

Chapter Three:

Major Patrons I

‘... for these the good offices of my friends’¹

Political and clerical patronage during late seventeenth and early eighteenth century England was widespread and obvious. What was less evident, but nevertheless important, was patronage in the mercantile arena. This chapter, and chapter four, will look at the men in England who provided Cowan with their support, the roles that they played in business and society, and the effect their patronage had on Cowan’s East India Company career. The question remains as to what they hoped to gain from providing such support. It was clearly not political allegiance as Cowan was definitely not in a position or place to exert any influence over anyone likely to benefit his patrons. He had the opportunity to continue to indulge in private trade whilst working for the Company, and in so doing was able to join his colleagues in offering to increase the wealth of their patrons through involvement in joint ventures.² By attracting a large number of investors to his trading efforts, Cowan could expand his own empire, and providing all went well, he could achieve status within the Company, and in return provide his patrons with financial rewards. This chapter will also show how Cowan solicited aid, his methods, and how he dealt with his successes and failures.

¹ Cowan to Peter Delaporte, 30 August 1728, PRONI RCP D654/B1/2A.

² P.J. Marshall, ‘Private British Trade in the Indian Ocean Before 1800’, *Trade and Conquest: Studies on the Rise of British Dominance in India*, Ashgate Publishing Ltd., Aldershot, 1993, p.290.

In early eighteenth century England, what did it mean to be a patron or a client? The term 'patron', from the Latin *patrōnus*, originally described a protector and defender of his clients, whether individuals, cities or provinces, but it also meant the former master of a freedman, and came eventually to describe a person of distinction who gave his protection and aid to a client in return for certain services. The recipient of such assistance was the client and he was bound, in return for the aforementioned services, to protect his patron's life and interests. By the eighteenth century the term had become synonymous with political and familial forms of assistance. East India Company patronage was almost exclusively granted through a variety of kinship affiliations, and, was more often than not, repaid with mercantile rather than political favours. Cowan and his contemporaries provide ample evidence of such arrangements.

Political patronage was evident from the very top of English society, inasmuch as the reigning monarch was dependent upon the support of leading politicians to achieve his own aims through Parliament.³ Even successful politicians of the period, Robert Walpole for example, still needed the support of a variety of people to either attain their own goals or maintain their status and they, too, were able to distribute largesse as a reward. Walpole did not necessarily remain loyal to those whom he supported and for him patronage was often limited by usefulness.⁴ Cowan's patronage network was based on this system, but he mainly utilised men who originated from the merchant sector. J.H. Plumb states, in *Sir Robert Walpole: The Making of a Statesman*, that merchants intermarried in order to protect and retain control of their

³ D. Marshall, *Eighteenth Century England*, Longmans, Green and Co. Ltd., London, 1962, p.128.

⁴ *ibid.*, p.156.

fortunes and positions.⁵ There are a couple of instances where Cowan's patrons seem to have become dispensable, but in the main he nurtured his benefactors with constant direct communications, as well as directing messages through third parties, and the provision of solicited and unsolicited gifts.

This was a period in which personal support was vital for advancement in both political and professional life. In politics this was necessary because there were no institutional affiliations as are evident in modern organised political parties, and it was important to constantly shore up support by less formal arrangements. The bestowal of positions in the Church and the Navy, as well as political appointments, were very much in the hands of royalty and the nobility.⁶ Commonsense dictated that those in receipt of political patronage were of similar persuasion as the donor, and in the granting of gifts, for example clerical livings, kinship was also influential.

There was third type of patronage that involved the business world, and here assistance was closely linked to financial, marital and kinship ties, although occasionally it also had political connections. It could range from something as simple as a landowner regularly providing work for local artisans and labourers, to the far more complex mercantile dealings of some Members of Parliament and big businessmen, including the Directorate of the East India Company. Robert Cowan was both recipient and dispenser of this form of patronage.

⁵ J.H. Plumb, *Sir Robert Walpole: The Making of a Statesman*, Vol.1, The Cresset Press, London, 1956, pp.51-52,204-205. In Chapter 2, Plumb explores the structure of eighteenth century government and clerical, political and regal patronage. Chapter 6 gives examples of kin and non-kin patronage provided by Walpole.

⁶ *ibid.*, p.129.

Where patrons were concerned, Cowan believed in the maxim that there was safety in numbers. There were approximately sixteen men who could be considered to be his major patrons, and many of them shared common backgrounds. The majority were members or directors of the East India Company, the South Sea Company, and the Bank of England, and several were Members of Parliament. Some were merchants who had traded in India, or Portugal, several were ship-owners, bankers, or business partners with other directors. They also included Russia, Levant, and Barbary merchants, but the common denominator was that all of these men were wealthy and were already in positions of power. Most were based in London, although a few came from Scotland and Ireland, and many of them were Dissenters. All were exceedingly influential men in their own right, and their continuing favour was necessary to Cowan in order for him to strengthen and maintain his position in India. Some were clearly more important to him than others, but it was not wise for him to neglect any of these men as allegiances often shifted and power bases within the various associations were constantly adjusted. The distance and time delay between Cowan and his patrons also meant that it was far safer not to rely on the good offices of just a couple of men.

Why some of these powerful men involved themselves in the patronage of such a man as Robert Cowan can be partially explained by the needs of the Directors of the East India Company, which were similar to those of Parliamentarians at that time.⁷ They too needed support because in the main they worked as individuals, and, apart from a position in the Company to protect, they had vested outside interests as well. Assuming that Cowan was, as he constantly claimed, the innocent victim of his

⁷ L.S. Sutherland, *East India Company in Eighteenth Century Politics*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1952,

partner Griff Lort's bad management in Lisbon, some of the blame for the failure of the business venture must have tainted Cowan's reputation, even if it was only with regards to poor character judgment in his choice of a partner. Cowan admitted that he had absented himself from Portugal, but he does not state the length of time involved:

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, however tis now to late to repine.⁸

It can be safely surmised from the sum of money he eventually left to settle upon his creditors, that the collapse did not happen overnight.⁹ In return for their support, the patrons must have expected some reasonable form of repayment to help offset any risk involved. It is difficult to imagine that they would have jeopardised their own reputations without seeking some substantial and tangible reward or gain.

On the other side, how did Cowan initially anticipate that he would benefit from their patronage, and how was he to ever repay such support, bearing in mind that he clearly stated that he only desired a competency from his sojourn in India? Those who chose to support Cowan gave him the opportunity to prove that he really was an astute businessman. His successful entrance into, and subsequent advancement, in the Company's service meant that he was able to fully utilise the assistance offered by his supporters. In return, his benefactors could expect his political support when he returned to England, and, perhaps, enhanced trading interests in the East. For both

pp. 35-37.

⁸ Cowan to John Sherman, c.30 November 1730, PRONI RCP D654/B1/2B.

⁹ TNA, DEL, 10/113, *Registrar of the High Court of Delegates and of the High Court of the Admiralty: Cause and Miscellaneous Papers*. Robert Cowan's Will - wherein he left 80,000 Rupees (£10,000) to settle his creditors in the failed business of Cowan and Lort.

parties, there was always the possibility that if he was more than moderately successful in his private trade deals in India that his fortune could then be united to an unmarried daughter of a prosperous mercantile family, or alternatively, to one in an impoverished gentry family. In either case, it was an alliance based on a monetary investment, but it would have bought Cowan a much-coveted place in society.

There were several patrons who asserted considerable influence over Cowan's career in the East India Company Service. Of those patrons who were involved with the Company, their levels of power and prestige varied over the years depending on whether they were Directors or just members of the Board of the Company. Similarly, personal, and health matters, and other business issues had to be taken into account, although the ability of Cowan's patrons to remain in the Directorate throughout his tenure in the East speaks volumes for the level of security they actually enjoyed. M. Moir states in *A General Guide to the India Office Records*, that there were numerous attempts by the East India Company to restrict the Directors from serving continuously, including one in 1734 which enforced a twelve month break after every fourth year in the Directorate.¹⁰ For a Company employee with only one patron in the Directorate, this new system might have meant the loss of all protection within the Company, but although Cowan would have worried about the loss of even one supporter, it is doubtful that this new regulation would have affected him to any great extent.

Collectively, the Gould family were the strongest and most omnipresent of all his major patrons. There were four of them, and their daughters married

¹⁰ M. Moir, *A General Guide to the India Office Records*, The British Library, London, 1988, p.25.

advantageously to men who were also of use to Cowan. The eldest pair were the sons of the non-conformist, wealthy East India merchant, John Gould.¹¹ The elder Gould brothers, John Snr., and Sir Nathaniel, were cloth merchants involved in both the Russian and Levant trades.¹² Nathaniel Gould, who was knighted in 1721, was a Russia merchant and a Director, and, at one stage, Governor of the Russia Company. From the end of the seventeenth century until his death in 1728, he held positions as a Director, the Deputy-Governor, or the Governor of the Bank of England.¹³ A diarist of the period commented that the new Banking Corporation was ‘under the government of the most able & wealthy Cittizens of London’.¹⁴ These citizens included Nathaniel, who became a director for the first time in 1697, three years after the establishment of the Bank.¹⁵ This directorship put Sir Nathaniel in a position of some significant influence as was recognised by Robert Cowan in 1728 whilst speaking of the value of John, Snr: ‘[he is] not of so great interest as Sir Nath. who is at the head of the Bank, which gives him some influence on all the trading companys in England.’¹⁶ On this qualification alone Sir Nathaniel was clearly a friend to acquire and to keep onside. He was also the Member of Parliament for New Shoreham for a period of almost 30 years, and his daughter, Elizabeth married into the wealthy Cairnes banking family.¹⁷ When he died in 1729, Sir Nathaniel left ‘the bulk of his Estate ... to his nephews John & Nath Gould’.¹⁸

¹¹ R. Sedgwick, *The History of Parliament: The House of Commons, 1715-1754*, Vol. II, H.M.S.O., London, 1970, p.74.

¹² I.R. Christie, *British ‘non-elite’ MPs 1715-1820*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1995, p.40.

¹³ Sedgwick, *op.cit.*, Vol. I, pp.74, 291; R. Roberts & D. Kynaston, (eds) *The Bank of England: Money, Power and Influence 1694-1994*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1995, pp.245, 248, 252.

¹⁴ John Evelyn quoted in Roberts & Kynaston, *ibid.*, p.185.

¹⁵ *ibid.*

¹⁶ Cowan to Hugh Henry, 30 August 1728, PRONI RCP D654/B1/2A. Cowan was referring to John Gould.

¹⁷ Sedgwick, *op.cit.*, Vol. II, p.74. Elizabeth married Sir Alexander Cairnes – see below pp.109,117.

¹⁸ Cowan to Henry Lowther, 29 July 1729, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1D.

His brother John was in the Directorate of the East India Company, and Chairman at one stage.¹⁹ He, too, was a Director of the Bank of England for a total of sixteen years between 1701 and 1730.²⁰ These two men were very influential people. They were also Non-conformists and their religious beliefs would have inclined them to favour Cowan. Robert Cowan considered the acquisition of their patronage to have been immensely important for someone in his situation. In 1724 he wrote to Henry Cairnes and described John Gould as the man 'whom I esteem my chief patron'.²¹ Gaining the support of two men who had influence in so many areas must have augured well for his future.

John and Rachel Gould had two sons and four daughters. John Jr., born *circa* 1695, was, like his father, a cloth merchant, and he later succeeded his uncle, Sir Nathaniel, as MP for Shoreham in 1728 until his electoral defeat in 1734. He was a Director of the East India Company from 1724 to 1735. From 1736 until his death in 1740 he was an inspector of exportation customs accounts.²² His younger brother, Nathaniel, born *circa* 1697, was a Director of the Bank of England, with stipulated breaks, from 1722 until 1737, and then Deputy Governor of the Bank from 1737 until his death in 1738.²³ He was elected as MP for Wareham from 1729-1734. In September 1729 Cowan wrote to John Gould, Snr, to 'heartily' congratulate him on the fact that both his sons had gained Parliamentary seats.²⁴ Cowan was doubly fortunate as he also acquired the friendship and patronage of John Jr, and Nathaniel.

¹⁹ Sedgwick, *loc.cit.*

²⁰ Roberts, & Kynaston, *op.cit.*, p.253.

²¹ Cowan to Henry Cairnes, 9 September 1724, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1C.

²² Sedgwick, *loc.cit.*, Vol. II. The entry for John Gould Jr, reads: '1st son of John Gould of Woodford, Essex, director and chairman of E.I. Co.'

²³ W. Marston-Acres, 'Directors of the Bank of England', *Notes and Queries*, CLXXIX, 1940, p.81.

²⁴ Cowan to John Gould, 2 September 1729, PRONI RCP D654/B1/2A.

Apart from the business and political success of their sons, their four daughters all achieved significant marriages. In May 1738, Sarah married Thomas Pelham, MP for Hastings, 1728-1741, and Lewes from 1741 until his death in 1743. Thomas was second cousin to Thomas, Duke of Newcastle, and the Hon. Henry Pelham, both of whom achieved the rank of Prime Minister in their political careers.²⁵ Frances married her cousin Elizabeth's brother-in-law, the Irish merchant, Sir Henry Cairnes. Mary married Alexander Nesbitt, and Elizabeth married Alexander's elder brother, Albert, who was a merchant, a banker, and later an MP.²⁶

As can be seen by the number of directorships and political seats this family controlled, they were clearly in a position to bestow considerable amounts of patronage. While other individuals had significantly more influence within the East India Company, for example Edward Harrison or William Dawsonne, it was the Cairnes and Gould families through their sheer numbers, linked by their judicious marriages, and the wider spheres of influence encompassed by their various business dealings, who certainly played a very important role in determining the fortunes of Robert Cowan. Furthermore, Cowan almost achieved a connection by marriage with these wealthy and influential people. That the family continued to countenance a marriage with one of John Gould's daughters, especially after Cowan's business had failed in Portugal, speaks volumes for the regard in which they held him. Elizabeth, who was also known as Betty, was engaged to Cowan for many years, before she finally married Albert Nesbitt in April 1729, at London Mercers Hall, Cheapside.²⁷

²⁵ Sedgwick, *op.cit.*, Vol. II, pp.333-334, 329-331.

²⁶ A. & C. Nesbitt, *History of the Family of Nisbet or Nesbitt in Scotland and Ireland*, Andrew Iredale, Torquay, 1898, p.37.

It is clear Cowan's association with the Gould family was one of longstanding as he said in 1729 that he had been betrothed to Betty for eighteen years.²⁸ This reference shows that he knew the Gould family before he went to Portugal. He was already a long term resident in Lisbon in 1711. He must have stood in a good financial and business situation at that stage, for it is highly unlikely that the Gould family would have accepted an offer for their daughter from an unknown or impecunious youth. Her sister, Frances, had married into the wealthy Cairnes family, and Betty would have been expected to make an equally good match. Cowan wrote of the younger Gould brothers as being 'my particular friends', which would not have been surprising as they would have been much of an age, with similar business and religious interests, as well as being prospective brothers-in-law.²⁹

Cowan also referred to the power wielded by Sir Nathaniel in the matter of Betty's second choice of a husband, and it is clear from this reference that suitors were very strictly vetted before extended family approval was granted. On a previous occasion in 1725, when rumour had reached Cowan about another prospective husband for Betty, he indicated his knowledge of the strength of patriarchal authority within the Gould family: 'I don't find there's anything in Govr Feakes marrying Betty Gould if Sir Nathaniel orders him so to do he dare not refuse.'³⁰ If an uncle carried so much weight in the choice of a husband then it is quite surprising that, even after his financial crisis, Cowan still managed to pass muster. Feake had been in the service of the East India Company, where he had risen to the rank of Governor. He

²⁷ Sedgwick, *op.cit.*, Vol. II, p.291; *International Genealogical Index Microfiche*, p.61870, Source MO97461, Serial Sheet 0227; Nesbitt, *History of the Family of Nisbet or Nesbitt*, *loc.cit.*

²⁸ Cowan to Robert Nesbitt, 20 December 1729, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1E.

²⁹ Cowan to Henry Lowther, 29 July 1729, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1D.

³⁰ Cowan to John Hinde, 20 May 1725, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1C.

left the Company in 1722, and he bought an estate in Essex and later became Chairman of the East India Company.³¹ For some reason he was either deemed unsuitable by the family or was rejected by Betty herself, as there is no further mention of his suit. By early January in 1727, it was evident that Betty was still single, and when Cowan wrote to her brother John he still hoped that she might wait for him:

I am sorry you tell me Miss Betty is not near changing her condition, I am always at her service, but if she stays for my return I fear shel [sic] find true what she told me at parting, I shall be a good for nothing old fellow, for these Indian climates are very unkind to European constitutions & mine begins to be the worse for the wearing ...³²

He must have taken some heart from the fact that Feake, who had also spent a long period in the hot climes and was no longer a young man, was still considered to be an eligible partner for Betty. Winning a fair lady must have seemed a far less realistic achievement especially as time passed, and Cowan's return to England seemed a remote dream.

Cowan found out about the end of his engagement sometime before September 1729, by which time Betty's marriage had already taken place. In December 1729 he wrote to one of Albert Nesbitt's brothers, Robert, a free merchant of Bombay, advising him of his acquisition of a new sister-in-law:

I believe I can give you a piece of news you have not yet heard that y^r Brother Albert was to be maryed to M^{rs} Betty Gould a lady I have claimed some title to these last Eighteen years past but it seems her patience was not quite so durable as mine, and indeed how could it,

³¹ P.J. Marshall, *East India Fortunes: The British in Bengal*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1976, p.228.

³² Cowan to John Gould, Jr, 12 January 1727, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1C.

my disappointment is more tolerable since a countryman still is to be happy in her as I deem not but he will intirely.³³

This ‘countryman’ was Albert Nesbitt, an Ulster Scot, an Irish banker, merchant and planter. He was a Director of the East India Company, and MP for Huntingdon 1741-1747, and Mitchell 1747-1753.³⁴ He left Ireland *circa* 1717 to trade in London as a Baltic merchant, and after his marriage to Elizabeth, he formed a merchant company, Gould and Nesbitt, with his brother-in-law Nathaniel.³⁵ Robert Nesbitt was another man whom Cowan described in correspondence as his ‘friend’.³⁶ In a letter of recommendation, he told James Macrae, Governor of Fort St. George, that he had been acquainted with Robert ‘formerly in Dublin.’³⁷ It is likely that the Nesbitt and Cairnes brothers, and Robert Cowan were all known to each other through mutual business interests in Dublin and Belfast in their early days in Ireland.

Cowan was clearly upset over the loss of his fiancée, to whom he had written regularly during the period of his stay in the East, and whom he addressed as ‘my Little wife’.³⁸ Cowan, always aware of his need to ensure continued support from England, had not been above using his future wife on occasion as an advocate for his advancement within the East India Company Service. He thanked Elizabeth for her ‘good offices for me to Mr Dawsonne, whose favour & Patronage I shall always Court.’³⁹ While he was temporarily dejected by Betty’s marriage, it is likely that he

³³ G.W. Forrest, (ed) *Selections from the Bombay Secretariat*, Vol. I, Government Central Press, Bombay, 1887, p.171; Cowan to Robert Nesbitt, 20 December 1729, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1E.

³⁴ Sedgwick, *op.cit.*, Vol. II, p.291.

³⁵ *ibid.*

³⁶ Cowan to Benjamin Francia, 9 January 1729, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1C; Cowan to John Hunter, 6 April 1729, *ibid.*

³⁷ Cowan to James Macrae, 1 February 1729, *ibid.*

³⁸ Cowan to Elizabeth Gould, 12 October 1723, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1B.

³⁹ *ibid.*

had primarily viewed his alliance to a member of the powerful Gould family as a way to ensure his social and financial security.

How were these four men able to help Cowan? The most obvious way was their protection and promotion of his interests within the East India Company. In their regular correspondence with Cowan they advised him of the many power shifts and struggles within Leadenhall Street. When there were changes in the hierarchy, they also notified him of which men he should supplicate for further aid. Cowan appointed John Gould, Jr., and his brother Nathaniel to act for him in settling his financial problems in his absence. He gave them power of attorney over his affairs and asked them to deal with his creditors in England, Scotland and Ireland.

I send you my power of Attorney to make them such proposals as you think equitable and whatever terms or conditions you agree for me I here acquies to & comply with.⁴⁰

Cowan also stated in this letter that his Portuguese affairs were to be handled by Messrs John Sherman and Richard Le Grand of Lisbon.⁴¹ These two men proffered the following advice to Cowan, which he in turn relayed to John and Nathaniel Gould.

... & they advise me that most of the creditors there will on my paying a moiety of the principal debt give a full & general release which I willingly accept but I can't at this distance guess what the English creditors will insist on that I must leave to your direction to manage as you think proper.⁴²

⁴⁰ Cowan to John and Nathaniel Gould, 20 January 1731, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1B. Prior to this appointment, Henry Cairnes had been Cowan's attorney.

⁴¹ It was not possible to read the surname name on this document. However, there are various references to Richard Le Grand in correspondence with John Sherman; Cowan to John Sherman, 30 November 1730, PRONI RCP D654/B1/2B, requesting that he write to Griff Lort on his behalf.

⁴² Cowan to John and Nathaniel Gould, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1B.

This request came in 1731 and that was at least twelve years after the end of his trading activities in Portugal. It was to be 1744, seven years after Cowan's death, before probate was finally granted on the will in which he left £10,000 to clear his affairs. It must have seemed an interminable wait for the creditors of the House of Cowan and Lort.

Cowan had a closer relationship to John Jr., and his brother Nathaniel than with the elder Gould brothers. There is far more evidence of regular correspondence between Cowan and the younger siblings, and he obviously had confidence in their ability to sort out his tangled financial affairs. Perhaps he also felt less in awe of his contemporaries, as the older Gould brothers were in positions of considerable power from the beginning of his career in the Company's service, whereas the younger brothers only achieved eminence whilst Cowan was making his second attempt to climb the greasy pole.

Other influential friends were to be found among the dissenting MPs for Ireland.⁴³ These MPs, through their merchant and banking connections, were in positions that enabled them to assist an up and coming member of the East India Company Service. Cowan wrote frequently to several of them, and he often corresponded with other members of their families as well. It is abundantly clear in those letters that not only was their continuing support of great importance to him, but also the supplementary endorsements that came from their relatives. Included in this group were the Cairnes brothers. Alexander, William and Henry Cairnes inherited a considerable fortune and they held a strong position in both English and Ulster

⁴³ See also Chapter I, pp.36-38

society.⁴⁴ By the time Cowan went to India, Alexander and Henry were resident in England. There is also a connection between the Cairnes family and Londonderry, Cowan's hometown, inasmuch as one of their cousins, David Cairnes, was resident there.⁴⁵ Sir Alexander Cairnes was most often referred to as a London banker but he was also a merchant, as was his brother Henry.⁴⁶ They were amongst the earliest of the Irish private bankers, and it is believed that they established the first regional bank branch in the town of Limerick.⁴⁷ The entrepreneurial ability that allowed them to take advantage of new markets was due to the fact that their kinship network was more widespread because of their Ulster Scot background, than that of any of the London based competitors.⁴⁸ The alliance they forged through marriage with two sections of the wealthy Gould family could only have increased their standing in the business community.

Whilst Alexander and Henry Cairnes ran their banking and merchant enterprises from England, the third brother, William, handled their business in Dublin.⁴⁹ William was classed as a merchant in Dublin in the late seventeenth century, and he also successfully dealt in real estate, and must have been kept well occupied with the responsibility for all three sections of the family business.⁵⁰ William entered Parliament in 1697 as MP for Belfast, a seat he held until his death in

⁴⁴ H.C. Lawlor, *A History of the Family of Cairnes or Cairnes and its Connections*, Elliott, Stock, London, 1906, p.82; C M. Tenison, 'The Old Dublin Bankers', *Journal of the Cork Historical and Archaeological Society*, Vol. III, 1894, p.121.

⁴⁵ *ibid.*, p.83.

⁴⁶ *ibid.*, p.84.

⁴⁷ L.M. Cullen, 'Landlords, bankers and merchants: the early Irish banking world, 1700-1820', in *Economists and the Irish Economy: From the Eighteenth Century to the Present Day*, ed A.E. Murphy, Irish Academic Press, Dublin, 1984, pp.31-32.

⁴⁸ *ibid.*, p. 28.

⁴⁹ Agnew, *op.cit.*, p. 186.

⁵⁰ Lawlor, *op.cit.*, pp.82-83.

1706.⁵¹ It has been estimated that the population of Belfast grew from about 1000 in the mid-seventeenth century to 8000 by the mid-eighteenth century.⁵² With such a relatively small population it is clear that the Cairnes brothers found it more profitable to expand their banking facilities to cover Belfast, Dublin and London, rather than to simply serve the needs of the Ulster merchant community. This allowed them to simultaneously work together, whilst pursuing their separate trading enterprises.⁵³ Since William Cairnes died relatively young, any role that he played in Cowan's life covered only the early and mainly undocumented part of the latter's career.

Alexander Cairnes was equally capable of inspiring both praise and disparagement, as he was described by Thomas Sheridan as 'an eminent banker' and by Jonathon Swift as 'a shuffling scoundrel'.⁵⁴ Swift also scathingly referred to the unsatisfactory nature of his financial transactions with Cairnes: 'What can one expect from a Scot and a fanatick?'⁵⁵ It can only be presumed that he was referring to not only what he saw as excessive and mistaken enthusiasm in his financial dealings, but also to Alexander's earlier strong non-conformist religious views. When Swift thus described him in 1711, such dissenting tendencies might well have been less manifest as Cairnes had subscribed to the Test Act of 1704.⁵⁶ Whether Cairnes had joined the mainstream religion, or was simply acting expediently, is not clear. Either way, it did not stop him from associating with, or assisting, those who retained his former religious views.

⁵¹ *ibid.*

⁵² P. Roebuck, 'The Donegall Family and the Development of Belfast, 1600-1750', in *Cities and Merchants: French and Irish Perspectives on Urban Development 1500-1900*, eds P. Butel & L.M. Cullen, Trinity College, Dublin, 1986, p. 125.

⁵³ *ibid.*

⁵⁴ Tenison, *op.cit.*, p.120.

⁵⁵ *ibid.*, p.121.

⁵⁶ Lawlor, *op.cit.*, pp.83-84.

Alexander Cairnes married Elizabeth Gould in 1702, the daughter of fellow non-conformist Sir Nathaniel Gould.⁵⁷ Alexander inherited William's not inconsiderable estate upon the latter's demise in 1706. In 1708 he was knighted, and by 1711, he had also acquired several forfeited estates, and a house in Blackheath, London. This residence meant that he was a neighbour of James Macrae. He was MP for Monaghan Town from 1710, until his death on 30 October 1732.⁵⁸ Cairnes, seemingly inspired by the South Sea Company speculation in the 1720s, endeavoured to diversify into trading in Germany but was thwarted in this project by the government disallowing his patent.⁵⁹ It is highly likely that Alexander introduced Robert Cowan to the Gould family, who were to become some of his most valuable patrons. Alexander seems to have abdicated his role as an active patron by 1723 at which time Cowan complained that he had not received 'a line' from Sir Alexander since he had left England.⁶⁰ Cairnes' silence was caused by the 'loss of his son' rather than Cowan's negligence as a correspondent.⁶¹ Cowan had a more formal relationship with Alexander, rather than the friendly, jocular association he maintained with Henry.

Henry Cairnes married Frances, daughter of John Gould, Snr, and cousin of Alexander's wife, Elizabeth.⁶² Henry was, according to a letter from Robert Cowan to his brother William in 1724, his initial choice to act as his 'principal attorney in England'.⁶³ Cowan remained a staunch friend through at least two personal financial crises that Henry endured. The first occurred in 1723 and may well have been the

⁵⁷ Lawlor, *ibid.*, pp. 85-86; Roberts & Kynaston, *op.cit.*, p.245.

⁵⁸ Lawlor, *loc.cit.*

⁵⁹ J. Carswell, *The South Sea Bubble*, The Cresset Press, London, 1960, pp.166-167.

⁶⁰ Cowan to Mrs Cairnes, 20 October 1723, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1B.

⁶¹ *ibid.*

⁶² Roberts & Kynaston, *op.cit.*, p.253.

result of the crash of the South Sea Company. Cowan wrote to a friend that he felt Henry would have to rely on his own hard work to re-establish his status because he feared that 'he is not to expect much favour from some of his relations', and he wholeheartedly and generously pledged his own support at that time in a letter to Henry's wife.⁶⁴ In his next letter to Henry, Cowan deplored his friend's inability to confide in him, and reminded him that he had received sympathetic attention from friends during his own 'distress' and was clearly endeavouring to repay Cairnes with similar kindness.⁶⁵ In October 1723 he wrote to Henry that he desired to retire to a 'little house where I propose ane apartment for you with ane easy chair & bottle of wine strong enough to keep the gout below the knee.'⁶⁶ The healing properties and power, real or imaginary, of a good drop of red were legendary in the eighteenth century.

Cowan's enduring loyalty was repayment in part for the Cairnes family's patronage and support over many years. A letter from Cowan to John Hinde in 1728 revealed that Henry again had suffered some severe financial problems: 'poor Mr Cairnes has met with fresh misfortunes & is now determined to retire from business & live in the country'.⁶⁷ Honourable retirement was the only option on this occasion. Henry succeeded to Alexander's title in 1732, but died without issue. The strength of the combined Gould/Cairnes family network was formidable. All six men were merchants, three were Members of Parliament, two were bankers, two held office in the East India Company, and two were Directors and a third the Governor of the Bank

⁶³ Cowan to William Cowan, 8 July 1724, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1C.

⁶⁴ Cowan to Mrs. Mitchell & Mrs. Cairnes, 20 October 1723, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1B.

⁶⁵ Cowan to Henry Cairnes, 26 October 1723, *ibid.*

⁶⁶ *ibid.*

⁶⁷ Cowan to John Hinde, 28 January 1728, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1C.

of England. The friendship and backing of these men alone was more than most East India Company servants could have dreamed of possessing.

The links with Ireland continued with Hugh Henry who was an Ulster banker, who established his bank at Upper Ormond Quay, Dublin.⁶⁸ He was an Irish MP for the seat of Antrim, and he, too, was a non-conformist.⁶⁹ In 1728 in a letter to another East India Company servant, Hezekiah King, Cowan referred to Henry as 'a particular friend'.⁷⁰ Henry was obviously an influential man within the City of London, as Cowan had occasion to thank him for his patronage in 1728:

I am extremely obliged to you for your solicitations on my behalf with Sir Nathaniel Gould and his brother John – the latter is very much my friend.⁷¹

Henry's efforts were of twofold benefit to Cowan because not only was the friendship and patronage of John Gould, Snr, cultivated to assist his advancement in the East India Company service, but he was also his prospective father-in-law. While Hugh Henry was not involved in the day-to-day running of the East India Company it is clear from this reference by Cowan that Henry was on familiar terms with many of the men who were. He was to play a continuing role throughout Cowan's career in the Company, and also in his personal transactions. Cowan maintained a fairly regular correspondence with Henry during his time in the East, but he did complain on a couple of occasions that Henry was not always diligent in his responses to such

⁶⁸ J. Salmon, 'Early Irish Bankers and Banking : I', *The New Irish Review*, Vol. XII, No.2, October, 1899, p.68.

⁶⁹ Agnew, *op.cit.*, p.185; 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.58; Salmon, *loc.cit.*

⁷⁰ Cowan to Hezekiah King, 18 April 1728, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1C.

⁷¹ Cowan to Hugh Henry, 30 August 1728, RONI RCP D654/B1/2A.

letters.⁷² In a show of appreciation for the support that Henry continued to provide, or to bolster what Cowan perceived to be a flagging interest in his welfare, he sent Henry a diamond ring in 1726.⁷³ Furthermore, in 1731 it was Hugh Henry to whom Cowan entrusted the remittance of the fairly substantial sum of £1,000, allegedly to be used for John Cowan's welfare in his old age.⁷⁴ The connection was to continue even after Cowan's death, as Henry was also a trustee in the marriage settlement of Robert's half-sister Mary in June 1737.⁷⁵ These men were involved with Cowan prior to his employment in the East India Company service and their lobbying and personal influence helped him not only to travel to India as a free merchant, but also to achieve his initial appointment as negotiator with the Portuguese. Once in the Service he quickly expanded this circle of friends and protectors to ensure his advancement. After his earlier business disaster, he left little to chance where his second career and moneymaking ventures were concerned.

In January 1726 Cowan thanked former Governor of Bombay and currently East India Company Director, Charles Boone, for introducing one of the Cairnes family to fellow Director, Edward Harrison, to help influence the latter to join Cowan's ever-growing list of patrons. By June of the same year Cowan was cheerfully able to report to Henry Cairnes that he had received a 'very friendly letter' from Harrison, and he later referred to him as 'my worthy patron'.⁷⁶ Edward Harrison

⁷² Cowan to Hugh Henry, 20 January 1731, PRONI RCP D654/B1/2B; Cowan to Hugh Henry, 2 January 1726, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1C

⁷³ Cowan to Hugh Henry, *ibid.*

⁷⁴ Cowan to Hugh Henry, 20 January 1731, PRONI RCP D654/B1/2B. For John Cowan see above, Chapter I, pp.33-36.

⁷⁵ PRONI RCP D654/F/6, *Marriage Settlement between Alexander Stewart and Mary Cowan*, 30 June 1737.

⁷⁶ Cowan to Henry Cairnes, 2 June 1726, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1C; Cowan to Arthur Stert, 2 September 1729, PRONI RCP D654/B1/2A.

carried considerable influence in the East India Company,⁷⁷ He began his illustrious career with the Company as a purser, and became captain of an East Indiaman involved in the China trade in 1701. He transferred to the civil service and eventually rose to the rank of Governor of Madras, a position he held from 1711 to 1717.⁷⁸ He returned to England having made his fortune, and was felicitous enough to inherit an estate near Hertford on the death of his brother.⁷⁹ He was in the East India Company Directorate from 1718 to 1731, giving him ample opportunity to meet Cowan before the latter departed for India. Harrison was elected as an MP in 1717, retaining a seat for nine years. After leaving Parliament he held the position of Postmaster-General from 1726 until his death in 1732.⁸⁰ In yet another link with Company servants, one of Harrison's cousins, Harriet, daughter of Lord Grandison, married Thomas Pitt's son, Robert.⁸¹ Thomas (Diamond) Pitt had been Governor of Fort St George from 1697 to 1709, and was well known to Harrison during that period.⁸² Harrison's nephew, Richard Bouchier, also served the Company whilst Cowan was in India, and he had risen to the rank of Chief in Bengal by 1726.⁸³ Edward's daughter, Audrey, married Charles, 3rd Viscount Townsend, so not only did Harrison emanate from a gentlemanly background but he also had important and prestigious family connections with other notable members of the establishment and the business world.⁸⁴

There was also an interesting and somewhat convoluted connection between Harrison, Cowan, a Cornish Member of Parliament and Sir Charles Wager, MP. In the

⁷⁷ Sedgwick, *op.cit.*, Vol. II, p.113.

⁷⁸ *ibid.*

⁷⁹ Love, *op.cit.*, Vol. II, p.104.

⁸⁰ Sedgwick, *loc.cit*

⁸¹ *ibid*; A. Farrington, *Trading Places: The East India Company and Asia 1600-1834*, The British Library, London, 2002, p.79. William Pitt (Pitt the Elder) was Thomas's grandson.

⁸² *ibid.*, p.352.

⁸³ Cowan to James Macrae, 5 August 1726, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1C.

early eighteenth century, the corrupt borough of Tregony in Cornwall returned two MPs to Westminster. One seat was bought by the Treasury, and the other was usually fought over by prosperous London merchants.⁸⁵ The seat was contested by two merchants: John Goddard and James Cooke. There appears to have been some bribery offered to the broker for the voters, the Reverend William Bedford, during the 1727 elections, and Goddard was the man involved in these ‘tampering’ allegations.⁸⁶ He was returned for the seat, and in late 1732 he was sent on a government mission to Spain.⁸⁷ From there he wrote to Sir Charles Wager to complain that his position in Tregony was being undermined by the efforts of Lord Falmouth. Regardless of this campaign against him, he managed to retain the seat from 1727 until his death *circa* 1736.⁸⁸

According to Cowan, the London merchant John Goddard was not only a friend of Edward Harrison but he also counted him amongst his own acquaintances. The two men had been trading in Portugal at the same time.⁸⁹ Moreover, Cowan recommended one of his own clients, a Captain Beresford, as a mentor for Goddard’s nephew.⁹⁰ Cowan’s friendship with Goddard was to provide an association with yet another powerful patron, Sir Charles Wager.⁹¹ This was to be a crucial connection in

⁸⁴ D. Defoe, *The Complete English Tradesman*, Vol. I. Burt Franklin, New York, 1970 (1st edition, Charles Rivington, London, 1727), p.236; Sedgwick, *loc.cit.*; Christie, *op.cit.*, p.38.

⁸⁵ Sedgwick, *op.cit.*, Vol. I, p.220.

⁸⁶ *ibid.*

⁸⁷ Sir L. Stephen & Sir S. Lee (eds), *Dictionary of National Biography: From the Earliest Times to 1900*, Vol. XX, Oxford University Press, London, 1973, p.428

⁸⁸ Sedgwick, *loc.cit.*

⁸⁹ TNA, SP 89/89, *Secretaries of State: State Papers Foreign, Portugal*, Representation from the Portugal Merchants complaining of the Hardships their Trade lies under, 20 Nov^r 1713. Signatures include Jn^o Goddard and Rob^t Cowan.

⁹⁰ Cowan to John Goddard, 20 January 1731. PRONI RCP D654/B1/2B.

⁹¹ Sedgwick, *op.cit.*, Vol. II, p.502. Wager was MP for Portsmouth 1710 -1711, West Looe 1713 - 1715, Portsmouth 1715 -1734, Westminster 1734 -1741 and West Looe again from 1741 until his death in 1743. He was also First Lord of the Admiralty 1733-1742, and Treasurer of the Navy from 1742 until his death; Christie, *op.cit.*, p.15. ‘Sir Charles Wager, a naval officer who made a distinguished career...’

Cowan's eventual political career as it allowed for an introduction to Sir Robert Walpole. Cowan and Wager's association most likely commenced in Portugal, as the latter was in Lisbon from 1705 until his return to England in the following year.⁹² This was a time when Cowan was still prospering in his mercantile business in Portugal, and was on his way to becoming one of the principal merchants in that community.⁹³ In 1731 Cowan wrote to Goddard mentioning the latter's continuing friendship with 'Governor Harrison', and later, in 1732, he made reference to the Court of Spain which ties in with Goddard's government appointment. Cowan also promised to travel around England with Goddard upon his return from India.⁹⁴ It is unlikely that their plans ever came to fruition as Cowan returned to England in 1736 and Goddard died that same year. Cowan followed him to the grave within twelve months.

Given these connections it is a reasonable assumption that Cowan's friend John Goddard, and the newly elected MP of that name for Tregony were one and the same. Sir Charles Wager's unhesitating support for Cowan to be considered the next member for Tregony seemed somewhat unexpected, as he had not previously been one of Cowan's regular patrons, nor even a casual correspondent. Friendship with John Goddard and the patronage of Edward Harrison provides the missing link between Wager and Cowan. In recommending Cowan as a prospective MP to Sir Robert Walpole in July 1736, Wager described him thus: 'a moneyed man and a sure

⁹² Stephen & Lee, *ibid.*

⁹³ TNA, SP 89/23, ff.246-255, *Secretary of State: State Papers Foreign, Portugal*, Principal Merchants of Lisbon ... Statement of Trade to James Stanhope (Principal Secretary of State) 31 July 1715. Signed by Robert Cowan, *et al.*

⁹⁴ Cowan to John Goddard, 20 January 1731, PRONI RCP D654/B1/2B; Cowan to John Goddard, 20 January 1732, PRONI D654/B1/2C.

hand.’⁹⁵ The terms of this reference would surely have pleased Cowan, as it had always been his aim to be considered a man of substantial wealth, and he attached immense importance on his steadfastness. Cowan was endorsed as a candidate and was elected as the new Member for Tregony on 9 February 1737.

Cowan told Harrison that he had ‘a great dependence on your friendship and good offices favourably to represent my actions to the Court of Directors’ adding that they should not attribute any failings on his part as due to ‘want of zeal for their service’.⁹⁶ He later acknowledged that it was Harrison’s patronage that had finally assured him of the Governorship of Bombay.⁹⁷ A third example was a piece of overt flattery: ‘I will no longer trespass on your time & patience but beg leave to recommend my self & my concerns to your protection as my only patron . . .’⁹⁸ This was simply not true as Cowan did not depend on the support of one patron, and this was something of which Harrison must have been well aware. He must, however, have been of great importance to Cowan who wrote almost despairingly in 1733 when he heard of the death of Harrison:

... melancholy news of Mr Harrisons death & Sir Math. Deckers indisposition & that it was apprehended he would no longer be able to undergo the fatigue of business but decline comeing into the direction this is an unexpressable loss to both Mr Lowther & me as I hear there is to be great alterations in the Court of Directors at the next Election there will be but little comfort continuing abroad, but I have determined to stay till next year lett what will happen⁹⁹

⁹⁵ Sedgwick, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p.589.

⁹⁶ Cowan to Edward Harrison, 8 July 1724, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1B.

⁹⁷ Cowan to Edward Harrison, 2 September 1729, PRONI RCP D654/B1/2A.

⁹⁸ Cowan to Edward Harrison, 12 September 1731, PRONI RCP D654/B1/2C.

⁹⁹ NAS, *Abercainry*, GD 24/1/464/N/70, Cowan to John Drummond, 18 August 1733.

Even though he felt the loss of such a potent patron it is clear from this postscript that Cowan was determined to continue as Governor of Bombay regardless of whether or not he had complete support from the East India Company Directorate.

However much in his correspondence he emphasised his undying allegiance to the Company, and his patrons' interests, Cowan's foremost concern was always the protection and advancement of his own cause, and his writings must be viewed objectively. Cowan's collection of correspondence contains the copies of letters and reports that he sent to various people, and they cover both private and company business. It should be appreciated that most of the duplicated letters were sent through the Company's own mail system, and it was always possible that these could be accessed by enemies as well as friends. It was advisable to err on the side of caution when referring to private dealings. Cowan was well aware that many members of the Directorate had other protégés beside himself to promote and protect. Harrison was not an exception to this rule, and he had other interests apart from Cowan's career to consider. In return, Harrison expected Cowan to provide patronage for some of his clients.

Edward Harrison was familiar with both sides of the patronage system within the East India Company. During his governorship at Fort St. George, he had asked for favoured treatment of his own son from Messrs. William Phipps and John Scattergood.

I perswade myself I need not say much to engage your kindness for my Son, I would not have him too much indulg'd, but strictly kept to

business as one that is to hew out his own fortune, with the sweat of his brows, the less time he has to be idle the better.¹⁰⁰

Harrison was quite clear that any patronage granted was not to be a special consideration but was to follow the normal protocol. Many years later Harrison personally recommended Captain Lyell, and Messrs. Chapman, Horne and Bidwell to Cowan, for assistance.¹⁰¹ By this time Cowan had been elevated to his governorship and was greatly indebted to Harrison for his patronage. Under such an obligation, how could he have possibly refused to confer his favours on these men?

The amount of aid granted was commensurate with the standing of each client. Cowan was aware that Captain Lyell had the backing of nine members of the East India Company Directorate, and such significance demanded appropriate support. Cowan wrote to Drummond that he had taken 'just regard of your recommendation of Capt. Lyell & I dare say he wont complain of his treatment this voyage'.¹⁰² This was Captain Robert Lyell who was in charge of the *Wyndham* from at least March 1729 until his death in 1734.¹⁰³ With such a volume of support from the East India Company directors it is highly likely that he was closely related to Henry and Baltzar Lyell. There was yet another Lyell in India at the same time as Robert. Thomas began as third supercargo on the *Morice* in 1729, and became the owner/supercargo of the

¹⁰⁰ OIOC, MSS EUR C 387/4, *Papers of John Scattergood Madras Merchant 1698-1723*, 4 Vols., 18 May 1713, Fort St. George, p. 209, Harrison to William Phipps and John Scattergood.

¹⁰¹ Cowan to Henry Lowther, 30 August 1729, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1D; Cowan to Edward Harrison, 2 September 1729, PRONI RCP D654/B1/2A; Cowan to Edward Harrison, 20 January 1731, PRONI RCP D654/B1/2B; Cowan to Edward Harrison, 12 September 1731, PRONI RCP D654/B1/2C.

¹⁰² Cowan to John Drummond, 30 August 1729, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1E; Two of these nine directors were the brothers Henry and Baltzar Lyell who were related to Captain Robert Lyell. See also Chapter 6 pp.229,241,247-248.

¹⁰³ OIOC, E/3/115, *Original Drafts of Despatches to Bengal, Madras and Bombay, 1725-51*, 7 March 1729, para.3; 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, 1957-1958, p.230.

Wyndham by 1733.¹⁰⁴ Presuming that he and Robert were related, and the tie-in of the ownership of the *Wyndham* points to this, the control of that particular ship and its trade was well and truly in the hands of one family. Little is known of Mr. Chapman but Cowan did bestow patronage in some form upon him, as he described him as ‘a good natural gentleman & well esteemed in this place’.¹⁰⁵ There is even less information about Mr. Bidwell but in 1731 Cowan advised William Phipps that he had upon Harrison’s recommendation, made him Secretary.¹⁰⁶ John Horne was already established in India when Cowan arrived there. By the time Cowan became Governor of Bombay, Horne was in charge of the Persian Gulf, based at Bandar Abbas. Even so, Cowan took care to advise Harrison that he had a ‘regard’ for Horne and that they maintained contact through regular correspondence.¹⁰⁷ Cowan acknowledged his debt to Harrison in 1729 when he thanked him for his patronage that he felt had assured him of the governorship.¹⁰⁸ It is not surprising that Cowan felt profoundly the loss of such a powerful benefactor.

Sir Mathew Decker, whose retirement also upset Cowan, was a much more public figure. He was born in Amsterdam, Holland in 1679 and he and his family arrived in England in about 1700, having fled from religious persecution.¹⁰⁹ He was a wealthy banker and East India merchant, a Governor of the South Sea Company and one of the longest serving Directors of the East India Company. His time there

¹⁰⁴ OIOC, E/3/115, *Original Drafts of Despatches to Bengal, Madras and Bombay, 1725-51*, 7 March 1729, para.5.

¹⁰⁵ Cowan to Edward Harrison, 20 January 1730, PRONI RCP D654/B1/2B.

¹⁰⁶ Cowan to William Phipps, 8 September 1731, PRONI RCP D654/B1/2C.

¹⁰⁷ Cowan to Edward Harrison, *ibid.*

¹⁰⁸ Cowan to Edward Harrison, 2 September 1729, PRONI RCP D654/B1/2A.

¹⁰⁹ Wiltshire and Swindon Record Office, 2057/F5/4, *Journal of a Voyage to Holland and Back 13 May – 30 August 1748* (includes a bibliographical note from Rijksbureau voor Kunsthistorische Documentie, Holland, 1951); Sedgwick, *op.cit.*, Vol. II, p.608.

spanned a period of approximately thirty years.¹¹⁰ By 1720 it was reported that Decker held £14,025 in Bank of England stock, and two years later he held £53,750 in stock in the East India Company.¹¹¹ As a financier, economist and advocate of free-trade, he has been remembered for his paper, published in 1744, entitled '*An Essay on the Causes and Decline of Foreign Trade*', but he is less known as being credited with introducing the cultivation of the pineapple to England.¹¹² Clearly these merchants were enterprising men who did not restrict their enthusiasms to solitary ideas. He was the London correspondent for some Dutch banks and was on the board of the significant Onslow marine insurance enterprise, and he was described as 'one of the shrewdest business brains of his time'.¹¹³

Decker successfully stood for Parliament and represented the people of Bishop's Castle for three years. His political patron, whom he shared with fellow East India Company Director John Drummond, was James Brydges (1673-1744), MP for Hereford from 1698 until 1714, and who held the lucrative office of Paymaster-General of Forces Abroad during the period 1707-1712. Brydges was created Duke of Chandos on 30 April 1719.¹¹⁴ Both Decker and Brydges had been involved with the East India Company since 1711, and together with Edward Harrison and John Drummond this quartet was regarded as all-powerful in the Directorate during the early part of the eighteenth century.¹¹⁵ Cowan had therefore acquired the patronage of three of the four predominant men in the East India Company. His accumulation of

¹¹⁰ P.G.M. Dickson, *The Financial Revolution in England: A Study in the Development of Public Credit 1688-1756*, MacMillan, London, 1967, p.498; Christie, *op.cit.*, p.44;

¹¹¹ Dickson, *op.cit.*, p.281; G.K. McGilvary, 'East India Patronage and the Political Management of Scotland', PhD thesis, Open University, 1989, p.90.

¹¹² Wiltshire and Swindon Record Office: 2057/F5/4, *loc.cit.*

¹¹³ Carswell, *op.cit.*, pp.138-9, 64.

¹¹⁴ Stephen & Lee, *op.cit.*, Vol. III, pp.162-163; Christie, *loc.cit.*

¹¹⁵ McGilvary, *loc.cit.*

so many friends in high places is testimony to his major strengths of ability, tenacity and persuasion. The Duke of Chandos was not Decker's only important aristocratic alliance, and some of these men were further links in Cowan's ever widening network of patrons. Decker was another great asset to Cowan as his pedigree of financial expertise and social connections must have been almost unparalleled. The extent of the latter is revealed in a series of journals kept by Decker in the late 1720s.

He kept three records of travels that he made in England between 1726 and 1729 and these reveal some interesting associations, especially with reference to the patronage network of Robert Cowan. At Hursley Park in August 1726, he visited his 'worthy friend' Mr. Dawsonne 'who received me with great friendship and kindness, as did his nephew Mr. Heathcote, to who this house and estate there ab^t belongs.'¹¹⁶ The 'Mr. Dawsonne' referred to by Decker was the brother of William Dawsonne. The latter was a fellow Director of Decker's in the East India Company. William was also Cowan's patron, and his sister and heir, Mary, married Samuel Heathcote.¹¹⁷ Mary's husband was the younger brother of Sir Gilbert Heathcote, yet another name on Cowan's long list of patrons.¹¹⁸ Decker also stayed with Thomas Parker, the Earl of Macclesfield at Shirburn Castle, Oxfordshire, and this provided another link with the Heathcote family. The Earl's daughter, Lady Elizabeth Parker married William Heathcote, son of Mary and Samuel, in 1720, and these were the 'Heathcotes of Hursley Park'.¹¹⁹ In a letter to James Macrae in January 1728 Cowan referred to Decker's invaluable social connections. He said that Decker 'is like to be a great man

¹¹⁶ Wiltshire and Swindon Records Office, 2057/F5/1, *op.cit.*, p.9.

¹¹⁷ Sedgwick, *op.cit.*, Vol. II, p.124.

¹¹⁸ *ibid.*, pp.123-4.

¹¹⁹ *ibid.*, p.124; Stephen & Lee, *op.cit.*, p.279.

being so great a favourite with the new King and Queen.’¹²⁰ The inference is that the cultivation of such good friends by Decker might well have a beneficial flow-on affect to Cowan’s career, as well as his later political prospects.

Two years later Decker embarked on another tour, this time dining with the Earl of Clarendon, and the Earl of Pembroke, and staying with Edward Harrison, Sir Andrew Fountains, and Sir Robert Walpole.¹²¹ He also visited Viscount Townshend’s seat at Raynsham, but they did not meet.¹²² Decker’s friend and close ally in the East India Company, and Cowan’s co-patron, Edward Harrison, was the father-in-law to the 3rd Viscount Townshend.¹²³ Decker also met with, and was entertained by, one Samuel Artis, Esq., Mayor of Yarmouth, ‘who was an acquaintance of Mr. Drummond and who had wrote to him.’¹²⁴ While all of these men were prominent members of society, and some may well have influenced Cowan’s fortunes whilst he was employed by the East India Company, the one with the most bearing on his future, especially after he returned to England, was undoubtedly Sir Robert Walpole. Decker stayed with Walpole at Houghton Hall from 2 July to 4 July 1728.¹²⁵ As Cowan had by this time been made the Governor of Bombay his name may well have been mentioned between the two men.

Decker’s final journal covers a trip he made in 1729 wherein he and several other Dutch friends travelled to Portsmouth as the guests of the Admiral of the

¹²⁰ Cowan to James Macrae, 18 January 1728, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1C.

¹²¹ Wiltshire and Swindon Record Office, 2057/F5/2, *op.cit.*, pp.1, 3, 6-7, 9,

¹²² *ibid.*, pp. 6-7.

¹²³ Sedgwick, *op.cit.*, Vol. II, p.113.

¹²⁴ Wiltshire and Swindon Record Office, 2057/F5/2, *op.cit.*, p.11.

¹²⁵ *ibid.*, pp.7-10.

English Navy, Sir Charles Wager.¹²⁶ This association, coupled with his earlier support of Cowan's friend John Goddard, provided yet another reason why Sir Charles decided to promote Cowan's political interests with Walpole. Decker's party were feted by the Admiral as they were collected by his own sloop, and saluted by guns on at least two occasions during their four-day visit.¹²⁷ It can be seen from these glimpses into Decker's social and business connections that his friendship was regarded by Cowan as a necessary and truly sound investment. It would be hard to imagine from Cowan's vast number of correspondents that he would have been totally unaware of Decker's travels and connections, and the value of such people towards his own career prospects.

Cowan's relationship with Decker began sometime in 1724, as he wrote to William Phipps to say that he had had a 'hint from a friend' to correspond with 'Mr Harrison, Mr Lyel, Wordsworth, Heathcote & Sir Mathew Decker'.¹²⁸ In the middle of the following year Cowan wrote directly to Decker to ask for his patronage, and from Mocha in 1726, Cowan stated that he desired to be of service to the Company.¹²⁹ Further evidence exists that patronage was granted and continued over several years, and this clearly refutes the assertion made by K. N. Chaudhuri that Cowan did not mention Decker as being amongst his supporters in London.¹³⁰ Cowan assured his friend Peter Delaporte in a letter about Sir Matthew that 'if any dependence can be had on a promise I may expect further favour'.¹³¹ Delaporte also played a part in

¹²⁶ Wiltshire and Swindon Record Office, 2057/F5/2, *ibid.*, p.1.

¹²⁷ *ibid.*, pp.1, 4.

¹²⁸ Cowan to William Phipps, 5 December 1724, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1C.

¹²⁹ Cowan to Sir Mathew Decker, 15 July 1725 & 8 June 1726, *ibid.*

¹³⁰ Cowan to Henry Lowther, 23 August 1730, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1F; Cowan to John Gould Jr., 20 January 1731, PRONI RCP D654/B1/2B; 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.113.

¹³¹ Cowan to Peter Delaporte, 2 June 1726, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1C.

securing Directorate support for his friend, and, in particular, that of Decker. This Cowan acknowledged in 1726:

I am verry gratefully sensible of your good offices with the Gentlemen of your acquaintance amongst our Directors particularly Sir Mathew Decker, who has a considerable influence in the Court.¹³²

It was not enough to just write to the patron concerned to thank him, it also seemed necessary to ask peers to pass on messages of acknowledgement. Throughout their correspondence Cowan, and other Company servants, frequently offered their ‘services’ to patrons by way of intermediaries. This semi-public form of appreciation was also a part of the accepted protocol of patronage.

A year later Cowan asked another Director, John Drummond, to convince Decker that he truly valued his patronage.¹³³ At the same time he acknowledged the Directorate’s confidence in him in his elevation in the ranks of Council members in Bombay:

I can’t omitt on this occasion rendering you & the rest of my friends in the Direction my harty thanks for the distinguishing Mark of the Honble Company’s favour in appointing me second in Council in case Mr Hope’s dismissal such incorridgement must animate all generous & honest spirits to exert their utmost endeavours for the interest & reputation of such Honble Masters...¹³⁴

Such a move, even though it came at the expense of his friend John Hope’s career, would have given him some encouragement of his standing in the Company. To cover himself, Cowan also wrote to Decker and after thanking him for his appointment,

¹³² Cowan to Peter Delaporte, 2 June 1726, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1C. Delaporte was a Portugal Merchant, and a Director of the South Sea Company. See also Chapter 5, pp.178-179,188-191,193,196.

¹³³ Cowan to John Drummond, 12 January 1727 & 20 January 1732, *ibid.* Cowan again asked for Drummond’s protection, mentioning Decker in particular.

added that he hoped that he would merit his continued patronage.¹³⁵ Despite all the work undertaken on his behalf in England, Cowan realised that his support was not necessarily uniform throughout the Directorate. He intimated this concern to James Macrae after he had received official confirmation of his appointment to the Governorship.

Mr Lyel & Mr Drummond have been verry harty in my Interest. Sir Mathew Decker & Mr Harrison have wrote me verry kindly this season and as my Conduct hitherto has been approved of by them I shall endeavour to deserve the continuance of their good opinion¹³⁶

In the world of patronage endorsement there is obviously a vast difference between ‘verry harty’ and ‘verry kindly’ and that was something Cowan well understood.

Robert Cowan, and other Company servants, were well aware of the powerful position Decker held in the company. In 1732 George Morton Pitt reflected on the ‘harmony between Sr Mathew, Mr Harrison & Mr Wordsworth.’¹³⁷ At least one historian has commented that the association formed by Decker, the Duke of Chandos, Edward Harrison and John Drummond, over an eleven-year period, and with the support of some other significant directors, made them redoubtable.¹³⁸ Regardless of the amount of power that Decker wielded, it did not stop Cowan from worrying about the volatile situation amongst the Court of Directors:

Sir Matthew constantly writes me & verry Complaisently but
Revolutions are as frequent in your Court as in any other Society &

¹³⁴ Cowan to John Drummond, 12 January 1727, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1C.

¹³⁵ Cowan to Sir Mathew Decker, 12 January 1727, *ibid.*

¹³⁶ Cowan to James Macrae, 18 January 1728, *ibid.*

¹³⁷ NAS, *Abercainry*, GD24/1/464/N/35, Pitt to John Drummond, Fort St George, 10 January 1732.

¹³⁸ McGilvary, *op.cit.*, p.91. Others listed in this clique were Henry Monson, Henry Lyell and Josiah Wordsworth.

those who pretend friendship to a man one day, show the reverse the next so that tis hard to depend on any thing¹³⁹

The simultaneous loss of Harrison and Decker might well have augured ill for him, but Cowan still had plenty of other patrons on whom he could call, and while they, as individuals, were not quite as influential as Harrison and Decker, collectively they were still a force not to be viewed without respect.

One such advocate was Sir Josias Wordsworth. He was in the East India Company Directorate from 1712 to 1739, including five years as Deputy Chairman, and eight as Chairman.¹⁴⁰ Wordsworth was the second man that K.N. Chaudhuri had thought it strange Cowan had not acquired as a patron.¹⁴¹ Cowan's relationship with Decker was established at the former's behest in 1725.¹⁴² His association with Wordsworth dated from slightly earlier, that is, late 1724, as he told Henry Cairnes that he had been corresponding with Wordsworth 'since my being a Chief'.¹⁴³

Cowan recognised Wordsworth's importance in 1724 when he said that 'Mr Harrison, Lyel & Wordsworth are the leading men in Leadenhall Street.'¹⁴⁴ His letters to Wordsworth during the early years of his residency in the East were, in general, confined to Company trade matters, particularly coffee and pepper prices, and even after his ascension to the Governorship, Cowan maintained this line in his letters to

¹³⁹ Cowan to John Gould, Jr., 20 January 1731, PRONI RCP D654/B1/2B.

¹⁴⁰ Sutherland, *op.cit.*, p.32.

¹⁴¹ Chaudhuri, *loc.cit.*

¹⁴² Cowan to Mathew Decker, 15 July 1725, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1C. See above p.131.

¹⁴³ Cowan to Henry Cairnes, 15 July 1725, *ibid.* There are few surviving letters to Wordsworth, but Cowan mentioned writing to him in letters to others, e.g. Cowan to William Phipps, 5 December 1724, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1C.

¹⁴⁴ Cowan to William Phipps, 28 June 1724, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1B.

Wordsworth.¹⁴⁵ Cowan's commitment to detailing these business details to his patron provides evidence that he did work assiduously for the East India Company and that he was well aware that to keep his position in Bombay required solid results on the Company's behalf. His patronage was obviously important to Cowan, but this particular relationship did not seem to progress beyond strictly formal lines compared with some of the other more personal patron/client associations Cowan embarked upon. Nevertheless it was far more important to have Wordsworth as a passive supporter than as an active opponent.

Cowan also made enquiries about a 'Mr Ecclestone' who was 'very much esteemed among the Directors' and whom he thought was acquainted with Henry Cairnes, because he was related to Cairnes' wife.¹⁴⁶ K.N. Chaudhuri dismissed the notion promoted by L.S. Sutherland that John Ecclestone played a more important role in the Company's affairs in the 1730s than was apparent. Chaudhuri argues that Ecclestone was only a Director, whereas Wordsworth was either Chairman or deputy Chairman for nearly half of the 27 years he spent in the Directorate.¹⁴⁷ Cowan sheds only a little more light on Ecclestone's importance when he went on to explain to Cairnes why he considered his patronage worthwhile: 'I should be proud of his friendship because he can say as much in behalf of his friend & as well as any man if there is room for it ...'¹⁴⁸ As usual, he was protecting his own position by making enquiries about someone he had heard about through the Company grapevine, and Ecclestone must have carried some considerable weight in the Company, otherwise

¹⁴⁵ Cowan to Josias Wordsworth, 15 July 1725, 1 January 1726, 8 June 1726, *et al.*, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1C.

¹⁴⁶ Cowan to Henry Cairnes, 15 July 1725, *ibid.* Cowan wrote 'Mr Ecclestone who I doubt not is your acquaintance & I think Mrs Cairnes relation'.

¹⁴⁷ Chaudhuri, *loc.cit.*

¹⁴⁸ Cowan to Henry Cairnes, 15 July 1725, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1C.

Cowan would not have wasted time and effort in trying to gain his patronage. Their contact was limited, but it was better for Cowan to have Ecclestone as a neutral party, rather for him to be against his interests.¹⁴⁹

One relationship that Cowan wanted to encourage was that between himself and the long-time Secretary of the East India Company, Thomas Woolley. Woolley held that position for at least twenty years.¹⁵⁰ Cowan desired, if not his patronage, then certainly his approval. He commenced his endeavours to forge such an association as early as April 1723, and then in the following year he sent a couple of gifts to Woolley. The first of these was described by Cowan as a ‘small parcel of coffee’, and a year later he had despatched ‘two Carboys of old double distilled Goa Arrack & a small bale of coffee which I desire your acceptance.’¹⁵¹ These gifts were to little avail as Cowan complained to Henry Cairnes a few months later: ‘Mr Wooley I have like-ways wrote to but he answers nobodys letters. I know you are intimate with him & twill be proper for you to cultivate his friendship for me.’¹⁵² Cowan, well knowing that Woolley did not enter into correspondence with Company servants, was still intent on adding the man’s support to his network if it was at all possible. This was not an uncommon situation as Thomas Pitt had encountered a similar problem in 1700 with Sir Edward Littleton.

My good ffriend,

This is the 3^d letter I have wrote you since yo^{re} Arrivall but rec’d not a line from you ... I have sent you upon the Sedgewicke – Capt Harnett

¹⁴⁹ Cowan to John Ecclestone, c. January 1730, PRONI RCP D/654/B1/2B; Cowan to John Ecclestone, 20 January 1732, PRONI RCP D/654/B1/2C. See also Chapter 10, p. 354.

¹⁵⁰ TNA, C 106/170, 1/31, *Exchequer and Chancery: Master Richard’s Exhibits*, 19 October 1720. Sir Robert Nightingale to John Scattergood. Confirming yet another link through the East India Company, Nightingale informed Scattergood that Thomas Woolley’s younger daughter had married ‘New Ship Capt Newsham Commandr’.

¹⁵¹ Cowan to Thomas Woolley, 10 July 1724 & 1 August 1725, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1C.

¹⁵² Cowan to Henry Cairnes, 12 January 1727, *ibid*.

two chests of Persia Wine 4 potts of Tea two hams of China Bacon 4
jars of Sweetmeats & 20 potts of Hogsne of w^{ch} I desire yo^r
acceptance and if you'll hon^r me but wth a line of what you want from
hence, I will be sure to serve you wth itt.¹⁵³

If patronage was to be withheld, protocol apparently did not even demand an acknowledgement of such generosity from the client. Thomas Woolley did not change his writing habits over the next two years, and Cowan noted his death in the same year as Sir Nathaniel Gould, Sir Peter Delmé, Sir Dennis Dutry, Sir Randolph Knipe and Mr William Thompson 'of the Bank'.¹⁵⁴ The date of Woolley's death is unknown, but it must have occurred at about the same time as the others, that is, in the latter half of 1728.¹⁵⁵

The simultaneous loss of these five powerful Bank of England men must have signified changes in the balance of power in established patronage circles. Gould was Director, Deputy Governor, or Governor between 1697 and 1728. Delmé held positions of Director, Deputy Governor, and Governor of the Bank of England between 1698-1728. Dutry, merchant and banker, was a Director of the Bank between 1711-1714, and 1724-1727. Knipe, a Turkey Merchant, was a Director from 1712-1728, and Thompson held the positions of Director, Deputy Governor, and Governor between 1714-1728.¹⁵⁶ Not surprisingly, Cowan did not grieve much for the former Company secretary whom he referred to rather unflatteringly as 'old Woolley' to the then Chief of Tellicherry, John Braddyll.¹⁵⁷ Even assiduous letter writing, and the proffering of unsolicited gifts could not achieve the patronage of some people.

¹⁵³ OIOC, MS 22842, *Letter Books and Invoices of Thomas Pitt, Governor of Fort St. George, 1699-1709*, Pitt to S^r Edward Littleton Presid^t for Affairs of the New Comp[@] in Bengall, 4 May 1700.

¹⁵⁴ Cowan to Henry Lowther, 29 July 1729, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1D.

¹⁵⁵ Marston-Acres, *op.cit.*, pp. 58,59,61,62,80. Knipe and Thompson died in June, Gould in July, Delmé in September, and Dutry in November.

¹⁵⁶ *ibid.*

Woolley remained neutral, as his was a permanent position, and not one dependent upon election. This was one of the very few instances where Cowan wasted both his time and money in trying to gain patronage, but this spectacular lack of success did not deter Cowan from attempting to win favour from Woolley's successor. In 1731 he authorised William Phipps to give the 'Secretary' fifty guineas if he was 'expecting a small present' from Governor Cowan.¹⁵⁸ Nothing ventured, nothing gained. The new secretary, Mr Mitchell, like his predecessor, did not respond to Cowan's overtures, as there is no further mention of overt efforts to gain his patronage.¹⁵⁹

Robert Cowan cultivated patrons whom he knew would be the most useful to him both in the short and long term. In the group covered by this chapter he had acquired some very important and influential men to act on his behalf both within the Company and on his private matters. Other Company servants of the time utilised men like the Goulds, and Edward Harrison, but few of his contemporaries had such a large network in place. The very fact that they had links to the same people as Cowan automatically extended his network and those of his patrons. Such alignments could be repaid in part by political allegiance upon the eventual return of the client, but with low life expectancy in the East, this was not something that could be guaranteed as a repayment for services rendered. Simultaneously the patronage provided by Cowan, often at the behest of his superiors, further added to the circles of obligation and trade. Cowan appeared impatient at times, but he never allowed the frustrations of his situation to cloud his ultimate goal. He left very little to chance, and he enlarged his network by acquiring other members of the East India Company Directorate as

¹⁵⁷ Cowan to John Braddyll, 8 July 1729, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1D.

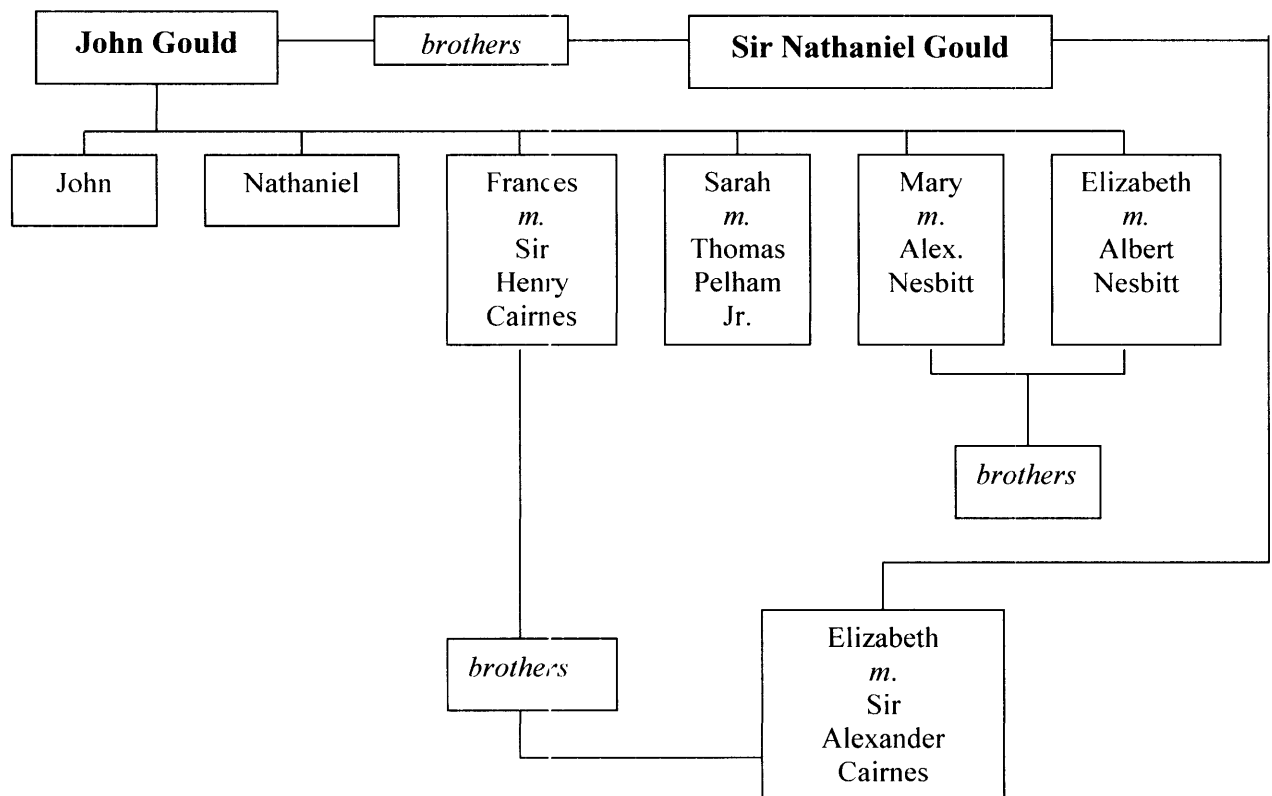
¹⁵⁸ Cowan to William Phipps, 20 January 1731, PRONI RCP D654/B1/2B.

¹⁵⁹ Cowan to Henry Lowther, 17 August 1729, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1D.

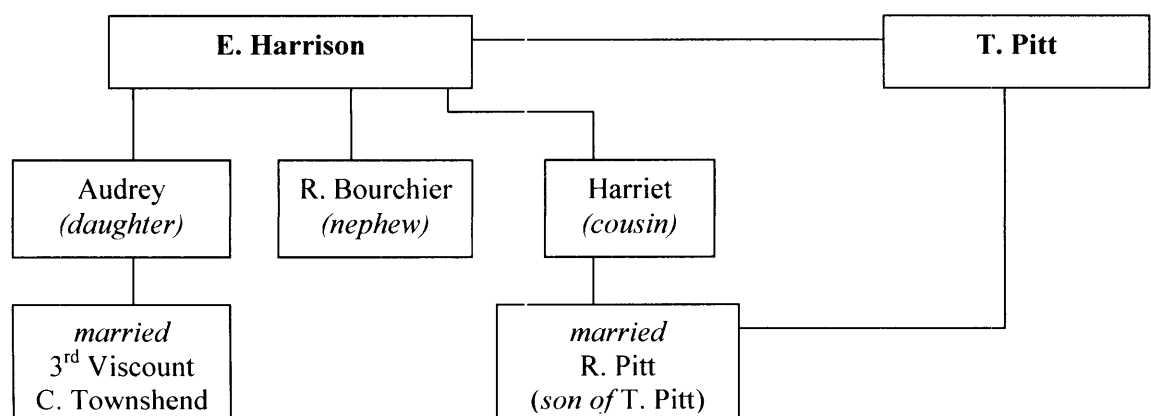
patrons. Their contribution to Cowan's rise in the Company will be discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter Three - Connections

The Gould Family



East India Company Governors



Chapter Three - Connections

Cowan's Major Patrons - 1

Legend:

Connections: —

Patronage: —→

East India Company

John Gould, Snr.
John Gould, Jr.
Edward Harrison
Sir Matthew Decker
Sir Josias Wordsworth

Bank of England

Sir Nathaniel Gould
John Gould, Snr.
John Gould, Jr.

Members of Parliament

Sir Nathaniel Gould
John Gould, Jr.
Nathaniel Gould
Sir Alexander Cairnes
Hugh Henry
Edward Harrison
Sir Charles Wager
Sir Matthew Decker

Merchants

Sir Nathaniel Gould
John Gould, Snr.
John Gould, Jr.
Nathaniel Gould
Sir Alexander Cairnes
Henry Cairnes
Sir Matthew Decker

Bankers

Sir Alexander Cairnes
Henry Cairnes
Hugh Henry
Sir Matthew Decker

Other

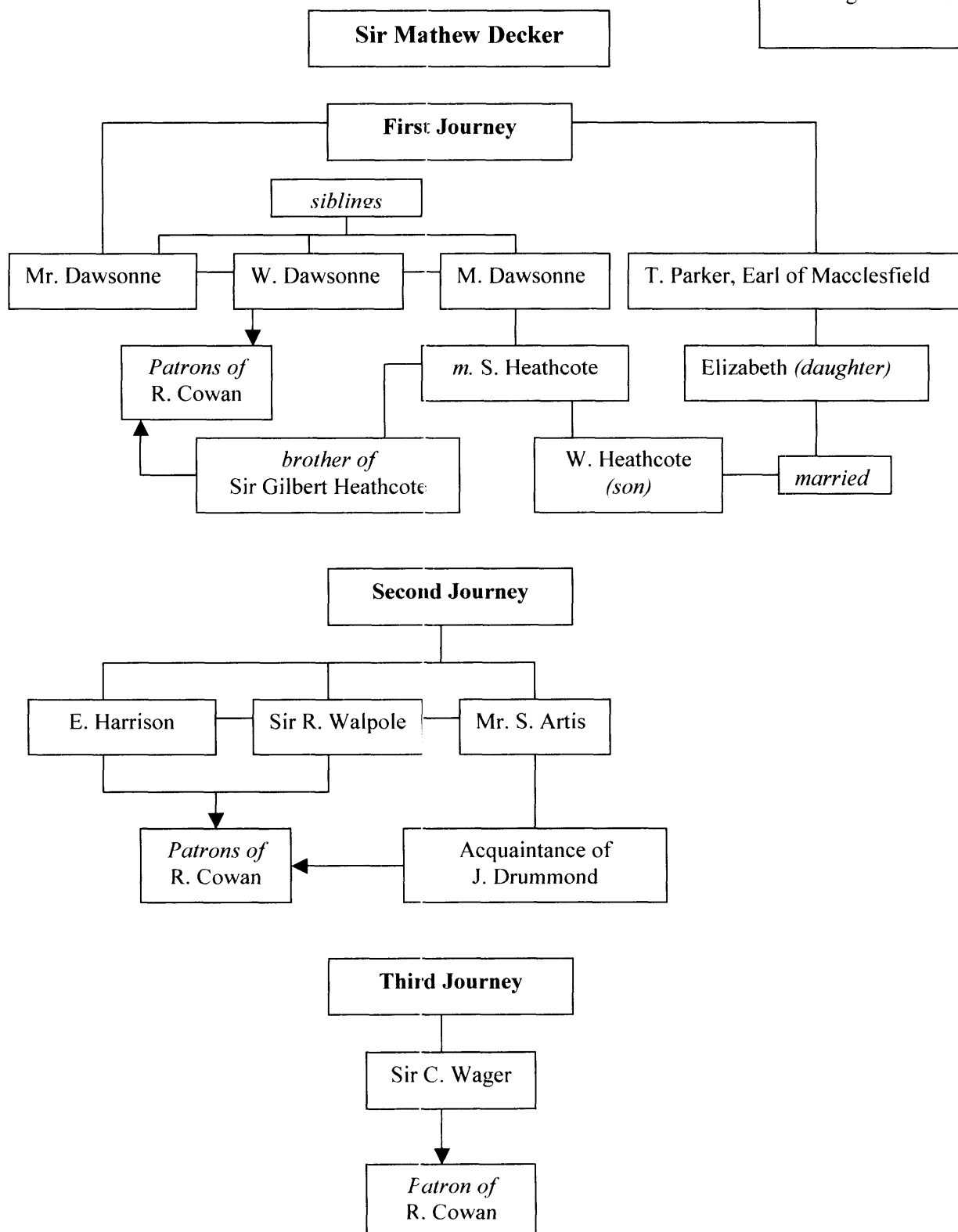
Edward Harrison:
Postmaster General.
Sir Charles Wager:
First Lord of the Admiralty/ Treasurer of the Navy.
Sir Matthew Decker:
South Sea Company.

Dissenters

John Gould, Snr.
Sir Nathaniel Gould
John Gould, Jr.
Nathaniel Gould
Sir Alexander Cairnes
Henry Cairnes
Hugh Henry

Chapter Three – Sir Mathew Decker's Journey Connections

Legend:
Connections: —
Patronage: —>



Chapter Four:

Major Patrons II

‘I think I have made him yours . . . ’¹

In addition to Cowan’s previously discussed sponsors, there were another six men in the East India Company Directorate who provided him with patronage. Patronage was not delivered in packages of equal amounts, and these men contributed in varying extents towards Cowan’s career advancement. This section will show some examples of how interconnected these ties became once a Director accepted a client. Having gained patronage for himself, Cowan found that he was then required to provide services for other protégés of his patron. This was not always an easy task, if, for example, the client was based at another Factory, but it was doubly difficult if there was a conflict of personalities, inefficiency, or employment rivalry. In the former case, the best that could be achieved was to ask a peer in the Factory concerned to extend assistance, with the offer of a reciprocal deal in a similar situation. In the latter case, assistance would be granted, but letters of explanation were promptly despatched to London in order to protect the original client’s situation. Such a complex system of patronage made it almost impossible to know when a client had fully discharged his debt, making most participants err on the side of caution by

¹ *The Manuscripts of His Grace the Duke of Portland* preserved at Welbeck Abbey, Vol. IV, Historical Manuscripts Commission, Fifteenth Report, Appendix. Part IV, HMSO, London, 1897, (hereafter Portland) p.xiv. I am indebted to Dr. J.S. Shaw of the National Archives of Scotland for this information.

taking on more and more responsibilities. This chapter will show how Cowan acquired additional patrons and how he handled his own patronage obligations.

John Drummond was a patron with a very interesting background, and he provided an important link with Scotland. Apart from adding another prestigious name to his growing band of East India Company supporters, Drummond's method of redressing his own bankruptcy provided a role model for Cowan, although he was not in such a hurry to right the wrongs suffered by his creditors as Drummond had been. Drummond went to Holland aged about fifteen and was apprenticed there as a merchant.² He was engaged in diplomatic tasks for the English government whilst resident in Amsterdam.³ Through his political contacts Drummond was able to take advantage of the prevailing system in order to gain some business contracts, but, more important, his experience there showed him the value and significance of patronage, not just the benefits that could be gained by the recipient, but also the reciprocal dealings for those with the ability to confer any munificence.⁴ In correspondence in 1710 with Robert Harley, Chancellor of the Exchequer, Drummond showed that he was prepared to use his ability with diplomatic skills in order to secure the support of Governor Thomas (Diamond) Pitt. He advised Harley:

I think I have made him yours . . . He will have a powerful purse in England, and be a thorn in the side of some great men now at the head of the Bank and India Company if they should thwart you. Therefore if you can get him chosen in Cornwall, pray do.⁵

² *ibid.*, p.xiii. Drummond was born in 1676.

³ *ibid.*

⁴ H. Bolitho & D. Peel, *The Drummonds of Charing Cross*, Allen and Unwin, London, 1969, pp. 22-23. I am indebted to Dr. J.S. Shaw of the National Archives of Scotland for this information.

⁵ Portland, *op.cit.*, p.xiv.

Exactly which of the East India Company and Bank men to whom Pitt was an irritant is unknown, but there were thirty three Bank of England Directors listed in the period covering 1710. They included a Deputy Governor, Sir Nathaniel Gould, and a Governor, Sir Gilbert Heathcote. The Directorate also included some notable merchants like Sir Francis Eyles, William Dawsonne, John Gould, Snr, Sir William Scawen, Sir Peter Delmé, and Sir John Houblon.⁶ The Directors of the East India Company included Sir John Eyles and Henry Lyell.⁷ Pitt had returned from India in 1710 with a fortune after a twelve-year reign as governor of Fort St. George. He is reported to have given at least £90,000 to his children, but after such generosity he found it necessary to dispose of what was known as the Pitt Diamond. This stone was sold to the Regent of France for £125,000 in 1717, and the transaction enabled him to retrieve his powerful financial position.⁸ It should be noted that Pitt was already an MP in 1710, not for the suggested Cornish seat, but for Old Sarum in Wiltshire. He had simply returned to the seat after his absence in India.⁹ Drummond's work, therefore, was not to get Pitt into Parliament, but to gain his allegiance to Robert Harley. Parliamentary patronage was securely in the hands of the aristocracy in the early eighteenth century, but not so apparent was the influence and pressure those with financial strength were able to impose on the men who held the disbursement of

⁶ W. Marston-Acres, 'Directors of The Bank of England', *Notes and Queries*, CLXXIX, 1940, pp. 38-41, 57-61. From these records provided by Marston-Acres it is not possible to ascertain all of the Directors who were 'In' at that time. However, the following were definitely in the Directorate in 1710: Samuel Lethieullier, John Devine, Sir William Des Bouverie, Sir James Dolliffe, John Emilie, Sir Justus Beck, William Henry Condison, John Dolben and Jeremiah Powell.

⁷ *ibid.*, pp. 80, 89. John Eyles was an East India Company Director from 1710-1713, and Lyell from 1710-1730; P.G.M. Dickson, *The Financial Revolution: A Study in the Development of Public Credit 1688-1756*, MacMillan, London, 1967, p.177. Dickson states that Sir John Eyles (1683-1745) was a Director of the East India Company from 1700, but this is unlikely, as he would have only been 17 years old at that time.

⁸ R. Sedgwick, *The History of Parliament: The House of Commons 1715-1754*, Vol. II, H.M.S.O., London, 1970, p.352.

⁹ *ibid.*

parliamentary seats.¹⁰ From an early age, Drummond understood the need for and advantages of patronage, whether it was in political, business or even social arenas.

During his residency in Holland, Drummond also became a banker and established the banking firm of Van der Heiden and Drummond, which, after a seemingly good start, went bankrupt. This caused more than financial hardship and personal embarrassment to Drummond. It cost him the lucrative position of Paymaster-General that had been sought for him by his friend, James Brydges, the Duke of Chandos.¹¹ Not only did Drummond feel that he had failed Brydges, but also other members of the East India Company to whom he owed money. It took 'Honest John' only four years to repay the full amount of nearly £3,500 to the Company and their gratitude was expressed by the gift of a gold cup to Drummond. It was inscribed: 'The Reward for Honesty'.¹² Cowan had one great advantage over Drummond in the matter of repayment, prompt or otherwise, inasmuch as he was absent from the country. The main benefit was that his creditors were kept at bay by distance, and the necessary use of intermediaries.

Drummond returned to his role of merchant by 1721, and he still retained the support of his friend Chandos who, with Sir Mathew Decker's aid, assisted him to gain a position as Director of the East India Company in 1721.¹³ Drummond also held office in the East African Company, served the Royal Exchange Assurance Company, and by 1727 had become MP for Perth Burghs, a seat that he held until his death in

¹⁰ J.V. Beckett, *The Aristocracy in England 1660-1914*, Basil Blackwell Limited, Oxford, 1986, pp.428-429.

¹¹ R.M. Hatton, 'John Drummond of Quarrel', *Scottish Genealogist*, 17, 1970, pp.66-67. I am indebted to Dr. J.S. Shaw of the National Archives of Scotland for this information; G.K. McGilvary, 'East India Patronage and the Political Management of Scotland', PhD Thesis, Open University, 1989, p.90.

¹² Hatton, *op.cit.*, p.69.

¹³ *ibid.*, p.70.

1742.¹⁴ It is apparent from these appointments that he had managed to fully regain his reputation, and was once again in a position to offer his protection to those in need of patronage. Drummond, too, was subject to the whims of others when it came to patronage, although his patrons were from social levels above those of Cowan. He wrote of these whilst reassuring Lord Milton that he still required and valued his support:

I rather venture to trouble your Lordsp with a letter than to lye under an imputation of being either insensible or unmindfull of your Friendship and civilitys done to me ... I have some friends of the first rank aboute his present Majesty whose protection I have reason to hope for and I earnestly entreat the continuance of your Lordsp favour and assistance which I assure your Lordsp shall never turn to ill account to your selfe or any of your friends but on the contrary shall be returned with all the gratitude and good services in my power ...¹⁵

At the time of writing, friends in the ‘first rank’ included Robert Walpole, the Duke of Argyll, the Earl of Oxford, and Henry St. John Bolingbroke.¹⁶ Those ‘good services’ included the placement by Drummond of Mr Hepburn, a friend of Milton’s, as a surgeon for the East India Company in 1730. Without the timely change of mind by another surgeon, this task was almost beyond Drummond’s powers. The sense of relief in his letter is palpable: ‘one of our surgeons found some encouragement to stay at home in hopes of a marriage by which means I got your friend Mr Hepburn provided’.¹⁷ There was no guarantee that even when patronage was promised it would be delivered. In June 1734, Will Douglas solicited assistance from Drummond

¹⁴ Sedgwick, *op.cit.*, Vol. I, p.623. He was also made commissioner for settling commerce in Antwerp from 1732 until 1742.

¹⁵ National Library of Scotland (hereafter known as NLS), *Saltoun*, MS 16536, f.43, Drummond to The Lord Milton, 17 June 1727.

¹⁶ *ibid.*, f.47, Drummond to The Lord Milton, 15 July 1727; Hatton, *op.cit.*, pp.67-70; Portland, *op.cit.*, p.xiii.

¹⁷ NLS, *Saltoun*, MS 16536, f.19, Drummond to The Lord Milton, 10 January 1730. This was a time of oversupply of surgeons for India. See below pp.156-157.

for his nephew James Pittcairne, and said that 'Ld Ilay who promised to be his friend, the Young Lad is now in Town and wants to know what he can expect that way.'¹⁸ Obviously something had gone awry in this case because eighteen months later Drummond wrote to Ilay's agent, Lord Milton, stating that the patronage system had not functioned properly.¹⁹ On another occasion Drummond sought Lord Milton's assistance to gain employment for Sir Alexander Wedderburn's son in the 'Sherif Clerks place in his room its nor worth 50 £ but Ld Ilay will want your good opinion of this.'²⁰ This was a clear example of the patronage ladder, and the necessity to observe the correct procedure even when the position was of humble remuneration.

By the time Cowan joined the East India Company, Drummond was already in a well-established position and able to offer him protection as a patron. Apart from a close association with Sir Mathew Decker, Drummond was also allied to Edward Harrison, Sir John Monson, and Sir Gilbert Stewart. Included in the coterie after his return from Madras in 1731 was ex-Governor James Macrae, although he was less influential than the other members of the group because he failed to gain a position in the Directorate.²¹ Cowan took the liberty of introducing himself to Drummond in July 1725.²² By the same mail, he wrote to Henry Cairnes: 'and now send you the inclosed for Mr Drummond...'²³ Unfortunately Cowan does not reveal what the 'inclosed' was but presumably it was either a letter with regards to private dealings, or a gift of some description. From such a small beginning grew a patronage deal that lasted nearly a

¹⁸ NLS, *Saltoun*, MS 16556, f.110, Douglas to John Drummond, 11 June 1734.

¹⁹ NLS, *Saltoun*, MS 16560, f.181, Drummond to The Lord Milton, 23 December 1735.

²⁰ NLS, *Saltoun*, MS 16543, f.19, Drummond to The Lord Milton, 10 January 1730.

²¹ McGilvary, *op.cit.*, p. 115.

²² Cowan to John Drummond, 15 July 1725, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1C.

²³ Cowan to Henry Cairnes, 15 July 1725, *ibid.*

decade, until Drummond's retirement from the Direction in 1734.²⁴ His departure added to Cowan's apprehensions about his remaining level of support within the Directorate following so soon after the loss of Harrison, Decker and Heathcote.

Cowan quickly felt assured enough in his relationship with Drummond to be able to tell him less than a year after he had been made Chief of Mocha that 'for my part I was no sooner possessed of my post than I was tired of it.'²⁵ Despite such admissions, Drummond was obviously pleased with his protégé's efforts when he said that Cowan's 'negotiations at Mocha were verry satisfactory to the comp^y...'²⁶ Cowan boasted to John Gould, Jr., that 'Mr Drummond writes to me verry friendly by all Conveyances'.²⁷ In January 1732, Cowan again requested that Drummond use his influence to protect him specifically in regard to Sir Mathew Decker. He felt threatened by either the loss of Decker's individual patronage, or that an attack on his integrity could cause him to lose a broader base of support.²⁸ This came at a time when serious allegations were raised that Cowan had purchased coffee privately and then sold it, at an inflated price, to the Company.²⁹ Cowan strenuously denied any 'sinister interpretation' and stated that 'it is a fair trade practised in all parts of the world.'³⁰ During this period Decker and Drummond were considered to be two of the most influential men within the East India Company, and the espousal of Cowan by Drummond would have been sufficient to reinvigorate his support.

²⁴ Sedgwick, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, pp. 622-623.

²⁵ Cowan to John Drummond, 8 June 1726, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1C.

²⁶ Cowan to Henry Lowther, 17 August 1729, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1D.

²⁷ Cowan to John Gould, Jr., 20 January 1731, PRONI RCP D654/B1/2B.

²⁸ Cowan to John Drummond, 20 January 1732, PRONI RCP D654/B1/2C. The previous request for Drummond to intervene on his behalf with Decker was in 1727- see also Chapter 3, p.132.

²⁹ Cowan to William Phipps, 3 February 1731, *ibid.*

³⁰ Cowan to John Gould, Jr., 20 January 1731, PRONI RCP D654/B1/2B.

As Drummond was still a serving MP at the time of Cowan's return from India he would have played a part in promoting Cowan's chances of gaining a Parliamentary seat, as he was a keen supporter of Robert Walpole, and the latter thought highly enough of him to present him at least twice at Court.³¹ In repayment, Drummond brought the Scottish interest with him to add to Walpole's political fraternity.³² He not only assisted Cowan, but he was a patron to many other aspiring Company servants as well. It has been suggested that his placement of Scottish men into posts in India was seen to be of political benefit to both the Duke of Argyll, and Robert Walpole, and this explains the extraordinary demands made upon his services.³³ J.M. Bourne argues that this was the prevalent reason for granting patronage by the mid nineteenth century.³⁴ G.K. McGilvary states that in the first half of the eighteenth century, a strong Scottish presence in the wealthy East India Company, with all the accompanying trade and business ramifications, could translate into advantageous political strength in Westminster.³⁵

It has been estimated that Drummond alone was responsible for approximately fifty Scottish placements either as Company servants, free traders or surgeons before his retirement in 1734.³⁶ By sponsoring Cowan, Drummond's assistance apparently also encompassed the Ulster Scots. Without the endorsement of someone like Drummond there was little chance for many of the men who sought their fortune in the East. His clients included James Ramsden, who was a cousin of Henry Lowther, President of Surat 1728-1736. James began as an assistant to Lowther in 1729 and he

³¹ McGilvary, *op.cit.*, p.112. He was presented in 1728 to George II, and in 1733 to Queen Caroline.

³² *ibid.*, pp.23, 55.

³³ *ibid.*, pp.17-18.

³⁴ J.M. Bourne, *Patronage and Society in Nineteenth-Century England*, Edward Arnold, London, 1986, p.58.

³⁵ McGilvary, *op.cit.*, pp.55, 131.

³⁶ *ibid.*, p.138.

was still on the West Coast of India in January 1735 when he witnessed Robert Cowan's will.³⁷ James's brother, John, became the MP for Appleby, Westmoreland, which was a seat that he held as an independent Whig from 1727 until 1754.³⁸ As John is known to have voted both with and against the Government on various items, the patronage provided to his brother was deemed a judicious investment in order to gain future support for Walpole.

Another of Drummond's clients was his nephew, John Haliburton, who was at Fort St. George from 1736 until 1741.³⁹ Drummond had paid for the education of his sister Mary's two sons, but he left very little to them in his will as he felt that he had already amply provided for them during his lifetime, including some lucrative dealings in India for John.⁴⁰ McGilvary states that Drummond despatched silver to Haliburton for his private country trade dealings with Henry Lowther, and it is likely that his nephew was included in the transaction.⁴¹ These deals were in the coffee trade from Mocha and at one stage a broker had invested a substantial 150,000 Rupees (approximately £18,750) for Drummond.⁴²

Drummond and Haliburton's cousin, Alexander Wedderburn, was also in India at this time. Wedderburn's career began at Surat in 1721; he worked as a Purser on at least one China voyage from Fort St. George, and was employed from 1731 until 1743 as a Factor at Bengal.⁴³ He complained to Drummond in 1727 about his

³⁷ TNA, DEL 10/113, *Will of Robert Cowan*, January 1735.

³⁸ Sedgwick, *op.cit.*, Vol. II, p.378.

³⁹ McGilvary, *op.cit.*, p.82.

⁴⁰ Hatton, *op.cit.*, pp.71, 75.

⁴¹ McGilvary, *op.cit.*, p.133.

⁴² NAS, *Abercainry*, GD 24/1/464/N-O, f.23, Lowther to John Drummond, 31 December 1727.

⁴³ McGilvary, *op.cit.*, p.131; NAS, *Abercainry*, GD 464/N/13, Wedderburn to John Drummond, 4 July 1727; P.J. Marshall, *East India Fortunes: The British in Bengal in the Eighteenth Century*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1976, p.230.

journey to China with one of the Hunter brothers. Wedderburn felt that it was incumbent upon James Macrae to have made the trip worth his while, but said that he was allowed to ‘carry nothing but silver & it is so extravagantly dear at present that there will nothing got by it,’ and that Captain Hunter was not allowed to ‘concern me with him in his private adventure as Mr Bouchier always did, so you see my prospect this year.’⁴⁴ He threatened to forego the position at the first opportunity and said that he only went at George Morton Pitt’s instigation. Pitt subsequently advised Drummond for a recommendation that he would serve ‘young Wedderburn’, and from his comments about opportunities available he did indeed promote the idea of that type of voyage. It was, he said, ‘a post that generally introduces young gentlemen into the best business in the Country trade’.⁴⁵ Wedderburn then asked Drummond to recommend him to Richard Bouchier, Governor in Bengal, whom he claimed was ‘so heartily my friend’, and pleaded that a position as a Factor at Bengal would be ‘the best thing which can be done for me.’⁴⁶ He was granted his request and in August 1731 was preparing to ‘take my Station as Factor about the 20th of this month’. This preferment, he dutifully acknowledged, was due to the patronage of Drummond and Sir Mathew Decker.⁴⁷ Wedderburn’s gain from this episode would have been to Macrae and Hunter’s loss. Both would have suffered some form of censure, and, in order to make amends, would then have had to exert themselves to assist other protégés. Pitt and Bouchier, having come to Wedderburn’s aid, earned valuable credit points for themselves, although they were not enough to redeem Bouchier from his own imprudence later that same year.

⁴⁴ NAS, *Abercairny*, GD 24/1/464/ N/13, *loc.cit.*

⁴⁵ NAS, *Abercairny*, GD 24/1/464/N/17, Pitt to John Drummond, September 1727.

⁴⁶ NAS, *Abercairny*, GD 24/1/464/N/13, *loc.cit.*

⁴⁷ NAS, *Abercairny*, GD 24/1/464/N/33, Wedderburn to John Drummond, 16 August 1731.

It is doubtful whether Wedderburn's choice of Bouchier as a patron was as valuable as he thought it might be. Another protégé of Drummond's, David Grahame, had also pinned his faith on the assistance of Bouchier, but by the end of 1731 Bouchier and others in the Bengal Council, had 'brought upon themselves a thorough revolution by disobeying orders and many other follies'. Edward Harrison was 'most heartily grieved' for his nephew, but agreed that he could not be excepted if there was to be 'entire reform'.⁴⁸ After Bouchier had been removed from Council, which nullified his patronage powers, Grahame wrote to Drummond asking him to 'excuse the liberty I take in troubling you so often' and added somewhat pathetically that he had 'no friend but yourselfe'.⁴⁹ This was yet another example of the folly of concentrating on one or two patrons rather than spreading the load on numerous shoulders. Wedderburn was fortunate enough to receive additional patronage from Sir Mathew Decker, and he acknowledged that he had further valuable support from the banker, Andrew Drummond, and a John Crawford.⁵⁰ He also acknowledged that it was to John Drummond that he owed the greatest debt as he believed that he had 'taken the whole burthen' for his assistance upon himself.⁵¹ Wedderburn served the company until his resignation in 1743, and, according to contemporaries, he was 'in a thriving way', and 'in a very good way of business'.⁵²

Bouchier remained a thorn in the flesh of the Bengal Factory. In early 1733 John Stackhouse, the Governor of Fort William, wrote to Drummond describing

⁴⁸ TNA, C108/96, *Chancery Master Farrer's Exhibits*, Harrison to John Roach, 10 February 1732.

⁴⁹ NAS, *Abercairny*, GD 24/1/464/N/53, Grahame to John Drummond, 30 November 1732.

⁵⁰ NAS, *Abercairny*, GD 24/1/464/N/13A, Wedderburn to John Drummond, 4 July 1727. Wedderburn stated that Andrew Drummond and Crawford stood 'security' for him; Hatton, *op.cit.*, p.69. Andrew was a younger relation, whose business was established in Charing Cross, London, and he acknowledged that John's patronage in his early days was 'a great matter for a young beginner'.

⁵¹ NAS, *Abercairny*, GD 24/1/24/464/N/13, Wedderburn to John Drummond, 4 July 1727; NAS, *Abercairny*, GD 24/1/464/N/33, Wedderburn to John Drummond, 16 August 1731.

⁵² NAS, *Abercairny*, GD 24/1/464/N/58, Douglas to John Drummond, 3 January 1733; NAS, *Abercairny*, GD 24/1/464/N/80, Weston to John Drummond, 30 November 1735.

Bourchier as a man of 'Violent Temper', which, when coupled with his history of the mismanagement of Company affairs, precluded any assistance with patronage. Joseph Collett, Governor of Fort St. George, had commented in 1718 that 'A man's conduct in Madras is no secret in London'.⁵³ It was no different in Bengal, and Stackhouse subtly intimated that relocation of the man to either the West Coast or Fort St. George would be the best way to assist him.⁵⁴ Such a transfer removed the problem from Stackhouse's sphere, and made his life easier, with the additional bonus of causing problems for the receiving Governor. There was little love lost between the members of the various factories in India, and although they sometimes worked together in private trade, where Company matters were concerned, they did not hesitate to do each other a disservice if they thought they could get away with it.

Both Wedderburn and Haliburton benefited from an association with free merchants Messrs. Monson and Morse, as Haliburton reported back to John Drummond in 1738. Initially the free merchants had declined a proposition made by Wedderburn but they later changed their minds with the result that Haliburton found himself 'hurry'd with their private Business to such a degree that I have seldom ½ hour to myself.'⁵⁵ It is quite likely that the 'private Business' involved Drummond as well as his two cousins, hence the report back to him on a successful private trading agreement. Furthermore, as another writer had died, Haliburton was now responsible for the Import Warehouse Books for the East India Company. He hoped that he would by 'all other means endeavour to express my Gratitude to you for the Obligations I lye

⁵³ J. Collett, *The Private Letter Book - Sometime Governor of Fort St George, Madras*, ed H.H. Dodwell, Longmans, Green & Co., London, 1933, p.176.

⁵⁴ NAS, *Abercairny*, GD 24/1/464/N/59, Stackhouse to John Drummond, 15 January 1733.

⁵⁵ NAS, *Abercairny*, GD 24/1/464/N/82, Haliburton to John Drummond, 5 February 1738.

under already, and given your esteem for the future.’⁵⁶ A plethora of influential friends and relations made career prospects a little more certain, but there was no such thing as a free lunch, and all patronage had to be paid for in some form. The price of patronage varied from client to client but in general in the East India Company service patrons could not expect any political support until, and in most cases, if, their protégés returned from India. In the meantime, clients repaid their patrons by providing aid to other clients, and by inviting their patrons to join in any private trade arrangements into which they might enter. If this man was Drummond’s nephew, then he paid later by not being a significant beneficiary in his uncle’s will.

Richard Lasinby was another client of John Drummond and in 1728 he acknowledged the latter’s assistance by stating: ‘I can but have a just sence of all Your favours when I consider how you have gone Step by Step for me.’ He also apologized in the letter for what he obviously regarded as a solecism in being unable to take what he considered to be proper leave of his patron and craved ‘ten thousand pardons’, and he profusely thanked him for all his favours.⁵⁷ He explained that this happened because he had had business with a Captain Collett and although this was apparently at Drummond’s behest, Lasinby still felt that he had not acted within the protocol of patronage. During his period of employment in the East Indies, Lasinby was involved in trade with, and on behalf of. Robert Cowan.⁵⁸ As a Captain, and with Cowan as the common denominator, it is likely that he also traded with the Hunter brothers, and it is also likely that he entered into transactions with Macrae. He had been asked to take Macrae back to England at the end of the latter’s term as Governor

⁵⁶ McGilvary, *op.cit.*, p.130; NAS, *Abercairny*, *loc.cit.*

⁵⁷ NAS, *Abercairny*, GD 24/1/464C, Lasinby to John Drummond, 11 December 1728. See Chapter 2, p.71, for Lasinby’s involvement with Cowan and Macrae on the *Cassandra*.

⁵⁸ Cowan to Richard Lasinby, 15 November 1724, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1C; Cowan to Richard Lasinby, 3 August 1729, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1D.

of Madras, which Cowan described in August 1728 as an honour bestowed upon Lasinby.⁵⁹ Lasinby was unable to fulfil this task as he died sometime before Macrae's departure from India.⁶⁰

Drummond also managed to secure positions in the East India Company for the son and two nephews of Lady Hyndford in 1733.⁶¹ One of these three was a surgeon and only a couple of years earlier Drummond had complained bitterly to his brother William:

I have told you once and again not to recommend any Surgeons to me, for all the East India Company Ships have either Scots surgeons or Surgeons Mates & till some of them die I can nor will look out for no more . . . and dos [*sic*] people think that I have nothing else to do here but looking out for ships for prentices who will pay no principle fee, I can assure you I will receive no more recommendations of that nature I have my own character to maintain as well as greater men
...⁶²

Drummond was put under considerable pressure when he was expected to find jobs for so many, particularly when there was an oversupply of men.⁶³ These placements were an expensive exercise, as the salary paid to surgeons, about £30 per annum, was the equivalent to that received by a Senior Factor.⁶⁴ Drummond was not the only man with responsibilities to family and friends, and, of course, his own patrons. The stress caused by endeavouring to fulfil the expectations inherent in the patronage system was, at times, a considerable drawback for men such as Drummond. The

⁵⁹ Cowan to Richard Lasinby, 3 August 1729, *ibid*.

⁶⁰ Cowan to James Macrae, 20 December 1729, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1E.

⁶¹ McGilvary, *op.cit.*, pp.140-141; NAS, *Abercainny*, GD 24/1/464/C, f.233, Earl of Hyndford to John Drummond, 28 November 1733. These were members of the Carmichael family – Michael and George (sons of Lady Hyndford) and their cousin, Charles.

⁶² NAS, *Abercainny*, GD 24/1/464/61, Drummond to William Drummond, 18 March 1731.

⁶³ Bourne, *loc.cit*. Bourne shows that little had changed one hundred years later, when Sir Robert Peel complained that he would 'only be deluding candidates ... by holding out expectations which it will never be in my power to realize'.

⁶⁴ P. Anderson, *The English in Western India*, Smith, Taylor & Co., Bombay, 1854, pp. 9, 147.

establishment of his nephew within the Company's service in 1731 cost him both emotionally and financially:

George Ramsay Banfs younger son for whom I have been at so much pains and very great expence, minding nothing but leafyness and Idleness his Master would keep him no longer, so I got leave to ship him under the denomination of a Soldier to Bombay in order to be put in the ClothWare house there to keep our Cloth neat and clean and free of moth wh will be worth about half a crown a day and if he behaves well may be better employ'd in time, he has coast [*sic*] me 25£ fitting besides a present to the Captains to free him from duty and to give him a Cabine in place of a hammock, so that he is fixd for five years in the Companys Service well recommended to the Governour Robert Cowan Esqr at Bombay but as the Chief Cloth warehouse is at Surat about 50 leagues distance he may probably be sent there under my good friend Henry Lowther Esqr Chief at Surat, these are heavy expenses on me and which I have little to do with,⁶⁵

These are cries from the heart of a man simply overwhelmed by the demands on his abilities to find suitable employment for so many of his countrymen, not to mention the drain on his own purse. He alluded to the risk, not only to his own integrity, but also to that of those with even greater reputations to safeguard, for example Robert Walpole and the Duke of Argyll. If they had to err on the side of caution, then the same applied to Drummond. There were, of course, other ways to promote the interests of a particular client, one method being by the delegation of patronage, which occurred with Banfs' son. Whilst in Mocha, Cowan, obviously under orders endeavoured to gain advantage for a 'young gentleman', one of Drummond's relations, by recommending him to William Phipps for a position in Bombay.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ NAS, *Abercainry*, GD 24/1/484/60, Drummond to William Drummond, 16 March 1731.

⁶⁶ Cowan to William Phipps, 7 May 1726, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1C.

Even when Drummond felt that he could not intercede on behalf of one desirous of the Company's patronage, he was sometimes pressured into favouring the man in question. Such was the case when in 1733 Lord Egmont visited him to gain support for his cousin. Drummond said Percival was ineligible to join the Company as he was in India as a free merchant. Lord Egmont would not take no for an answer, and managed to get Drummond to agree, begrudgingly, to 'do what he could.'⁶⁷ Despite his unwillingness to promote any new East India Company applicants, he continued to take care of those who had received his endorsement, and the majority of them took full advantage of his protection to pursue their careers with earnest effort within the Company.

Occasionally a protégé would stumble, bringing Drummond's fears about damage to his reputation sharply into focus. One example was that of John Cleland of the Military. Cowan alleged in 1728 that Cleland 'was so mean spirited as to black his face and hands and attempted in the night to make his Escape as one of the Natives to the Portuguez Country...'⁶⁸ Under Cowan's guiding hand, Cleland settled to more productive work in the Secretary's office, and a year later the governor reported that he had 'done sufficient penance for his past indiscretions'.⁶⁹ Cleland later dutifully thanked Drummond for his intercession in his admission to the Company's service.⁷⁰ Even though Cleland prospered in his new career, Cowan still maintained some misgivings about him in mid 1733.

Mr Cleland is one of the Attorneys of our Mayors Court, by which he picks up a genteel maintenance [*sic*] & has time enough besides to

⁶⁷ Historical Manuscripts Commission: Egmont MSS, 3 Vols., 1923, II, 6, quoted in P. Lawson, *The East India Company: A History*, Longman Group UK Ltd., Harlow, Essex, 1993, p.72.

⁶⁸ Cowan to John Drummond, 3 January 1729, PRONI RCP D654/B1/2A.

⁶⁹ Cowan to John Drummond, 10 January 1730, PRONI RCP D654/B1/2B.

⁷⁰ NAS, *Abercainny*, GD 24/1/464/N/43, Cleland to John Drummond, 23 January 1732.

improve himself in the knowledge of the Company's Affaires but with concern more than I can express.⁷¹

Someone in Cowan's position needed to simultaneously exert effort and practice caution in his endeavours with other protégés of his patrons. It was not always necessary to actually bestow favour, but to be seen to be attempting such a task. Similarly, if there was any chance of misbehaviour on the client's behalf, then it was essential to forewarn those in higher patronage positions, and to distance oneself from that particular person. It must have been a very fine line to traverse, but Cowan seems to have had an inbuilt guidance system to cope with the challenges he received. Drummond had seen both sides of the client/patron nexus, and was well aware of the benefits, pitfalls and exertions required in the pursuit of both political and mercantile patronage.

Another of Cowan's patrons, William Dawsonne, was not only involved in the directorate of the East India Company, he was, at times, a Director of the Bank of England, and treasurer of the excise.⁷² He was also concerned in trade with Madeira as his name is on a petition with other merchants in 1718, thereby adding another Portuguese association to the already intricate trading network.⁷³ In yet another convolution in the family ties of early eighteenth century business and society, his daughter and eventual heir, Mary, married Samuel Heathcote, the younger brother of Sir Gilbert.⁷⁴ As early as 1715 Joseph Collett, the then Governor of Fort St. George,

⁷¹ NAS, *Abercainny*, GD 24/1/464/N/67, Cowan to John Drummond, 18 August 1733.

⁷² Sedgwick, *op.cit.*, Vol. II, p.124.

⁷³ TNA, CO 388/20, *Trade Bundle: Trade Petition of Several Merchants Trading to Madeira, 31 December 1718*, p.136.

⁷⁴ See also Chapter 3, p.129.

acknowledged to his brother-in-law, John Quincy, the dominant position Dawsonne occupied within the Service:

I send you enclos'd two Letters, one directed to Mr Page, the other to Mr Dawsonne desiring their favour towards you. I esteem them the most powerful Men in the Company.⁷⁵

Dawsonne had a family member serving the East India Company, and he was one with whom Cowan nearly got off on the wrong footing. A Captain Hutchinson had listened to some gossip about Cowan which portrayed the latter to be 'no Company's Servant but a creature of Mr Boone's & placed at Goa for his private affairs.' Cowan then complained to Dawsonne that Hutchinson had accepted this as truth and 'the Captain so far credited as never to come near me nor vouchsafe an answer to the letter I wrote him a few days after suspecting some unfair management'.⁷⁶ This lack of acknowledgement of his letter offended Cowan's strict sense of propriety, and the ready acceptance of this gossip incensed him further. When realization dawned about the connection between Hutchinson and Dawsonne, Cowan speedily endeavoured to repair any damage. He explained the mix-up by stating that he was unaware that Dawsonne and Hutchinson were related. He must have grovelled sufficiently as Dawsonne remained Cowan's ally for the remainder of his time as a director of the Company.

By 1724 Dawsonne had left the Company, but Cowan received advice from one of his contacts to maintain communication with him: 'Mr Dawsonne has quite left the house yet I have a hint from a friend to write him constantly.'⁷⁷ This 'hint' meant that Dawsonne was still a man of influence, and therefore worth ongoing attention.

⁷⁵ Collett, *op.cit.*, p.106, Collett to John Quincy, 3 January 1715.

⁷⁶ Cowan to William Dawsonne, 28 October 1723, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1B.

⁷⁷ Cowan to William Phipps, 5 December 1724, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1C.

Cowan told James Macrae in May 1725 that his patron's retirement was in fact due to 'the scandalous behaviour of his relation'. Cowan attributed Dawsonne's problems to his niece's infidelity.⁷⁸ Regardless of the prestige, reputation or power of an individual, eighteenth century society could easily condemn by mere familial association. Any patronage that Dawsonne gave to Cowan after his retirement was terminated by his death in 1727.

The Lyell family also figured prominently in the fortunes of Robert Cowan. Henry Lyell, a London merchant, was a Director of the East India Company from 1710 until 1730, and a Bank of England Director 1714-1715, and he was acknowledged by Cowan as one of his patrons.⁷⁹ Henry had a brother, Baltzar, with whom Cowan also corresponded, and in one letter he acknowledged what he termed as the 'generous patronage' of the former.⁸⁰ Both brothers were, at various times, in the Company Direction, and Baltzar's signature was on at least one official letter from the Board at Leadenhall Street.⁸¹ When Cowan felt his position was threatened in 1731 he wrote to Henry to reinforce his claim for patronage by invoking the memory of William Dawsonne:

It has been hinted to me that a certain Gentleman in England has been soliciting to superceed me pretending to be supported by your interest but I have too great a dependence upon your well known Integrity & the regard you pay to the memory of my worthy Patron Mr Dawson to believe you will entertain my Notions to my disadvantage upon the bare insinuations of my Adversarys.⁸²

⁷⁸ Cowan to William Phipps, 7 May 1725, *ibid.*

⁷⁹ Marston-Acres, *op.cit.*, p.80; Cowan to Baltzar Lyell, 6 January 1729, PRONI RCP D654/B1/2A.

⁸⁰ *ibid.*

⁸¹ Cowan to Baltzar Lyell, 10 January 1730 & 20 January 1731, PRONI RCP D654/B1/2B; *A Letter to the President and Council of Bombay from the East India Company Board of Directors*, 19 August 1724, PRONI RCP D/654/B1/4A. The signatures included that of B. Lyell.

⁸² Cowan to Henry Lyell, 20 January 1731, PRONI RCP D654/B1/2B.

This incident showed that he had serious doubts about the amount and strength of support he could expect from Lyell, hence his plea for Henry to respect the wishes of the late William Dawsonne.

When Cowan received notification of Henry Lyell's terminal illness, he sympathised with other East India Company directors, but added in a letter to John Gould: 'I have been lately told he was not so much my friend or Patron as I was made to believe, that he espoused Capt. Newton's interest, who talked of setting up for my post.'⁸³ Cowan had obviously received confirmation that Lyell had supported Newton's ambitions for the Governorship, and his concerns were therefore justified. Ever mindful of those who were still of use to him, in a letter of condolence to Baltzar after Henry's death, Cowan once more referred to Henry as 'my esteemed friend'.⁸⁴ His personal appeal of the previous year, coupled with the influence exerted by other patrons, were enough to ensure continued patronage and support from Lyell. Apparently his rival for the position of Governor, Captain Newton, did not have sufficient backing to displace the incumbent Governor. Cowan wrote to Jonathon Newton in May 1729 and stated that he was 'hartily sorry for your double disappointment'.⁸⁵ As the timing was right, this man was Cowan's rival for the Governorship of Bombay, and, as the victor, Cowan could well afford to be magnanimous. Newton was eliminated from any further contention by his death at Surat in September 1729.⁸⁶ The fact that Henry Lyell supported a rival whilst simultaneously providing Cowan with patronage, shows just how wise the Governor

⁸³ Cowan to John Gould, Jr., 30 January 1731, *ibid*.

⁸⁴ Cowan to Jonathon Newton, 26 May 1729, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1D; Cowan to Baltzar Lyell, 20 January 1732, PRONI RCP D654/B1/2C.

⁸⁵ Cowan to Jonathon Newton, 26 May 1729, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1D.

⁸⁶ Cowan to Henry Lowther, c. September 1729, *ibid*.

of Bombay was in seeking and accepting patronage from a variety of sources. It did not pay Company servants to put all their eggs in one basket.

The distance factor always played an important part in the careers of East India Company servants, and their positions in India were often subject to attack by returning servants. Those who resorted to this tactic were generally trying to present themselves in the best light, and if that meant sacrificing a fellow worker's reputation they did not hesitate to do so. It then took several months for news of such accusations to reach India, and a written defence required even more time to reach the Company. In the meantime, the adversary was in the fortunate position of being in England, and with ready access to his own patrons. It was therefore vital to be able to rely on the services of supportive leading men within the Company in England to act on the accused's behalf. A defence, no matter how spirited or legitimate, which arrived more than a year after the original complaint, was of little use.

Allegiances and associations within India were also subject to change, often because of personality conflicts and differences over trade matters, but they were also greatly influenced by affiliations with patrons. Allegations against Company servants often had a ripple effect on other members of the Service. An example of this type of reaction was the case of Thomas Waters. It was obvious that Waters was unhappy with Cowan's promotion to Governor, and that, regardless of the latter's endeavours, he was determined to work against Cowan:

... and as little to be dissatisfied at my succeeding Mr Phipps in the Government for had they behaved themselves with any decency towards me I beg leave to assure you and with the greatest sincerity that your sole recommendation had entitled them to the good Offices in my powers, and as much favour as they Could have expected from

any man whatever. But Mr Watter from the beggining seemed verry little to regard mine or any other friendship trusting to his own Self Sufficiency ...⁸⁷

Waters could have learned a lot from Cowan had he chosen to listen to the wily trader. No man is an island, and this was never more true than in the complex world of the East India Company in the eighteenth century.

By 1730 Waters was involved in litigation against William Phipps, Cowan's predecessor at Bombay. Cowan wrote to John Horne, Chief of the Gulf of Persia:

... by the last letter I received from Mr Boone I find Mr Waters has perswaded him to withdraw his protection from me but that shant lessen the respect I bear him not slacken my endeavours in his service whenever he lays his commands upon me.⁸⁸

Cowan's endorsement of Waters here is at odds with a report he had filed to Henry Lyell almost two years previously. Carefully distancing himself, he stated that Waters had accepted a bribe of 'five hundred Pounds Sterling for Mr Orme chief of Anjenjo' three years previously.⁸⁹ It was more expedient for Cowan to endeavour to retain Boone's goodwill by simply ignoring this earlier indiscretion. It was after Waters was dismissed from the Company service that he made a concerted attack on Cowan and his supporters.⁹⁰ Cowan informed Richard Bouchier not only of Waters' efforts, but also the strength of his own position:

. . . which had occasioned a disposition in the Court of Directors the more readily to listen to complaints from all parts and Messrs Waters, Rammel & Page who went home from hence in 1730 took

⁸⁷ Cowan to Charles Boone, 25 September 1728, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1C.

⁸⁸ Cowan to John Horne, c. October 1730, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1F. Horne was based in Gombroon, which is now known as Bandar e 'Abbas.

⁸⁹ Cowan to Henry Lyell, 6 January 1729, PRONI RCP D654/B1/2A.

⁹⁰ Cowan to John Horne, *loc.cit.*

the opportunity of venting their spleen against me and my administration which gives me no great concern as I can easily answer all their Accusations however as such things are very disagreeable I wish my friends were not put to the trouble of making my vindication I am advised that Mr H_____n does not appear with his usual Vigour on the present occasion tho' I am perswaded he will have the same Influence ...⁹¹

Once more Cowan placed his faith in the ability and strength of Edward Harrison to protect his position, although this communication with the Chief of Bengal was not simply seeking peer group endorsement. It was a further endeavour to strengthen his support in England because Richard Bouchier was Harrison's nephew, and one more advocate's voice might have tipped the scales in Cowan's favour.

Another powerful group of Cowan's benefactors were the Heathcote family and their strength lay in their extensive trade interests and their wealth. Sir Gilbert Heathcote, Director and Governor of the Bank of England, Director of the East India Company, MP for various seats from 1701 until 1733, Lord Mayor of London, Alderman, Sheriff, Merchant in Spanish Wines, Master of the Vintners Company, East Indies Trader, and Portugal Merchant, was one of Cowan's patrons, as was his son, John.⁹² Gilbert Heathcote was in the Directorate of the East India Company during part of the time Cowan was in Portugal, but not during the period of Cowan's employment with the Company.⁹³ He was reputed to be the richest commoner in England with a fortune estimated at £700,000.⁹⁴ His association with Robert Cowan

⁹¹ Cowan to Richard Bouchier, 6 August 1731, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1M. 'Mr H.....n' is Edward Harrison.

⁹² R. Roberts & D. Kynaston, (eds) *The Bank of England: Money, Power and Influence 1694-1994*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1995, pp.186, 251; Marston-Acres, *op.cit.*, p.39.

⁹³ Sedgwick, *op.cit.*, Vol. II, p.123.

⁹⁴ I.R. Christie, *British 'non-élite' MPs 1715-1820*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1995, p.40; Sedgwick, *ibid.*, L. H. Officer, 'Purchasing Power of British Pounds from 1264 to 2005', at www.MeasuringWorth.com/calculators/ppower. Using a 1730 estimation, Heathcote was worth well over £90,000,000 against the 2006 United Kingdom retail price index.

can be traced back to Portugal, and they must have met during Cowan's residence in Lisbon, as Heathcote's signature appears on a petition in 1715.⁹⁵ Although Cowan's name is not on this document, he was resident there in July of that year as he signed another Statement on Trade from the Principal Merchants in Lisbon.⁹⁶ Others, who did sign with Heathcote, were to reappear amongst Cowan's list of correspondents and fellow Company servants. They included Peter Delaporte, Thomas Cooke and Son, John Upton, Thomas Scattergood and Charles Savage Jr.⁹⁷ The Heathcote family business empire traversed enormous distances including Russia, the Caribbean, Europe, America, as well as the sub-continent of India.⁹⁸ The Portuguese link remained the predominant and recurrent theme running through Cowan's associates and patrons both within India, and amongst his friends and allies in England.

By 1729 Cowan had heard that Sir Gilbert and Henry Lyell were both ill. He wrote to Henry Lowther stating his concern over the possible loss of the 'good offices of two powerful patrons', but hoping that even if this happened he had enough support remaining in the Directorate to continue with his career.⁹⁹ The loss of these patrons affected more than just Robert Cowan's welfare, as he stated in September 1729: 'Mr Gilbert's indisposition & advanced Age will deprive the publick of his good services & his friends of his powerfull patronage'.¹⁰⁰ This was clearly an

⁹⁵ TNA, SP 89/89, *Secretary of State: State Papers Foreign, Portugal*, ff. 86 – 87, Merchants of Portugal Recommendation of a Chaplain to the Factory at Lisbon, 1715.

⁹⁶ *ibid.*, ff. 246-255, Principal Merchants in Lisbon Statement on Trade to James Stanhope, Lisbon, 31 July 1715.

⁹⁷ *ibid.* ff. 86 – 87, Merchants of Portugal Recommendation of a Chaplain to the Factory at Lisbon 1715.

⁹⁸ R. Grassby, *The Business Community of Seventeenth-Century England*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1995, p.90. Grassby states that Sir Gilbert was in London, brother Samuel covered the Russian tobacco trade from Danzig, four others (brother Josiah, nephews George, John, and William) were based in the West Indies, with Caleb (unknown relationship) in New York; Sedgwick, *op.cit.*, Vol. II, pp. 121-124.

⁹⁹ Cowan to Henry Lowther, 29 August 1729, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1D.

¹⁰⁰ Cowan to Captain Thomas Bronsdon, 2 September 1729, PRONI RCP D654/B1/2A.

acknowledgment of the all-encompassing power that a man in Sir Gilbert's position wielded. Cowan realised that the 'system' worked not only on the small scale with help for individuals but also in the bigger picture with the flow-on effects to the 'publick'. Heathcote recovered from this particular illness, but he only lived until 1733. This added to Cowan's woes, as Sir Gilbert's demise must have occurred in fairly close proximity to that of Edward Harrison. One of the other directors in the East India Company was Sir Gilbert's son, John. His appointments there ran from 1716 to 1724 and again from 1728 to 1731.¹⁰¹ He was also in the Directorate of the Bank of England, as well as being an MP, and merchant. While Cowan's correspondence with both father and son was limited, he was still grateful for whatever patronage they were able, or willing, to bestow.¹⁰²

The strength of the patron/client relationship played a very important role in overcoming the distance factor. Without the active support from these men in England it is problematic whether Cowan, or indeed many others in the East India Company service, would ever have fulfilled their goals in India. The first disgruntled talebearers to return to London would have ensured a spate of recalls, and the termination of employment for many servants. This would have had a very unsettling effect on the affairs of the Company itself. It would have affected the interests of the directors, for example, Sir Mathew Decker, who had a large personal investment in Company stock, and the multitude of small stockholders who had grown accustomed to a profitability brought about by a degree of stability. The protection provided by the patrons ensured some continuity existed in the Service, although it did not guarantee job security for any definite length of time.

¹⁰¹ Sedgwick, *loc.cit.*

¹⁰² Cowan to John Heathcote, 25 September 1728, PRO/NI RCP D654/B1/1C.

The men covered in Chapters Three and Four were Cowan's major patrons in England, and it can be seen from their backgrounds and positions both within society and the business world that they were men of considerable importance, especially to an aspiring East India Company servant. It also shows that family ties were inextricably linked with patronage, and that the 'network' also meant shared religious beliefs, or common business interests, could also accelerate a prospective high flyer through the company's service. A summary of these two groups, comprising a total of fifteen men, gives a fairly impressive view of their strength. Ten were Members of Parliament, eleven were merchants, seven were involved with the running of the Bank of England, and eleven were related either by blood or marriage. At least seven were Dissenters, four were bankers, and ten served either as Directors, or at a higher rank, in the East India Company.¹⁰³ Furthermore, the ten Members of Parliament had opportunities to attain valuable government contracts, which were beneficial to themselves and their clients.¹⁰⁴ It was certainly a case of 'who you knew' being equally if not more important than 'what you knew', in order to advance your career in early eighteenth-century England. It took Cowan eight years of hard work in the Persian Gulf and India as well as the intensive lobbying of his 'friends' in England, before he was eventually rewarded with a position he coveted, the Governorship of Bombay.

¹⁰³ The merchants were: J. Drummond, W. Dawsonne, H. Lyell, G. & J. Heathcote, J. Gould, Snr, Sir N. Gould, J. Gould, Jr, H. and A. Cairnes, M. Decker.

The MPs were: J. Drummond, G. & J. Heathcote, Sir N. Gould, J. Gould, Jr, N. Gould, A. Cairnes, H. Henry, E. Harrison, M. Decker.

The bankers were: A. & H. Cairnes, H. Henry, M. Decker.

The East India Company Directorate members were: J. Drummond, W. Dawsonne, H. & B. Lyell, E. Harrison, G. & J. Heathcote, J. Gould, Snr, J. Gould, Jr, M. Decker.

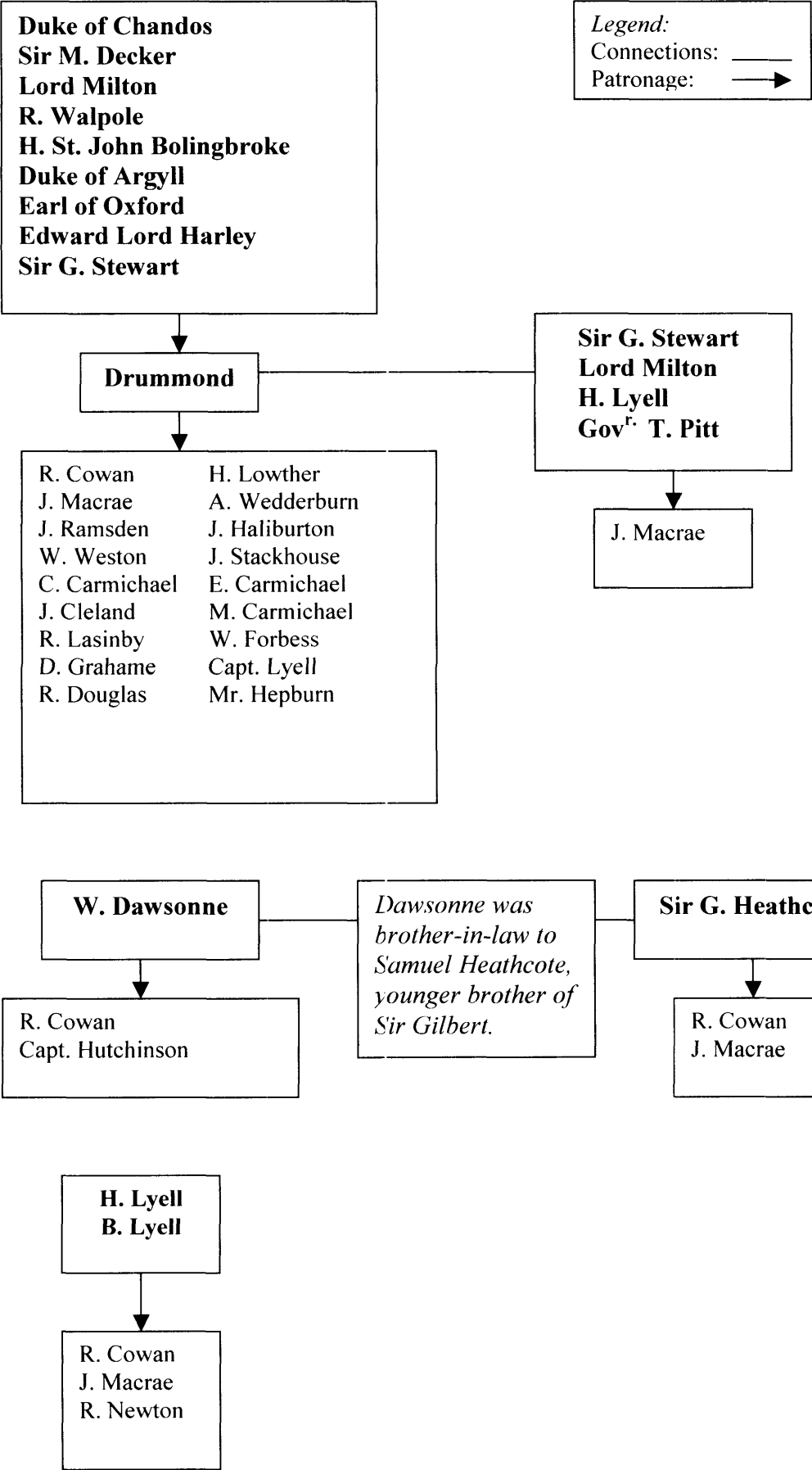
¹⁰⁴ W.E. Minchinton, 'The Merchants in England in the Eighteenth Century', *Explorations in Entrepreneurial History*, Vol. X, December 1957, p.66.

It is clear from Cowan's later writings that he continued to curry favour from his patrons long after he had obtained his financial 'competency'. His spirited defence against the allegations that brought about his eventual dismissal from the Company shows that, despite his comfortable financial situation, he looked for the continuing support of his patrons in England to further his career. Examination of these influential patrons shows that there was a well-established system of patronage in existence, in the East India Company. By accepting Cowan as his client Drummond, was continuing and extending the patronage chain, even though Cowan was clearly not of political importance to him at that time. However, as a successful trader he could provide valuable opportunities to increase the wealth of his patrons. Drummond's affiliations may have gained Sir Matthew Decker and Edward Harrison for Cowan's cause. The price of his support was for Cowan to provide aid to Drummond's own clients who were sponsored through kinship, and obligatory patronage deals. Cowan showed that pursuit of some patrons was not worth the effort, for example Thomas Woolley, but that some men, like Dawsonne, retained power and influence even after they had even retired. Cowan fully realised that a Company servant did not know when a patron might stand him in good stead, and he always took the long-term view in his selections. The forfeiture of patrons either through withdrawal of support or death was always of considerable concern to Cowan, and it would have been equally so for all Company employees.

Apart from the previously discussed 'major' sponsors, there were other 'lesser' patrons, and they played a crucial supportive role for Cowan. Many of these patrons were previously known to Cowan from his time in Portugal and they were linked together by trading and friendship ties. These men were also considered by

Cowan to be extremely valuable, and their role in his Indian career will be discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter Four
Patronage Connections



Chapter Four - Connections

Legend:

Connections: —

Patronage: —→

Cowan's Major Patrons - 2

