the Mid-Eighteenth Century,* Asia Publishing House, Bombay, 1965, p.26.
[24] Biddulph, *op.cit.*, p.138; Alexander Hamilton, *A New Account of the East Indies, being the Observations and Remarks Of Capt. Alexander Hamilton,* Vol. 1, John Mosman, Edinburgh, 1727, pp.22-23.

by Cowan or Macrae, or because of the high regard which some of the pirates held for Macrae remains a debatable point.[25]

It was reported that although the pirates agreed to guarantee a safe passage for the survivors of the *Cassandra*, some, including George Taylor, initially still intended to murder Macrae. This was to be repayment for his spirited attempt to foil the pirates' aim of capturing the *Cassandra*. It transpired later that several of the pirates had previously worked as legitimate sailors under Macrae's command, and they argued for his life to be spared as they respected his integrity. Included amongst these supporters was a vehement and ferocious-looking man, complete with a wooden leg, who was later used by Robert Louis Stevenson as the model for Long John Silver in *Treasure Island*.[26] Surprisingly, this ruffian was most vociferous in the defence of Macrae and, combined with the support of Edward England, his efforts led ultimately to the safe passage of the remaining crew on board the *Fancy*. As the pirates had won a brand new ship, and an estimated £75,000 in cash plus the remaining stock on board, the loss of the smaller Dutch-built ship and the sparing of the lives of just over forty men might have been deemed a small price to pay for such prize. On the survivors' arrival in Bombay on 26 October 1720, the then Governor, Charles Boone, ordered the pursuit of the pirates.[27] The confidence of the pirates must have been considerably shaken when some time later they were hounded out of Indian waters by Walter Brown, working in conjunction with the redoubtable Macrae. Such unaccustomed treatment must have hurt their pride, because they turned against

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[25] *ibid.;* Captain Charles Johnson, *A General History of the Robberies and Murders of the Most Notorious Pyrates,* with intro. & commentary by David Cordingly, Conway Maritime Press, London, 1998, pp.85-9 (1st edition, Charles Rivington, London, 1724); Sir E. Cotton, *East Indiamen: The East India Company's Maritime Service*, ed. Sir C. Fawcett, Batchworth Press Ltd., London, 1949, pp.147-148.

[26] Biddulph, *op.cit.,* pp.138-9; Cotton, *op.cit.,* p.148.

Edward England and left him in Mauritius, preferring to take their leadership from George Taylor.[28] This information was eventually relayed back to the East India Company by the one hostage the pirates had kept from the *Cassandra* – the carpenter's mate, Richard Lasinby.[29] After his eventual release by the pirates, Lasinby became a ship's captain in the service of the East India Company sometime before September 1723 until his death in 1729.[30]

This episode set the scene for a patron/client relationship between Macrae and Cowan, but it also led to a myriad of other connections through the extended and complicated patronage and kinship networks. Macrae's long service at sea, further enhanced by his vigorous and courageous efforts to save the *Cassandra*, was duly rewarded by the East India Company with employment as a Company Servant. He was despatched in 1723 to investigate the Company's affairs in Sumatra, where corruption was rife, and the directors decided the skills that he possessed in dealing with people, as well as his obvious veracity, made him the most suitable person to reorganise and rejuvenate their affairs in that region.[31] He forwarded a plan to settle matters in Sumatra, but it was never acted upon. His efforts must have impressed the Directorate of the East India Company, because he was promised the next Presidency of Fort St. George, Madras, and he was appointed to this position in 1725 after an initial period as Deputy Governor at the subordinate factory of Fort St. David.[32]

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[27] Biddulph, *op.cit.*, p.140.
[28] *ibid.*, pp.154-156.
[29] *ibid.*, p.140; Furber, *op.cit.*, pp.16-17. There are two spellings used for Richard's surname – Lazenby and Lasinby. I have chosen to use the latter version as that was favoured by Cowan. For Lasinby's patrons see Chapter 4, p.155.
[30] Cowan to David Hunter, 23 September 1723, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1B; Cowan to James Macrae, 20 December 1729, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1E.
[31] H.D. Love, *Vestiges of Old Madras, 1640-1800*, Vol. II, John Murray, London, 1913, pp.223-224.
[32] Macrae, *History of the Clan Macrae,* pp.236-237; Biddulph, *op.cit.*, pp.159-160; OIOC, E/3/115, *Original Drafts of Despatches to Bengal, Madras and Bombay 1725-51,* Our Governour and Council of Bombay, 7th March 1729, para. 44. The Directorate used the term Presidency in this despatch.

Cowan acknowledged Macrae's continuing good fortune in a letter to Captain David Hunter, Macrae's brother-in-law in 1723:

> ... he is appointed Supravisor of the West Coast to succeed Mr Jennings in the Governm[t] of Fort St David, he takes his passage in the *Swallowfield* a small ship, & was to part England in May last.[33]

He added a word about the flow-on benefits such a position would afford Captain Hunter: 'I congratulate you upon his success, which I doubt not will turn to your advantage.'[34] Implicit in this comment is that Hunter, as a kinsman of Macrae, was in a position to gain from the bestowal of patronage by the new Governor. Cowan considered the value to Macrae of the Fort St. David appointment to be about five thousand pounds per annum, and with the added bonus of moving to Fort St. George at a later date, which Cowan described as 'the most profitable post any English subject can enjoy.'[35] Macrae was additionally rewarded by the East India Company for 'fidelity and trouble hitherto' in late 1725, after he had secured a fine of 30000 pagodas from Stock Merchants. The considerable reward of 5000 pagodas (approximate value £625 - £714) was granted in 'consideration of the difficultys you met with, and the Temptations that you tell us were thrown in your way'.[36] At this stage of his career, Macrae's well-known integrity was his greatest asset.

Macrae was not averse to using the patronage system in order to advance his standing in the Company. His major patron was a Scottish East India Company Director, John Drummond, and Macrae's promotion to Governor of Madras was, in

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[33] Cowan to David Hunter, 23 September 1723, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1B.
[34] *ibid.*
[35] Cowan to Mrs Mitchell, 20 October 1723, *ibid.*
[36] OIOC, E/3/115, *Original Drafts of Despatches to Bengal, Madras and Bombay 1725-51*, James Macrae, Esqr, President of Fort St George, London, 8 December 1725, para.6.

the main, due to this man's sponsorship.[37] Macrae owed at least some of this support to his real or perceived importance to political connections of Drummond's, particularly the Duke of Chandos.[38] Chandos was in the Directorate of the East India Company with Drummond and Edward Harrison, and he was a patron of yet another Director, Sir Matthew Decker.[39] He probably also received the support of Andrew Fletcher, known as Lord Milton. Milton was in turn a close compatriot of the Earl of Ilay, Archibald Campbell, who became the third Duke of Argyll.[40] Drummond's own political patrons were Milton and Argyll, and, through them, Robert Walpole. With their assistance he was able to gain his parliamentary seat, and was then well placed to become their spokesman in London.[41] Furthermore, these connections tied mercantile patronage to political power, and led to additional patronage for Scotland. Favourable granting of valuable government contracts and Company positions were part of the rewards available to those supporters deemed to be deserving of patronage.[42] Macrae also received some support from at least one of the Gould family of merchants because, according to Cowan, he was 'one for whom Mr Gould has a regard.[43]

During his time in India, Macrae also received sustained and vigorous endorsement from Major John Roach, Commandant of the Fort St. George Garrison. Roach began his career in India as an Ensign in 1706 and rose to the rank of Major by 1717. He, like Macrae, received patronage from John Drummond, but he had the

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[37] G.K. McGilvary, 'East India Patronage and the Political Management of Scotland', PhD thesis, Open University, 1989, p.116.
[38] NLS, *Saltoun,* MSS/16536, f.45, Drummond to The Lord Milton, 11 July 1727.
[39] McGilvary, *op.cit.,* p.90. For Sir Mathew Decker see Chapter 3, pp.127-134.
[40] J.S. Shaw, *The Political History of Eighteenth-Century Scotland,* MacMillan Press Ltd., Houndsmill, Basingstoke, 1999, p.64.
[41] McGilvary, *op.cit.,* pp.83-84.
[42] L.S. Sutherland, *The East India Company in Eighteenth Century Politics*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1952, pp.18-19.
[43] Cowan to John Hinde, 20 May 1725, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1C. Hinde was a cousin of the Gould family and therefore could have easily refuted Cowan's claim if it had been untrue.

added advantage of Edward Harrison's support as well.[44] Although Macrae was initially held in high esteem by the East India Company, at some stage he incurred their displeasure. Edward Harrison wrote to Roach in February 1729 that he hoped:

> ... the Gov will be wise enough to be content with what he has gott, (tho^{h} in a very odd manner), and come away before the storm falls upon him, w^{ch} has been brewing here these two years, insomuch that he has very few friends in the direction who will endeavour to support him.[45]

Previously, Roach had written to John Drummond extolling Macrae's virtues:

> ... and now I can boldly say what I have said all along, that Governor Macrae is a very faithful servant to the Company and leaves nothing undone that can be done for their advantage ...[46]

Despite his defence of his patron, Roach experienced a fall from Macrae's grace in 1730, and he wrote of his position to Drummond:

> I have the vanity to think I enjoyd a particular share of Mr Macrae's Friendship & Favour till latterly that the little, mean, underhand artifices of some Enemies prevaild so far as to put him upon doing me some diservices which how much so ever they might be intended to my prejudice were not of a nature strong enough to erase out of memory the services that Gentleman did me while I shard his favour...[47]

As was often the case in disputes amongst East India Company servants, Roach did not remain in Macrae's disfavour for very long. Roach was described as a 'brave, able and diligent officer' and loyalty should also have been added to his attributes.[48]

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[44] TNA, C/108/94 – 95, *Chancery: Masters Farrers Exhibits Accounts and Correspondence,* Major John Roach, Fort St George, 1727-1738, Foul Europe Letters begun January 1729/30. Roach to Sir Matthew Decker, 6 February 1730.

[45] TNA, C/108/96, *Chancery: Masters Farrers Exhibits Accounts and Correspondence*, Harrison to John Roach, 7 February 1729. Harrison advised Roach to distance himself from Macrae and any 'irregular and unjust proceedings, with respect both the Companys Servants, and the white & black inhabitants of all orders and degrees'. Cowan also believed that Macrae had outstayed his welcome in India - see below p.87.

[46] NAS, *Abercairny,* GD 24/1/464/N19, Roach to John Drummond, 21 January 1728.

[47] TNA, C/108/94–95, *Chancery: Masters Farrers Exhibits Accounts and Correspondence,* Roach to John Drummond, Fort St George, December 1730.

[48] Love, *op.cit.,* pp. 38, 154.

When Macrae returned to England he left his financial matters in Roach's reliable and loyal hands, although Edward Harrison was not enthusiastic about Roach's continuing involvement with Macrae. In a letter to Roach in 1732 Harrison stated that 'nothing could be more surprising than his leaving you his attorney ...'[49] Four years after Macrae's return to England the two men still maintained their correspondence and their trading arrangements, and Roach remained in charge of Macrae's personal affairs in Madras. Macrae's other major supporters were East India Company Director Sir Gilbert Stewart, and the former Governor of Fort St. George, Thomas Pitt.[50] Macrae, like Cowan, received the patronage of Henry Lyell, who, over a period of twenty years, held directorships in both the East India Company and the Bank of England.[51] He needed the aid of only a few powerful patrons, because he was able to rely on his good record as a ship's captain, in conjunction with his honest efforts on the Company's behalf in order to gain rapid promotional advantage.

Macrae became Governor of Fort St. George in 1725, and he remained there until 1730. His work in Madras on the Company's behalf was praised by Sir Mathew Decker, who wrote to John Roach that: 'The Trade of India was upon a better foot as you mention, I doubt not but Governor Macrae's good and faithful management has mended this much to ye advantage of you'.[52] As to the man himself, at least one description of Macrae exists, written by a Judith Weston in an account of her voyage to India on the *Stretham* in 1727.[53] Miss Weston was greeted by James Macrae in what

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[49] TNA, C/108/96, *Chancery: Master Farrers Exhibits Accounts and Correspondence*, Harrison to Major John Roach, 12 February 1732.
[50] McGilvary, *op.cit.*, p.136.
[51] McGilvary, *ibid.*
[52] TNA, C/108/94 – 95, *Chancery: Masters Farrers Exhibits Accounts and Correspondence,* Bundle of letters from Sir Mathew Decker to John Roach, 17 February 1727.
[53] OIOC, MSS, EUR. B 162, *Account by Judith Weston (later Mrs Judith Fullerton) of her journey to Madras in the Stretham,* 14 ff, 10 December 1727.

she considered 'a gruff manner'. She has left an eloquent portrayal of the self-made, seafaring Governor:

> His eyes justly expressed his natural disposition - a great quickness of parts, strong sense of severity the want of a proper education to soften or polish the ruffness of nature made him affect a bluntness of expression w^{h} awed the ignorant or dependent - but if not the dependent He seemed most gratifyed with those who gave him as good as he bought by way of Repartee'.

Macrae's bluntness led him to tell Judith that he had only invited her to visit him because he had met her brother's wife, but she was not at all overawed by his gruff manner, and she may well have joined the ranks of those 'who gave him as good as he bought.'[54]

It is likely that the brother known to Macrae was a Thomas Weston. He and three others, William Monson, John Bulkley, and Edward Bracstone, were nominated as Aldermen for Madras in 1727.[55] There was another possible relation to the Weston siblings as there is also mention of a William Weston who had married a Miss Ballantine *circa* 1732. John Stackhouse, Governor at Fort William, Calcutta wrote in 1733 to his patron, John Drummond, that 'Miss Ballantine is well married to Mr. Weston so that it does not lye in my way to be further useful to her.'[56] Drummond was a patron of William Weston, and in correspondence from the latter in 1735, he advised him that Alexander Wedderburn, another of Drummond's Scottish kinship protégés, had gone into partnership with a Mr. Jackson, brother-in-law to Mrs. Weston.[57] This one example shows just how intricate and involved were kinship and patronage ties in the early eighteenth century. A judicious marriage, especially when

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[54] *ibid.*
[55] Love, *op.cit.*, p.242.
[56] NAS, *Abercairny*, GD24/1/464/N/59, Stackhouse to John Drummond, 15 January 1733.

combined with the patronage of an influential man, had a long lasting ripple effect upon the affairs of even a small player in the mercantile world.

Judith Weston had undoubtedly undertaken the perils of the journey to India not just to visit her brother, but also to find a husband. In this venture she met with success, as her account of her journey gives her married name as Fullerton. Captain John Fullerton was employed in country trade in the Persian Gulf in 1730, and from letters to Cowan he clearly desired to work for him.[58] From Cowan's reply in September 1730, he was not to be swayed by overt flattery, but by results. Neither Fullerton's reference to Cowan's 'great generosity & kind treatment to the Merchants of Judda' nor offers to visit Bombay 'yearly', would have compensated for the known fact of the poor outcome of a previous voyage.[59] Cowan's patronage was generally influenced by three factors. First, the benefits that he could gain by bestowing such patronage; second, the cost to him and his reputation if the client was dishonest or unsuccessful, and third, the extent of the obligation he felt under to any other patron of the man in question. These considerations had to be weighed carefully in each instance, and Cowan was ever mindful of these three salient points when distributing his favours.

For all Macrae's rough, and sometimes brusque, manner he was a staunch friend and remembered those who had supported him. Cowan experienced a difficult time after his business had failed in Portugal, but he certainly had more than his fair share of luck when he decided to head to India. Not only did he survive the attack by the pirates, and was befriended by Macrae, but he was rewarded with financial

[57] NAS, *Abercairny,* GD 24/1/464/N/80, Weston to John Drummond, 30 November 1735.

assistance too. William Monson, who was employed in the Service in Madras in the 1720s, wrote to his father that without sufficient funds supplied either through capital or credit, there was little chance to do more than simply exist in India.[60] To show his gratitude, Macrae advanced Cowan a loan of £22,000, which was to assist him to establish his business as a free trader in Bombay.[61] Now that Cowan had the capital, he began to assemble a group of influential patrons. Macrae later recommended Cowan to John Drummond, and advised Cowan of his response: 'I have a letter from my good friend, Mr Drummond, wherein he assures me he will use all his interest for your service'.[62] Not surprisingly Cowan referred to Macrae as being his 'Patron and Benefactor'.[63] By the use of both terms to describe Macrae's efforts on his behalf, Cowan implied that the large loan made to him was in a different category to real patronage. This was 'monetary' patronage and it was purely a financial obligation, and one that could only be repaid by the return of the capital sum. Repayment of real patronage, regardless of whether it was of reciprocal, vertical or horizontal form was of a promissory nature, and often involved a third party. Macrae's generosity made Cowan's initial trading forays much easier, negating any need to apply for credit.[64] The loan of such a large amount of capital indicates Macrae's sound financial position.

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[58] Fullerton to Robert Cowan, 30 July 1729 & 15 July 1729, PRONI RCP D654/B1/5AA.
[59] Cowan to Captain John Fullerton, 6 September 1730, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1F.
[60] P. Nightingale, *Trade and Empire in Western India 1784-1806,* Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1970. p.17.
[61] Furber, *op.cit.,* p.26.
[62] Macrae to Robert Cowan, 27 September 1727, PRONI RCP D/654/B1/4B.
[63] Cowan to James Macrae, c. April 1725, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1C.
[64] J. Collett, *The Private Letter Book - Sometime Governor of Fort St George, Madras,* ed H.H. Dodwell, Longmans, Green & Co., London, 1933, p.19. Joseph Collett stated in 1718 that for Zachary Gee to improve his situation he would need to be employed thus: 'I mean Supra Cargoe of one of my Ships which is the only way a free Merchant can advance himself here, unless he has a large Stock to begin with'.

When Macrae retired he had amassed a fortune of about £100,000 acquired from his years as ship's captain, and later through his private trade dealings in the East.[65] This was accumulated over a career spanning slightly less than four decades.[66] It has been estimated that, on a good trip, a ship's captain could make a profit of between £5,000 and £10,000.[67] Even if the lesser amount is used as a measure it remains an impressive sum of money, and Macrae served at sea for a long time before his elevation to the East India Company civil service. Such longevity of service allowed him to take advantage of his prestige as a ship's captain, and the extra commissions that came as perquisites from passengers and others who used his ship. Macrae and Cowan established a successful trading partnership in shared ventures, and Cowan suggested in October 1723 that they deal together when Macrae was 'settled' in his 'government', and he thought that they 'may Cultivate a Correspondence to mutual advantage'.[68] Macrae more than likely made other lucrative joint investments with Company servants based in the other East India Company factories in India, and the Persian Gulf, as well as through his own private trade to China.

Although a history of the Macrae clan stated that James Macrae died unmarried, this has been shown to be untrue by the evidence in Robert Cowan's papers.[69] Many of the wives of Macrae's contemporaries joined their husbands in the Company settlements in India, but Mrs. Macrae declined to accompany her husband, and she remained at their home in Blackheath, an expensive residential area in the

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[65] In 2006 values that £100,000 would be worth over £13,000,000. This estimation was made using figures calculated by L. H. Officer, *Purchasing Power of British Pounds from 1264 to 2005,* at www.MeasuringWorth.com

[66] Biddulph, *op.cit.,* pp. 159-160.

[67] Chaudhuri, *op.cit.,* p.66.

[68] Cowan to James Macrae, 20 October 1723, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1B.

south of England. This was a highly respectable and socially valuable address, dominated by the 1st Earl of Dartmouth's family estate. Robert Cowan wrote to Mrs Macrae in October 1723 telling her that Fort St. David is 'the pleasantest place in India' but doubted that she would decide to visit especially as she 'did not resolve to accompany the Govr' when he first settled in India.[70] It is not known from whence Mrs Macrae originated, although Robert Cowan did address her as 'Dear Country Woman,' on at least one occasion, so she was either Scottish or, more probably, an Ulster Scot.[71]

In June 1725, Mrs. Macrae, whilst 'at Table at Mr Hertings house on Black Heath' was taken ill, and within 'a few hours was deprived of her speech & sences & dyed the next morning.'[72] Cowan forwarded a further description of Mrs Macrae's death to her husband, saying that she apparently died from an 'appopletick fitt.'[73] To her brother, John Hunter, Cowan mourned the 'loss of so valuable a Sister and friend,' and Cowan was not alone in his high opinion of Mrs. Macrae.[74] Evidence of the esteem that the East India Company held for James Macrae and his wife is illustrated in the report Cowan sent of her funeral to her brother, David: 'and she was honourably entered [*sic*], Mr Gould, Lyell, Drummond, Cairnes and two other Gentlemen of Note bearing up the Pall . . .'[75] The Mr Gould referred to was probably John Jr., as both he and John Drummond were in the East India Company Directorate at the time of Mrs Macrae's funeral. As Cowan does not mention Baltzar Lyell before

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[69] Macrae, *History of the Clan Macrae,* p.238.
[70] Cowan to Mrs. Macrae, 20 October 1723, *op.cit.*
[71] *ibid.*, R. Bell, *The Book of Ulster Names,* The Blackstaff Press Ltd., Belfast, 1988, p.100. The author states that 'most in Ulster will be of Scottish descent', and that it is a name common only in Northern Ulster.
[72] Cowan to David Hunter, 8 May 1726, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1C.
[73] Cowan to James Macrae, 5 May 1726, *ibid.*
[74] Cowan to John Hunter, 8 May 1726, *ibid.*
[75] Cowan to David Hunter, 8 May 1726, *ibid.*

1729, the Lyell referred to would have been Henry. The 'Cairnes' was most likely Alexander as he was a resident of Blackheath at the time.[76] That the pallbearers comprised such prominent merchants and bankers, present and future Members of Parliament, and past and current Directors of the Bank of England and the East India Company clearly indicated the status of the Macrae family in London mercantile and financial society. All of these men played a part in Cowan's career.

In a letter to Mrs Stirling, who was either Macrae's niece, or niece by marriage, in January 1727, Cowan spoke of the death of her 'Aunt' and Mrs Stirling's indisposition that followed her loss. He also referred to the fortunes of her acquaintances in India and to Governor Macrae, stating that 'the Govr is well & harty drinking Oceans of Claret with his friends at the Fort.'[77] It is extremely questionable as to whether this last piece of information would have in any way set her mind at rest about her uncle's well being.

The previously mentioned brothers of Mrs Macrae were John and David Hunter, who both served as ships' captains trading between India and the Far East, and, not surprisingly, both men were heavily involved in the private trade commissions of Robert Cowan and James Macrae.[78] In a letter to David Hunter in June 1724 Robert Cowan stated that John had been refused permission by the directors of the East India Company to travel to India, but, as he had already left his employment, he would probably travel there regardless. From Cowan's correspondence it is clear that he placed great faith in John Hunter, and that he trusted

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[76] H.C. Lawlor, *A History of the Family of Cairnes or Cairns and its Connections*, Elliot Stock, London, 1906, p.86.
[77] Cowan to Mrs. Stirling, 19 January 1727, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1B.

him with his private trade. Hunter's relationship to James Macrae exerted considerable influence on Cowan's initial dealings with him. Later ventures would have been more heavily influenced by Hunter's record as a Captain because Cowan's pursuit of his fortune was always uppermost in such considerations. Cowan later said that John had profited more from his business acumen than David had, although he noted that David had not received patronage from Macrae equal to that given to his sibling:

> ... but he has not been so fortunate as his brother in being so immediately under your Hon[rs] protection & powerfull influence tho I hope in a few years he may be looking homewards.[79]

That David received less help from Macrae was due to the fact that he had, by 1727, transferred from commanding the *Balls* galley – a Bombay ship – to a more lucrative role of 'Comm[r] & Sole Supra Cargo of a small ship from Bengall to Mocha' thereby removing himself from Macrae and Cowan's direct protection.[80] Macrae was also intent on improving his own fortunes, as well as those of the East India Company, and it made sense for him to allocate his favours to those who could be of immediate assistance to him, even if it was at the expense of another family member.

Cowan's association with John Hunter ceased in 1731. Hunter had married in March 1728, whilst he was still in India.[81] According to Robert Cowan's correspondence there were at least two children as a result of this marriage: 'ane heir

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[78] Cowan to William Phipps, 7 May 1726, PRONI RCP D/654/B1/1C; Cowan to James Macrae, 20 January 1732, PRONI RCP D/654/B1/2C.
[79] Cowan to James Macrae, 8 August 1729, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1D.
[80] Cowan to Captain Thomas Bronsdon, c. December 1726/January 1727, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1C.
[81] Cowan to William Stirling, 23 September 1728, PRONI RCP D654/B1/2A.

to inherit the fruits of his labours' in 1729, and a daughter in 1730.[82] John Hunter and family returned to England with Governor Macrae, and Major Roach, not wishing to offend his patron, wished him a safe voyage, and gave his best respects to 'Mrs Hunter, yourself & little ones.'[83] Macrae informed Roach of the unfortunate news of John's death shortly after their return to England. He died 'by grief', three months after the loss of his wife, in July 1731.[84] The ties that bound Cowan and Macrae were based on the friendship forged on board the *Cassandra,* and included shared patrons and the links provided through kinship ties, such as the above-mentioned Hunter brothers, mutual obligations and their trading dealings. It is doubtful that Cowan, without the aid of Macrae in these areas, would have achieved such rapid success in India. If he was not solely responsible for negotiating the Captain's safe conduct from the vengeful pirates, then his debt to Macrae was even greater.

By 1725 Cowan was making tentative advances to Macrae on behalf of the then Governor of Bombay, William Phipps, for the two men to begin some form of trading alliance.[85] Cowan was situated in the Gulf, and his two most powerful allies, Phipps and Macrae, were based on the West and East coasts of India respectively. A working alliance between these three men would have been the ideal way not only to cover the private trade of the region, but such a partnership would have also united the two most powerful on-the-spot patrons Cowan possessed, and would have helped diminish Cowan's patronage debts to both men.

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[82] Cowan to James Macrae, 1 February 1729, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1C; Cowan to David Hunter, 15 April 1730, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1F.
[83] TNA, C108/94 - 95, *Chancery Masters: Master Farrers Exhibits Accounts and Correspondence*, Roach to Captain John Hunter, 30 January 1731.
[84] Macrae to Major John Roach, 17 December 1731, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1F.
[85] Cowan to James Macrae, c. April 1725, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1C.

Only a few months later, however, Cowan expressed doubts about the way in which Macrae was conducting his private trade. He appeared to be excluding Cowan from some of his trading ventures, and Cowan felt sufficiently incensed to write of such matters to Mrs. Macrae.

> I hear Govr Macrae is sending Capt Shannon with a considerable cargo to Seindy to his consignation, but his unaccountable management will frustrate my endeavours & those of my friends for his advantage, this affair I confess has given me more uneasyness than any thing I have mett with since my being in India.[86]

That this particular transaction caused Cowan so much concern was because it seemed that he was not included in the deal. He was worried that he had lost Macrae's patronage. Normally Company servants traded constantly, and in all directions, and with any number of partners. It was not unusual for one servant to decline involvement in a particular joint venture cargo especially if he felt that his resources were stretched at that time.[87] Cowan's relief was palpable when he realised that any cessation in correspondence from Macrae had been brought about by illness rather than Cowan causing his benefactor what he termed 'umbrage or offence.'[88] However, there was a definite problem in the relationship by the beginning of 1727 as Macrae had for some reason decided to curtail his letters to Cowan, and this provoked the following response:

> I am verry desirous of continuing a correspondence which I thought once so well founded on a long acquaintance & mutual benevolence that nothing could interrupt, there shall be nothing wanting on my part to improve it.[89]

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[86] Cowan to Mrs Macrae, 28 August 1725, *ibid.*
[87] Cowan to Henry Lowther, 22 Jan 1731, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1G.
[88] Cowan to James Macrae, 5 May 1726, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1C.
[89] Cowan to James Macrae, 18 January 1727, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1C.

The humble attitude adopted by Cowan in this letter worked because their correspondence resumed. Macrae followed the advice given by John Drummond and promised that he would 'write' to all his friends that Cowan should 'succeed Mr Phipps'.[90] One of his first letters after he eventually took charge of the Western Presidency was to write to Macrae to acknowledge his benefactor's congratulations. It can only be imagined with what pride and sense of achievement he felt in being able for the first time to write his address as 'Bombay Castle'.[91]

Macrae was less important to Cowan's future after the latter's promotion, and that may also have affected their business dealings. After so many years they were finally on equal terms in rank in the East India Company. By this time, 1729, Cowan was heavily involved in trade with his protégé in Surat, Henry Lowther, and he made it quite clear that he was no longer interested in trade matters with Macrae. 'I doubt not of Govr Macrae's coming into my scheem that I shall propose to him, tho I am very indifferent whether he does or does not ...[92] It is likely Cowan felt that Macrae, whose term as Governor of Madras was rapidly coming to an end, was less useful to him particularly if he was retiring completely from the Company's service. Cowan's aggressive country trade dealings did not sit well with Macrae's integrity and his loyalty to the East India Company. On an earlier occasion he had reprimanded Cowan for what he considered an attempt to control the West Coast private trade.[93] Macrae, whilst willing to participate in country trade joint ventures, did not always agree with the way his protégé acted. Such a difference of opinion was enough to sour relations between Company servants.

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[90] Macrae to Robert Cowan, 27 September 1727, PRONI RCP D654/B1/4B: 13A.
[91] Cowan to James Macrae, 1 February 1729, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1C.
[92] Cowan to Henry Lowther, 27 March 1729, *ibid.*
[93] See below Chapter 7, p.258.

Even though the above-mentioned venture seems to have come to nought, word of the proposed plans did reach Macrae, and Cowan described his reaction in a letter to Captain Richard Upton:

> Govr Macrae writt me somewhat dryly upon my being so largely concerned with you in a New & Secret Scheem as he tearms it, I wish you had been able to put it in Execution & I should not have much feared its Answering our Expectations.[94]

That letter was dated 5 April 1729, and it showed that at least one letter had just been received from Macrae, but the following day Cowan wrote to Macrae and stated that he had not received any letters from him. He did, however, offer Macrae a quarter share in what he thought was a very profitable scheme to send the *Carolina* on the Surat to Mocha run with the possibility of a second voyage.[95] For all his nonchalance, Cowan remembered that every Company servant, regardless of rank, needed to preserve his patronage network. Summary dismissal of such a long-standing benefactor, especially one about to return to Leadenhall Street, with the distinct possibility of a gaining a directorship, was not the most sensible course to follow. He reinforced his commitment to Macrae with the following comment four months later on benefits that could be gained from service in the East: '... little real satisfaction besides that of being serviceable to our friends, helping them forwards,' but somewhat diminished the sincerity of this thought by reiterating that his primary aim was to acquire a 'moderate competency' whilst he was in India.[96]

According to Cowan, Macrae provided ammunition to use against him by outstaying his term in India by some six months: 'thereby given his Enemys ane

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[94] Cowan to Captain Richard Upton, 5 April 1729, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1C
[95] Cowan to James Macrae, 6 April 1729, *ibid.*
[96] Cowan to James Macrae, 8 August 1729, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1D.

opportunity of rejoycing at his fall'.[97] He went on to elaborate slightly on this theme to Robert Nesbitt, a free trader, that: 'strange things are reported here of his management but I hope they are aggravated.'[98] In a letter shortly after to Macrae's successor, George Morton Pitt, Cowan in an uncharacteristic humble tone, criticised Macrae:

> I think the greatest happyness that could attend my old friend Mr Macrae in his late circumstances was to be forgott since I cant learn that he has been thought or talked of with much respect ... an old acquaintance & I really believe my well-wisher, had he depended less on his own judgment and admitted of the advice of some he despised he might have parted with a clearer reputation for I never heard or read of any man so wise but he might learn something – even from ane inferior.[99]

In 1733 Macrae confided in John Roach that he felt it would not be too difficult for him to gain a Directorship of the East India Company but added:

> ... as there's so many different Interests and parteys I have no great Inclination to it. If I come in you may be assured of all the freindley offices in my power ...[100]

He did not appear to offer the same assurances to Cowan. Macrae seemed unaware of the considerable ill feeling, if Edward Harrison is to be believed, that the Directorate held for him. Unless he was able to clear his name, the members would automatically preclude him from joining that select body.[101] He seems to have forgotten that Company Servants, like his protégé Cowan, had influence both within the Company in India and in England, and could work against him with the Directorate. As it turned

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[97] Cowan to Robert Lennox, 30 July 1730, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1F.
[98] Cowan to Robert Nesbitt, 12 August 1730, *ibid.*
[99] Cowan to George Morton Pitt, 9 December 1730, *ibid.*
[100] TNA, C/108/96, *Chancery: Master Farrers Exhibits: Accounts and Correspondence,* Macrae to John Roach, 7 February 1733.
[101] See above, p.74.

out, Macrae was spared the humiliation of legal proceedings. Harrison informed Roach that:

> I am very glad to find the Grand Jury went no further with respect to Macrae, if he had been exposed to a publick triall, the settlement would have felt it forever and the Company would have shared in the ill effects ...[102]

Not surprisingly, he did not achieve his Directorship, and, instead, he retired to Scotland where he used his fortune to acquire several estates, and he also became a Burgess for Ayr in 1733. It is then that the Cowan - Macrae correspondence concluded. Macrae died in 1744 aged about sixty-seven leaving his considerable estate to his nephew and nieces.[103]

Thanks to Macrae's generosity, Cowan had received an excellent financial start for his free merchant dealings in India. The services he had rendered to Macrae on the *Cassandra* recommended him to other powerful men, like Charles Boone and William Phipps, and his career path very quickly changed when he gained entry into the Company's service. Due to his knowledge of Portugal, and more particularly, his fluency in Portuguese, he was sent to Goa in June 1721 to negotiate with the Viceroy on behalf of the East India Company. The aim of the mission was to achieve an agreement between the two nations with respect to not only trade but also to find a way to subdue the aggressive pirate leader and Maratha Chief, Angria.[104] Under this agreement, each country provided a force of two thousand men and five ships in order to deal with the pirate attacks. In the early 1720s Bombay was still a minor British settlement and it was located in an isolated position between two Portuguese

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[102] TNA, C 108/96, *loc.cit.*, Harrison to Major Roach, 12 February 1732.
[103] Shaw, *Ayrshire 1745-1950,* pp.254-255.
[104] Biddulph, *op.cit.*, p.174.

controlled regions.[105] Co-operation with the Portuguese as allies against a common enemy was necessary to secure the safety of the English factory. Cowan concurred with Charles Boone's opinion that friendship between the Portuguese at Goa and the English factories should be 'cultivated rather than disputes created'.[106] Above all, a Portuguese – English entente would have benefited the Company's business as well as the country trade indulged in by the Company's servants. Cowan's mission was successful, and he was duly rewarded with a position on the Bombay Council.[107] In the ensuing battle against Angria, Cowan was given the rank of a general, but failed to shine in this role as he had received no military training.[108] Here was one of the few occasions in Cowan's life where he undertook a project that was clearly beyond his capabilities.

After his foray into the diplomatic regions of Portuguese-English relations, Cowan was next sent to investigate the affairs of Surat. In the early 1720s Surat was the major trading centre on the west coast of India.[109] Cowan was despatched to examine both 'abuse that has Crept into the Management of the English Affairs' in that city, and the activities of a family of Brokers suspected of defrauding the East India Company.[110] The outcome resulted in patronage being granted to those whom Phipps and Cowan decided could best promote not only the Company's, but also their own vested interests. Scrutiny of such matters gave Cowan valuable insight into the power involved in Company patronage. From the late seventeenth century there was a

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[105] Furber, *op.cit.*, p.2.
[106] Cowan to Charles Boone, 8 December 1724, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1C.
[107] Furber, *op.cit.*, p.26; Biddulph, *op.cit,* pp.174 -179 According to Biddulph, Cowan concluded his negotiations in September, but after a failed attack on Angria's forces, the coalition was sundered a few weeks later.
[108] *ibid.*, pp.175, 179.
[109] Furber, *op.cit.*, pp.6-9.
[110] OIOC, E/4/459, *Abstracts of Letters Received from Bombay (1709-1725 incomplete)*, Bombay Castle, 17 August 1722, (signed Wm Phipps) p.84, para. 11.

rivalry for East India Company favour between two families of brokers, the Rustumjis and the Paraks.[111] This contest continued through at least six decades well into the mid-eighteenth century.[112] It was the allegations of fraud made by Seth Laldas Parak against the Rustumjis that Cowan was sent to examine. As a result of his enquiries, the Rustumji family lost the brokerage to the Company, and it was awarded to the Paraks.[113] Some of the Rustumjis were arrested and at least one Company servant, John Hope, was also implicated in the scandal.[114] Cowan wrote to Charles Boone that Hope's alleged behaviour:

> ... has occasioned his suspension & being called down to give an account of his management ... doubtless the late Brokers took advantage of his easy temper & were more his Masters than the Company's Servants.[115]

Cowan's description of Hope was of 'ane honnest man', but he qualified this by adding that he perceived him to be 'verry pusilanemous and irresolute.'[116] Counter allegations were made that Phipps used country trade ships to deliver coffee he had purchased in Mocha to the Bombay factory, and that he thereby profiteered by then selling the coffee to the Company, and charging them for the freight.[117]

The dismissal of the Rustumjis by Phipps and Cowan, who were by now closely aligned with the Paraks, earned them the enmity of the Rustumjis' patron,

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[111] P. Spear, *India, A Modern History*, University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor, 1961, pp.17-18. The Rustumjis were a family of Parsis with Persian origins; A. Das Gupta, 'The Merchants of Surat, c.1700-50', in *Elites in South Asia,* eds E. Leach, & S.N. Mukharjee, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1970, p.205. The Paraks were Hindus.

[112] Das Gupta, *ibid.*, pp.212-213. This chapter contains a detailed report of the history of the brokers, their feud and their connections with the East India Company.

[113] *ibid.*, p.212.

[114] Cowan to John Hope, 16 October 1723, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1B. These allegations are dealt with in Chapter 6, pp.234-237.

[115] Cowan to Charles Boone, 6 November 1723, *ibid.*

[116] *ibid.*

Commodore Matthews. He threatened to expose the two Company servants on his return to England, and caused both men some considerable concern over the allegations he brought against them.[118] He accused Phipps of 'barbarous usage' of the brokers, alleging that Phipps and the East India Company owed the Rustumjis' over £100,000.[119] Furthermore, by granting them the brokerage, Phipps and Cowan had exercised a substantial amount of patronage, and they expected a considerable level of reciprocal assistance in their private trading arrangements in return for their judgment. The involvement between Company employees and brokers and the conflict of interest that these relationships caused was not confined to this one instance. The pattern was already well established by the 1720s, and continued long after Cowan and Phipps had retired from the East India Company.[120]

Cowan was appointed to the position of Chief of Mocha in the latter part of 1723, and he later said that it was 'my own choice I might have gone to Surat but I was informed this was a place to get more money in and that overruled me'.[121] He quickly became disenchanted with his posting and he lost no opportunity to hint at his desire to be back in Bombay.[122] As early as July 1724 he mentioned to Mrs Cairnes that he might request a transfer back to Bombay from this 'cursed place', while he described Bombay to Henry Lowther as a 'paradise'.[123] The following year he complained to Macrae of the difficulties he was under with both trade and his

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[117] 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.72.
[118] I.B. Watson, *Foundation for Empire: English Private Trade in India 1659-1760*, Vikas Publishing House Pvt Ltd., New Delhi, 1980, p.265. For details of these allegations see Chapter 6, pp. 211, 218-233.
[119] White, *op.cit.,* pp..72-73.
[120] Watson, *op.cit.,* pp.265-266.
[121] OIOC, E/4/459, *ibid.,* 17 August 1722, (signed Wm Phipps) p. 258, para.137; Cowan to John Cowan, 20 October 1723, & to John Sherman, 15 July 1725, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1C.
[122] Cowan to James Macrae, 20 October 1723, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1B.

'Chiefship', and a month later told him that he thought he would have to return to Mocha again 'next season'.[124]

Cowan was extremely apprehensive that his patrons would forget him while he was based in Mocha, although the constant barrage of letters he sent to them must have kept him to the forefront of their attention.[125] Whether it was true or not, it is quite clear that he regarded what became an extended stay in Mocha as a form of punishment, and he described his situation at the end of 1725 as his 'pennance'.[126] He had been fully aware of what lay ahead for him in Mocha because before he went there he described it to be a place of 'more proffitt than pleasure ... being verry hott yet halthy [*sic*]' but, more important, a post that he thought would make him 'easy unless my ambition prompts me to attempt something higher'.[127] From the outset Cowan was well aware of the limitations of this post, and it is apparent that he always aimed for a higher position despite his modesty to his friend Nicholas Hammond. In a letter to his fiancée a mere five days later he announced that before he could 'merit' his prospective wife he 'must attempt something still better, for my present post intitles me to the grave epithet of Worshipfull and I know you will like Honourable much better.'[128] To Betty's brother he added that he had been 'stigmatized with the Epithet of the wetherbeaten Batchelor', and felt that it would soon be appropriate as he described Mocha as 'a rare Coffe [*sic*] roaster', but, tellingly, added that 'no matter

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[123] Cowan to Mrs Cairnes, 8 July 1724, *ibid.*; Cowan to Henry Lowther, 17 July 1724, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1C.
[124] Cowan to James Macrae, 17 May 1725 & c.15 April 1725, *ibid.*
[125] Cowan to Hugh Henry, 8 July 1724, *ibid.*
[126] Cowan to Captain Thomas Bronsdon, 10 December 1725, *ibid.*
[127] Cowan to Nicolas Hammond, 5 October 1723, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1B.
[128] Cowan to Elizabeth Gould, 12 October 1723, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1B. For more information about Cowan's fiancée, Elizabeth Gould, see Chapter 3, pp.109,112.

for that they tell me thers money to be gott there and that's the Idol of this age'.[129] Money was an idol that Cowan worshipped with complete and utter devotion.

Although he consistently complained about his situation in North Yemen, he still conveyed the impression that he was able to make the best of any situation that fate threw his way:

> I endeavour to make my self easey under all circumstance and live as gayly as time and place will admit, but this climate of Mocha has made me tenn years older than Nature designed me, I hope to retrieve it in some measure at Bombay which is my favourite place and always agreed with me.[130]

Throughout his correspondence with his patrons there were constant references about how much Cowan liked Bombay, and that the climate was advantageous to his health, and these comments seem to have been a rather blatant part of his campaign towards gaining the Governorship there.[131] The achievement of good results for the Company in Mocha, when combined with support from his connections in the East India Company Directorate, meant that his name was definitely on the short list for the Presidency when it was finally vacated by William Phipps. Cowan also said that although the decision to appoint Phipps's successor rested with the Directorate, if the 'choice' was left to Phipps, 'I am pretty secure'.[132]It was accepted that a successful stint in the position of Chief in Mocha was the natural precursor to attaining the

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[129] Cowan to John Gould Jr., 10 October 1723, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1C.
[130] Cowan to Peter Delaporte, 2 June 1726, *ibid.*
[131] Cowan to Henry Cairnes, 15 July 1723, & to Martin French, 20 October 1726, & to Edward Harrison, 6 September 1726, & to Capt. Thomas Bronsdon, c. January 1727, *ibid.*
[132] Cowan to Henry Cairnes, 12 January 1727, *ibid.*

Governorship of Bombay.[133] The prospect of his future promotion would have been the deciding factor in Cowan's choice of Mocha over Surat.

One vital occurrence that coincided with Cowan's period on the sub-continent was the rise of Bombay as the most important centre for Western India trade, and this allowed Cowan to make the most of his opportunities.[134] Bombay's ascendancy has mainly been attributed to the expansion of British private trade by East India Company servants, and Surat was relegated from its former position as the major trading port on the west coast. The island of Bombay attracted merchants because of its isolated position, security and political stability. By the time Cowan arrived in India in 1721, Bombay already possessed its own bank, and eight years later the merchants received further protection by the creation of a Mayor's Court to oversee commercial law.[135] Cowan evidently saw the potential of Bombay from his earliest days in India, and he expended considerable time and effort to ensure that he would have the chance not only to rule the English East India Company's factory and promote its trade, but also to take the utmost advantage of any country trading possibilities that arose from the city's new status.

The title of President was given to the head of any factory that had other minor factories under its control.[136] The President was in charge of a Council, whose members were appointed on seniority qualifications or patronage obligations. These

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[133] 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.104.
[134] P. Nightingale, *Trade and Empire in Western India 1784-1806*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1970, p.16.
[135] *ibid.*, p.17.
[136] L.S.S. O'Malley, *The Indian Civil Service 1601-1930*, Frank Cass & Co. Ltd., London, 1965 (1931), p.3

appointments were always subject to East India Company confirmation. Apart from making trade decisions for the Company, the Council also had municipal and local judicial responsibilities, as well as being required to have some knowledge of military intelligence for defensive purposes.[137] D.A. Irwin states that although the Directorate in London was responsible for ongoing trading strategies, it was left to the President to make the everyday decisions with regard to stock, trading permits and staff requirements.[138] With the title of President of Bombay came the power to influence not only Company trading activity, but also shipping permits for those who wished to indulge in country trade in both Bombay itself and subordinate factories such as Surat. It is not surprising that this was a position to which Cowan aspired.

Living in a region with such a high mortality rate, Cowan was naturally concerned about his own health and that of his fellow expatriates. He wrote to the surgeon Charles Hamilton in 1725 that 'this goes by your friend Lasinby who has made two campaigns in this agreeable country but is as fat as ever.'[139] It would be interesting to know whether Cowan himself managed to retain his youthful figure despite the rigours of living in the East. He complained to Hamilton in the same letter that he had lost his appetite whilst living in Mocha, but that it had returned once he was back in Bombay. Cowan made no secret of what he perceived as wasted opportunities to make money, although his complaints were often couched in droll terms.

> ... so that we whose fate is to reside in these parts labour under a greater disadvantage than our brethren at Madrass & Bengall, but I have been so used to disappointments that I am at length turned

[137] O'Malley, *ibid.*, pp.3-5.
[138] D.A. Irwin, (ed) *Trade in the Pre-Modern Era, 1400-1700*, Vol.I, Edward Elgar Publishing Ltd., Cheltenham, 1996, pp.470, 473.
[139] Cowan to Charles Hamilton, 15 July 1725, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1C.

> Philosopher and endeavour to be contented with my circumstances, still hoping for better ...[140]

Compared to Bengal and Madras, Bombay was deemed to be the poor relation in trade matters, but Bombay derived benefit, particularly in private trade matters, from access to the Persian Gulf ports of Basra and Bandar Abbas, and, of course, Mocha.[141] The East India Company at this time was experiencing the peak of its coffee trade in Yemen. Coffee, representing a fifth of the Company's total exports in value, had risen from 250 tons exported in 1711 to about 1200 tons by 1724 and it would be uncharacteristic if Cowan had not capitalised on such a boom.[142] In direct contrast to these figures, Cowan stated in 1726 that he considered that 'since the consumption of coffee in England will not be above one ship's loading in a year doubtless the sending of supra cargoes will be less expensive than the keeping of a Factory'.[143] Since East India Company ships at this time ranged in size from 250 to 450 tons, Cowan clearly underestimated the value of his trade.[144] Whether the factory was worth retaining, or whether Cowan was simply tired of the place, remains a moot point. It is likely he realised that although Mocha had previously dominated the coffee market, by the mid 1720s its premier position was being usurped by Java.[145]

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[140] Cowan to Charles Savage, Jr., 6 January 1727, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1C.
[141] Lawson, *op.cit.*, p.67.
[142] B.P. Lenman, 'The English and Dutch East India Companies and the Birth of Consumerism in the Augustan World', *Eighteenth Century Life*, 14 February 1990, pp.56-57; N. Steensgaard, 'The Growth and Composition of the Long-Distance Trade of England and the Dutch Republic before 1750', in *The Rise of Merchant Empires: Long Distance Trade in the Early Modern World, 1350-1750,* ed J.D. Tracy, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1990. p.129; PRONI RCP D654/B1/5M: 23A. Company Acct., 1 July 1724. There were 3000 bales of coffee at Beetlesuckee valued at Spanish Dollars 209428.14. The document was signed by Thomas Rammell. [375 tons worth £43,630]; Cowan to Edward Harrison, 10 January 1730, PRONI RCP D654/B1/2B. Cowan reported that 'The Dutch sending this year to resettle their Factory at Mocha makes me believe the Java Coffee does not Answer.' He then spoke of the order for 25000 bales of Coffee from Mr Dickinson which was to be ready for despatch to England. This amounts to 3125 tons of coffee.
[143] Cowan to Charles Boone, 8 June 1726, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1C.
[144] E.H. Pritchard, 'Private Trade between India and China in the Eighteenth Century, 1680-1835,' *Journal of the Economic and Social history of the Orient*, Vol. I, 1957-58, p.116.

Cowan's tenure in Mocha might not have been so arduous if he had been less optimistic about the date of William Phipps retirement from the service. He had been in Mocha for about eight months when he took at face value a comment of Phipps's that he intended to return to England the following year. Sadly for Cowan's expectations it was another four years before Phipps finally left India.[146] Cowan later acknowledged that his ambition for high office led him to overestimate his chances of making money in Mocha. As he told Miss Furness: 'I was ambitious of being a Chief as soon as I could, not so much for the honour as the profitt, but this I find is no ways equal to what I was made to believe . . .'[147] Although Cowan despised his posting, he made the most of his situation. His letters frequently confirmed his obsession with making money, and he advised Macrae that it was difficult to do so without 'fleecing the Company'.[148] However, his complaints about poor trade do not seem justified because he was in charge of the Mocha Factory during the coffee boom of the mid-twenties. In fact, Cowan presided over the two best ever years of trade, namely 1723 and 1724, when the value of the coffee imported by the East India Company reached a staggering £287,975.[149] In 1724, coffee represented over twenty per cent of the Company's import value.[150] It has been estimated that only a sixth of the ships calling at his port belonged to the Company, leaving Cowan with plenty of opportunities to utilise the majority of vessels destined for both Europe and country trade ports.[151]

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[145] Steensgaard, *op.cit.*, p.130.
[146] Cowan to Henry Cairnes, 9 September 1724, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1C.
[147] Cowan to Miss Furness, 8 July 1724, *ibid.*
[148] Cowan to James Macrae, 18 July 1724, *ibid.*
[149] K.N. Chaudhuri *The Trading World of Asia and the East India Company 1660-1760*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1978, p.522. Table C.9: *Imports of Coffee (Mokha)*.
[150] Steensgaard, *op.cit.*, p.129.
[151] H. Furber, *Rival Empires of Trade in the Orient, 1600-1800,* University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1976, p.254.

It was obvious that Cowan felt India was the best place to exercise his talents as a merchant in order to gain the maximum financial benefits for both the Company and for himself. He was well aware of the risks he ran by his enforced absence from Bombay, and he found reasons to return regularly to the west coast of India. Ostensibly he stated these visits were for health purposes, and, while they often seemed to have coincided with severe attacks of gout, that particular affliction could hardly have been blamed on Mocha's climate. Any lengthy absence from William Phipps's side meant that someone else on the Factory staff could replace him as the favoured protégé of the Governor. Cowan eventually managed to return permanently to Bombay more than two years before Phipps retired from the Service. He complained of the endless waiting, and chafed at the delay. He was a man of action, and was never happier than when embroiled in trade or political manoeuvrings with patrons, would-be patrons and fellow merchants.

To gain a coveted position of Governor required not only talent, but also tenacity and extremely good health. A stout constitution was a huge asset and must have helped Cowan's ascent especially as many of those around him were less robust and succumbed to either the perils of the local climate or the demon alcohol. Promotion was, at that time, generally based on seniority although, as Cowan proved, merit, coupled with the right connections, accelerated promotion.[152] Cowan went from free merchant to Governor of Bombay in a little over eight years, without climbing through all the ranks in the Company, although he was officially designated to follow Phipps into the Presidency after six years' service. His rise was due in part to his sponsorship by Phipps and Macrae, and through his strong and helpful connections in

[152] Marshall, *ibid.*, pp.10-11.

England. Cowan's acquisition of the Governorship of Mocha so early in his career was a significant, if frustrating, stepping-stone to the top job on the West Coast.

Cowan's early years in India were spent in consolidating his standing with some of the most influential people within the East India Company and thereby aiding his chances of promotion. On the personal side, he established a network of trade and trading partners in the East in order to make his fortune. Without the security of senior tenure he knew that his chances to achieve a monetary competency were considerably diminished. He also had to appease his creditors from his failed Portuguese business, and although he made plenty of promises he continued to apportion the majority of the blame on his ex-partner, and used this as his excuse to delay the repayment of his debts. By the time he gained the Presidency he had an excellent network of patrons in place. His success in these endeavours must lie with the fortuitous circumstances that made James Macrae his first real benefactor. Without his financial aid, and the introductions that he was able to effect, Cowan would have had a far more difficult beginning in India. Macrae's career in the East India Company reinforces the evidence from Cowan's correspondence that there was a very complicated and effective patronage network in place during the early eighteenth century. Both Cowan and Macrae used ties of kinship, and the bonds forged by friendship and business opportunities, for their pecuniary benefit. In the next chapter it will be shown how Cowan enlisted his major patrons through Macrae's auspices, as well as through his own network of contacts in England and Ireland. It will also show how vital the support of these men was to a successful career in the East India Company, and of the obligations under which Cowan was thereby placed.

Chapter Two - Connections