

## Chapter Five:

### Minor Patrons and Reciprocal Patronage

**‘... a word of his will do it’<sup>1</sup>**

The two previous chapters concerned the dealings Cowan had with his major and most influential patrons. He also acquired other patrons in a lower league than men like John Drummond and William Dawsonne. Cowan was indebted to the major patrons for career enhancement, but the minor patrons played a different role. Men in Cowan’s position repaid their major patrons in a fairly overt manner, that is, by providing aid to others on their behalf, and through later political support. Less open was their inclusion in trade dealings. The minor patrons who were usually involved through one of the kinship networks were, more often than not, repaid through reciprocal patronage and by gifts. When blood ties were absent, patronage could be gained through a kinship network of business partners. Amongst those whom Robert Cowan assembled around him during his fifteen years service in the East India Company, there is a group that can best be described as the Portugal merchants. Amongst Cowan’s correspondents, there were fourteen Portugal merchants, and one who dealt at Madeira, but of this group of fifteen, only six were active patrons. One merchant acted as his attorney in Portugal, and the others, at times, formed part of his trading coterie. By their relative proximity to England and their contacts there, they were in a position to attract the attention of other patrons for Cowan. Old trading partners or associates forged an ongoing chain of business contacts, and provided a

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<sup>1</sup> Cowan to John Sherman, c.30 November 1730, PRONI RCP D654/B1/2B.

secondary network of patrons, one that had the potential to be as valuable as those formed by blood ties.

Of the six Portuguese merchants recognised as patrons of Cowan, two, William Dawsonne and Sir Gilbert Heathcote, have already been dealt with in Chapter Four.<sup>2</sup> Another Portugal merchant with significant links with India was William Stirling. He was a signatory in Lisbon in 1733, but he had been in business for some considerable time by that date, and over the years he had acquired multiple East India Company connections.<sup>3</sup> One of these was with Edward Harrison, the then Governor of Madras and future Chairman of the East India Company. They were listed as part owners of the ship *Amity* in 1713.<sup>4</sup> A valuable connection for Stirling was John Scattergood, a Madras merchant from 1698 to 1723. Stirling sought Scattergood's 'friendly assistance with Gover. Phipps, in some advantageous voyage or employ,' in 1722.<sup>5</sup> John Scattergood's own list of patrons included some who were very familiar to Cowan, namely William Dawsonne, Sir Gregory Page, Bart., and Sir Robert Nightingale.<sup>6</sup> In another link, Scattergood and Edward Harrison were also

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<sup>2</sup> Sir Gilbert Heathcote and William Dawsonne were Portuguese and Madeira merchants respectively. Madeira was a Portuguese island. See Chapter 4, pp.145,166-167, for Heathcote, and pp.145,159-161,170 for Dawsonne.

<sup>3</sup> TNA, SP 89/37, *Secretaries of State: State Papers Foreign, Portugal*, ff.191-192, List of names of those members who voted for each of the two candidates included: William Lowther, William Stirling and Arthur Stert, Jr., 10 June 1733.

<sup>4</sup> TNA, C 106/170, Part II/26, *Exchequer and Chancery: Master Richard's Exhibits: John Scattergood vs Raworth: Correspondence and Accounts relating to trade with India and China 1698-1719*, Fort St George, 3 October 1713.

<sup>5</sup> TNA, C 106/170, Part I/24, *ibid.*, Sterling to John Scattergood, Surat, 24 March 1722.

<sup>6</sup> OIOC, MSS C Europe 387/2, *Papers of John Scattergood, Madras Merchant 1698-1723*, p.386. Scattergood to William Dawsonne, November 1719; *ibid.*, p.374, Scattergood to Sir Josiah Child, November 1719; *ibid.*, p.389, Scattergood to Sir Gregory Page & Sir Robert Nightingale, November 1719; TNA, CO 388/20, *Trade Bundle*, Trade Petition of Several Merchants Trading to Madeira, 31 December 1718, p.136. Apart from their connections with, and influence over, the East India Company these men were also engaged in other enterprises; R. Roberts & D. Kynaston (eds), *The Bank of England: Money, Power and Influence 1694-1994*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1995, p.252. William Dawsonne was a Madeira Merchant, and a Bank of England Director; J.Collett, *The Private Letter Book - Sometime Governor of Fort St George, Madras*, ed H.H. Dodwell, Longmans, Green & Co., London, 1933, p.119, Harrison to John Collett, 28 June 1715: 'Nat. Gould and Rob. Nightingale stood with the Bank Interest'; P.G.M. Dickson, *The Financial Revolution in England: A Study in the*

involved in business dealings with John Drummond, whilst he was still trading as a merchant in Amsterdam in 1712.<sup>7</sup>

Cowan was indebted to Stirling for the patronage of at least one of the Lyell brothers. In September 1728 Cowan thanked Stirling for a 'beautiful gift' he had received from him, and for recommending him to 'Mr. Lyell'.<sup>8</sup> Cowan responded immediately in kind by despatching a 'service of China ware' for Mrs Stirling.<sup>9</sup> It was important to observe the niceties punctiliously, especially when the donor had provided him with access to yet another patron.

Stirling's marriage around 1724 to Betty Shannon, a niece of James Macrae, brought him into closer contact with both Cowan and Macrae.<sup>10</sup> Prior to her marriage, Cowan had been a regular correspondent with Betty, and he offered his services four years later to her brother Captain Jemmy Shannon. Cowan felt that Shannon deserved such support because 'the merit of his worthy sister & other relations intitle him to it,' but this also gave Cowan an opportunity to reduce his indebtedness to Macrae.<sup>11</sup> However, the East India Company was not quite so enthusiastic about the Captain. In a letter to the Governor of Fort St George in 1730 they complained in general terms of the continued employment of staff not licensed by themselves, and cited the 'Case of Shannon our late Presidents Nephew.' They chastised Macrae:

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*Development of Public Credit 1688-1756*, MacMillan, London, 1967, p.278. Sir Gregory Page was a merchant who had invested £10,000 in the South Sea Company by 1723-24.

<sup>7</sup> OIOC, MSS Eur C 387/1, *ibid.*, p.180. Harrison to Mr James Wendey and Mr Oswald Beavoir. 'if he touches in Holland to deliver to Minheer Drummond and Vanderhegden, Merchants in Amsterdam', 8 October 1712.

<sup>8</sup> Cowan to William Stirling, 25 September 1728, PRONI RCP D654/B1/2A.

<sup>9</sup> Cowan to William Stirling, 6 September 1729, *ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> Cowan to William Stirling, 25 September 1728, *ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> Cowan to John Hunter, 25 February 1728, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1C.

We must say that We can have little hopes of seing our orders obeyd, for sending home such persons as come abroad without our License, as long as Our Governour Countenance and screen relations of their own, for with what reason or justice can they punish the one and protect the other...<sup>12</sup>

According to Cowan, Shannon was the Captain of a 'small ship', which was used in country trade, and later on a venture to Siam.<sup>13</sup> As he was the subject of this specific complaint from Leadenhall Street, he must have been involved in Company trade rather than private transactions.

This was one of many occasions when the Company had tried to exert some control over their servants. The Directorate had also made their rules abundantly clear to Bombay in April 1727:

... to supply yr want of hands on probation till We confirm them on giving us security nor are we pleased with the clandestine methods of late practices [*sic*] in our settlements for persons to get abroad by stealth & then find one place or another to get into our Service without our Knowledge which we have often forbid and Do now again positively order That no Person whatsoever be entertained in any Mercantile Capacity under Us without he be sent out from hence under our Covenants or hath our previous leave for his being entertained.<sup>14</sup>

The matter of alleged clandestine recruitment was an ongoing bone of contention between the Directorate, and the Governors in India. To give Cowan his due, he did apply for replacement staff at the beginning of his governorship, but there was always a lengthy delay between application and the granting of permission. In the meantime,

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<sup>12</sup> OIOC, E/3/115, *Original Drafts and Despatches to Bengal, Madras and Bombay, 1725-1751*, Our President and Council of Fort St George, London, 12 February 1730, para.58.

<sup>13</sup> Cowan to William Phipps, 5 October 1724, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1C; Cowan to Thomas Bronsdon, c. December 1726/January 1727, *ibid*.

<sup>14</sup> OIOC, E/3/115, *op.cit.*, para. 58, 5 April 1727. See also Chapter Ten, pp.343-344,347.

the Company's business still had to be run, and replacements for staff had to be found.<sup>15</sup>

The only explanation for such an outburst was an attempt to curb the power of the servants in order to keep as much of the East Indian trade as possible under the Directorate's control. Private trade was expanding, and with the factories stacked with the Governor's clients, the Directors realised that the employees would be tempted to serve themselves to the detriment of the Company's interests. As long as the Directors remained in charge of placement of Company servants, it gave them further opportunities to participate in private trade as repayment of the obligations of their clients. In *The Scandal of Empire: India and the Creation of Imperial Britain*, N. B. Dirks argues that Company employees in India, particularly in the latter half of the eighteenth century, were subsumed by 'rampant greed' and were more interested in making their own fortunes than in increasing the Company's profits.<sup>16</sup> The wealth amassed by men like Cowan, Yale, and Macrae obviously set an example for later Company servants to emulate. However, because they were poorly paid, and probably less conscientious than Cowan, it meant that the Company's interests were neglected to the point where it came close to bankruptcy.<sup>17</sup> Cowan was always open about the fact that he wanted to make a competency on which to retire, but throughout his writings he appeared to remain diligent in his efforts for the Company. Without

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<sup>15</sup> OIOC, E/4/450, *Bombay Abstract Letters Received*, President Cowan at Bombay, 8 January 1728/9, para 101. 'The Company's Affairs will require a yearly recruit of four Servants at least that are acquainted with business'.

<sup>16</sup> N. B. Dirks, *The Scandal of Empire: India and the Creation of Imperial Britain*, The Belknap Press of Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2006, pp.14, xiii. Dirks states that the East India Company came very close to bankruptcy in 1772, due in part to speculation, and the costs incurred by military campaigns undertaken by Company servants.

<sup>17</sup> M. Edwardes, *A History of India: From the Earliest Times to the Present Day*, The New English Library, London, 1967, pp.198-199.

achieving good results for the Company, he would have quickly lost support from his patrons in the Directorate, and therefore would have lost his position in the Service.

The other three traders in Portugal were Arthur Stert, Charles Savage and Peter Delaporte. Another two merchants, Richard and Sampson Stert, were both in Lisbon during the period 1714 to 1715 but they left only fleeting records of their lives as signatories on petitions.<sup>18</sup> As they were in Lisbon at the same time as Cowan indicates that they must have known him, especially if they were related to Arthur Stert, who was not only a patron, but also a close friend of Robert Cowan.<sup>19</sup>

Arthur Stert, apart from being a Portugal Merchant both during and after the time of the Cowan and Lort business venture, was the Member of Parliament for Plymouth from 1727 to 1754.<sup>20</sup> Stert was also appointed as 'Plymouth Commissary for settling the Merchants' losses with the Spaniards ever since the Year 1728', for which he received remuneration of £1,000, and in 1754 he received a pension of £600 from the government.<sup>21</sup> He played a diplomatic role in negotiations between Portugal and Britain early in the 1730s.<sup>22</sup> It is interesting to note that these two friends were designated similar roles as negotiators between the two nations, albeit continents apart.

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<sup>18</sup> TNA, SP89/89, ff.82-83, *Secretaries of State: State Papers Foreign, Portugal, 1714*, Draft from the Merchants of Oporto, to the King on his Accession: Signed by Sampson Stert; TNA, SP 89/89, ff.88-89. *Secretaries of State: State Papers Foreign, Portugal*, The Humble Petition of your Majestys most Dutyfull & Loyall Subjects the Merchants Tradeing to & from the Kingdom of Portugall, 29th March 1715. Signed by Richard Stert.

<sup>19</sup> TNA, 89/89, *ibid; ibid.*, ff.88-89, The Humble Petition of your Majestys most Dutyfull & Loyall Subjects the Merchants Tradeing to & from the Kingdom of Portugall, 29th March 1715. Signed by Richard Stert, *et al.*

<sup>20</sup> R. Sedgwick, *The History of Parliament: The House of Commons 1715-1754*, H.M.S.O., London, 1970, Vol. II, p.446; G. Yogeve, *Diamonds and Coral: Anglo-Dutch Jews and Eighteenth-Century Trade*, Leicester University Press, Leicester, 1978, p.33. Yogeve states that Stert was resident in Lisbon from 1702 until 1721, and again after 1726.

<sup>21</sup> *The Gentleman's Magazine*, Vol. 9, 1739, p.307; Sedgwick, *op.cit.*, Vol. I, p.141.

<sup>22</sup> Cowan to Arthur Stert, 20 January 1732, PRONI RCP D654/B1/2C.

Cowan wrote to Stert in September 1729, although he had let their correspondence lapse during his early days in the East. His excuse was that he had previously felt uncertain of his position, but was resuming contact with friends since his promotion to Governor.<sup>23</sup> Having heard that Stert had gained a seat in Parliament, Cowan evidently decided that the friendship was well worth reviving. His alleged insecurity about his future during his stay in the Gulf had not caused him to neglect others from his past.<sup>24</sup> He did in fact refer in this particular letter to hearing about Stert's success in the Plymouth 'burrow', and also told him that he wanted to buy a property near to the 'fine house near Plymouth' that Stert had built. This, he envisaged, would be in about six years time.<sup>25</sup> A year earlier, in August 1728, Cowan mentioned to Peter Delaporte his idea of buying a 'farm' in about twelve years time.<sup>26</sup> Cowan liked to keep his options open but on this one idea he was fixed. His money was to be invested in land, and he left implicit instructions to this effect in his will.<sup>27</sup> The information contained in another letter he had received at about that time from his 'worthy patron', Gov<sup>r</sup> Harrison, gave details of an investment made on Stert's behalf, and that patron/client connection between Harrison and Cowan's friend would have been reason enough to reactivate the friendship.<sup>28</sup>

A few months later Cowan was involved in the presentation of a Bill of Exchange to the Viceroy of Goa, for a Mr Hardwick. This bill was designed by

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<sup>23</sup> Cowan to Arthur Stert, 2 September 1729, PRONI RCP D654/B1/2A.

<sup>24</sup> These former friends included Peter Delaporte, Charles Savage, and John Sherman.

<sup>25</sup> Cowan to Arthur Stert, *loc.cit.*

<sup>26</sup> Cowan to Peter Delaporte, 30 August 1728, PRONI RCP D654/B1/2A.

<sup>27</sup> TNA, DEL 10/113, *Registrar of the High Court of Delegates and of the High Court of the Admiralty: Cause and Miscellaneous Papers*, Cowan bequeathed the bulk of his estate to his half brother William on the grounds that 'all my personal estate shall be realised as soon as conveniently may be turned into ready money, and laid out in the purchase of a freehold estate ... either in the Kingdom of England or Kingdom of Ireland.' As William did not live to take up his inheritance, Alexander and Mary Stewart used the money to purchase what became the Londonderry Estate, thereby truly fulfilling Cowan's wishes.

<sup>28</sup> Cowan to Arthur Stert, *loc.cit.*

Harrison, with some involvement on the part of Arthur Stert, to be reinvested in diamonds, and there was some difficulty involved in the transaction.<sup>29</sup> Stert's position in English business circles was, by 1730, well established as a letter from Cowan to Portugal merchant John Sherman concerning his son, implies.

Your only way is to get him sent out as a Writer which requires some interest, Mr Stert is very intimate with Gov<sup>r</sup> Harrison who has the greatest influence concerning our Directors a word of his will do it ...<sup>30</sup>

Stert was one of the few people with whom Cowan openly confided any details of his financial affairs. In January 1732 he promised to remit £1,400 to him on the next ship bound for England for the purchase of a property in the Chiswick neighbourhood. He complained of the difficulties he encountered because of the Company's knowledge of its servants' affairs, and how he did not wish to antagonise the Directorate 'so early in my government'.<sup>31</sup> This comment seems a little strange as Cowan had already served three years as Governor of Bombay and the usual term for this office was a period of five to six years. Even by this stage Cowan admitted that he 'should esteem it a reproach to return to England with a less estate than my predecessor'.<sup>32</sup> He does not state how much money Phipps took back to England, but it is more than likely that Cowan did at least match the fortune made by his friend and trading partner.

After an initial prohibition, the East India Company in 1664/5 allowed its servants to indulge in limited private trade as a perquisite prior to their return to

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<sup>29</sup> Cowan to Edward Harrison, 10 January 1730, PRONI RCP D654/B1/2B; H.E.S. Fisher, *The Portugal Trade A Study of Anglo-Portuguese Commerce 1700-1770*, Methuen & Co. Ltd., London, 1971, p.24. Lisbon was much favoured to transfer diamonds to England because these shipments were not recorded by the English Customs officials.

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

<sup>31</sup> Cowan to Arthur Stert, 20 January 1732, PRONI RCP D654/B1/2C.

<sup>32</sup> *ibid.*



England.<sup>33</sup> Despite the Company's best endeavours to restrict private ventures, illicit trade flourished throughout the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, and the networks of successful men like Elihu Yale, John Child, and Thomas Pitt were joined by men like Cowan and Phipps.<sup>34</sup> The Company tried to contain the trade by prohibiting certain items, like coral, ivory and calico, and later by imposing very high freight charges on such items, and by increasing the list of forbidden goods.<sup>35</sup> G. M. Anderson, R. E. McCormick and R. D. Tollison argue in 'The Economic Organization of the English East India Company' that the Directors not only were content with the system, providing the servants traded within established guidelines, but further rewarded those servants who achieved good results for the Company by allocating extra space for their goods on returning East India ships.<sup>36</sup>

There was also the opportunity to trade from India with China, and Earl Pritchard notes in his article 'Private Trade between India and China in the Eighteenth Century 1680-1835' that after 1710-1714 there was a downward turn in that trade except for the year 1731-32 – a period when Cowan was operating extensively in that area.<sup>37</sup> At this time, Cowan owned several ships, and had a twenty five per cent share in another vessel. Cowan confidently stated in January 1732 that he had 'already acquired a pritty fortune' and such a comment was unusual for him as he tended to be extremely cautious in both estimations and announcements of his pecuniary affairs. After such an overt pronouncement on the acquisition of wealth through private trade

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<sup>33</sup> I.B. Watson, *Foundation for Empire: English Private Trade in India 1659-1760*, Vikas Publishing House Pvt Ltd., New Delhi, 1980, p.69.

<sup>34</sup> *ibid.*, p. 72; E.H. Pritchard, 'Private Trade between India and China in the Eighteenth Century 1680-1835', *Journal of Economic and Social History of the Orient*, Vol. 1, 1957-58, p. 111.

<sup>35</sup> B. Krishna, *Commercial Relations between India and England (1601 to 1757)*, George Routledge & Sons Ltd., London, 1924, pp.159-160; Pritchard, *op.cit.*, pp.116-117, 228-229.

<sup>36</sup> G.M. Anderson, R.E. McCormick & R. D. Tollison, 'The Economic Organization of the English East India Company' in *Trade in the Pre-Modern Era, 1400-1700*, ed. D.A. Irwin, Edward Elgar Publishing Ltd., Cheltenham, 1996, Vol.1, pp. 417, 473-474.

<sup>37</sup> Pritchard, *op.cit.*, pp.228-229.

there should have been an immediate attempt by the Company to curb such dealings. This did not happen which suggests that members of the Directorate might well have been beneficiaries from Cowan's successes. There is evidence to show that this was not something that was new to Directors of the Company. I. B. Watson states that in 1668, after the Company Secretary had been found guilty of indulging in widespread private trade, and with dealing in prohibited goods, wide ranging embargos were placed on Directorate members.<sup>38</sup> Watson continues by describing the interconnections between the Company Directors, various merchants and Company servants, and suggests that by the time Cowan was in India the Directors were no longer able to control private trade, but merely endeavoured to moderate excesses.<sup>39</sup> This would have given Cowan and his network every opportunity to exploit a system that ignored anything but blatant overstepping of the mark.

By 1732 Cowan's correspondence with Stert had ceased, or later letters were lost or, if they contained sensitive information about private trading deals, deliberately destroyed. Possibly Cowan felt that his Portuguese colleague had outlived his usefulness as a patron, but a contributing factor would have been the demise of their connection, Edward Harrison, in 1733. Just how influential Stert had been in Cowan's affairs in India is difficult to say, but it is evident that he was more than just a casual friend. Cowan trusted him with at least one real estate purchase on his behalf, as well as with confidential matters. He was not alone in relying on Stert's discretionary nature as the British government had entrusted Stert with delicate negotiations with the Portuguese, and in settling merchants' losses with Spain.

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<sup>38</sup> Watson, *op.cit.*, pp.71-75.

<sup>39</sup> *ibid.*

Charles Savage, Jr, was another of the Portugal merchants but, unlike Stert, he had a more direct influence over Cowan's affairs in the Company's service. Savage held a position in the East India Company Directorate 1725-1729, and again in 1731-1732. He then held varying positions in the Bank of England from 1733 until 1760, including that of Governor during the period 1745-1747.<sup>40</sup> By 1742 Savage also held the position of High Sheriff for Buckinghamshire.<sup>41</sup> This was the man that Cowan referred to as one of his 'Honble Masters' in a letter to Arthur Stert in 1729.<sup>42</sup> Cowan began by re-establishing contact with Savage through his friend Henry Cairnes. He had heard of Savage's appointment to the Board of Directors but was uncertain as to whether it was the same man that he had known in Portugal. He gave Cairnes the following instructions:

now I send you the enclosed for Mr Savage supposeing it is the Packers son who lived some time in Lisbone, if I am mistaken & tis any other of that name, then destroy the letter, if I am right please to deliver it to him your self or lett your brother Gould do it . . .<sup>43</sup>

As in Stert's case, the opportunist in Cowan sought to re-establish the connection, and by the middle of 1726 Cowan was in contact with Savage, and assured him of his 'pleasure' in seeing his name 'amongst the rest of my Honble Masters'. He duly advised him of how the previous year's trading had been the most successful of his three years at Mocha. In a classic example of his dry humour, Cowan consigned his letter for Savage to the care of a Captain Westerbane, 'our old acquaintance', whom he said, 'would describe to you the pleasures of Mocha which are so lushious that he has got a surfeit of them as most people do in one voyage.'<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> W. Marston-Acres, 'Directors of the Bank of England' *Notes and Queries*, CLXXIX, 1940, p.96; Roberts & Kynaston; *op.cit.*, p.245.

<sup>41</sup> Marston-Acres, *loc.cit.*

<sup>42</sup> Cowan to Arthur Stert, 2 September 1729, PRONI RCP D654/B1/2A.

<sup>43</sup> Cowan to Henry Cairnes, 20 December 1725, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1C.

<sup>44</sup> Cowan to Charles Savage, 8 June 1726, *ibid.*

Westerbane later accused Cowan of giving preferential treatment to another ship's captain, Richard Lasinby. If Westerbane was such 'an old acquaintance' of Savage, it is unlikely that Cowan would risk alienating his patron's support in such a way.<sup>45</sup> Cowan was concerned that Westerbane's story would be widely circulated in London. Captain Thomas Bronsdon was therefore asked to present Cowan's version of the facts. 'I desire you'l produce for my Vindication the accompanying Answer which is the State of the Case, if not you may destroy it'. He added that this type of ingratitude would only make him 'more cautious' in future.<sup>46</sup> He attributed Westerbane's complaints to the state of his health at the time. He advised Bronsdon of the Captains death in December 1727.<sup>47</sup>

Charles Savage had asked Cowan to extend his assistance to a Samuel Johnson when he returned to Bombay, and Cowan referred to him in late 1728 as 'a Stable industrious fellow, has pickd up some money but as he is no artist, he cant hope for much preferment'.<sup>48</sup> When Cowan next wrote to Savage, less than four months later, it was to inform him that Johnson had died at Basra in the Persian Gulf. In this letter he spoke of 'Legacys' from Johnson's estate for Charles's father but he did not know at that time what this entailed.<sup>49</sup> When the details arrived some four days later Johnson had left £100 to Mr. Savage and a gift for Charles Savage's brother: 'Capt Lyell will deliver you a little black Slave boy which the same Johnson left to your brother the Clergyman. His name is Domingo'.<sup>50</sup> However, in an undated letter of

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<sup>45</sup> Cowan to Captain Thomas Bronsdon, 6 September 1726, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1C. Cowan stated that Westerbane had left a letter of complaint about his treatment. See also Chapter 2, p.71, and Chapter 4, pp.155-156 for further information on Richard Lasinby.

<sup>46</sup> Cowan to Captain Thomas Bronsdon, *ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> Cowan to Captain Thomas Bronsdon, 22 December 1727, *ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> Cowan to Charles Savage, 25 September 1728, PRONI RCP D654/B1/2A.

<sup>49</sup> Cowan to Charles Savage, 6 January 1729, *ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> Cowan to Charles Savage, 10 January 1730, PRONI RCP D654/B1/2B.

around 20 January 1731, Cowan simply wrote that Domingo was for 'Johnson's brother the clergyman'.<sup>51</sup> There is no further mention of the legacy for Savage's father but news of the latter's death had reached Cowan sometime prior to the despatch of this letter.

In each of these letters Cowan expresses his desire that Charles will pass on his regards or 'Services' to all his Lisbon acquaintances. Cowan had discovered that with the elevation of Charles Savage to the East India Company Directorate, it was worthwhile to remain in contact with anyone from the merchant arena in Europe in case they, too, became an 'Honble Master', regardless of however remote a possibility it might seem. Two years later Cowan was still using Charles to forward his mail to acquaintances in Portugal.<sup>52</sup> In January 1731 Cowan wrote to Savage advising him not only of Company affairs, but also expressing his concern for the 'indifferent treatment' his predecessor, William Phipps, had received upon his return to England. Cowan knew that the position of Governor was precarious because of the inability of any one person to please everyone at home and abroad.<sup>53</sup> He was well aware that he could be undermined at any time by allegations raised by other servants, and he reminded Henry Lowther of this in 1731 when he explained why he could not send Major Roach to Pegu:

... besides it would not look well to send a man employed in the Company's service on privat Business and might give malicious people a handle to draw inferences both to your and my disadvantage.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Cowan to Charles Savage, c.20 January 1731, *ibid*.

<sup>52</sup> Cowan to Charles Savage, 20 January 1732, PRONI RCP D654/B1/2C. He enclosed a letter for 'my friend ... de la Porter', and two more for Lisbon.

<sup>53</sup> Cowan to Charles Savage, c. January 1731, PRONI RCP D654/B1/2B.

<sup>54</sup> Cowan to Henry Lowther, 22 January 1731, *ibid*. Pegu is near Rangoon in Burma.

Cowan's concerns were well founded because in 1732 he reported to Richard Bouchier that:

By way of Mocha I rece<sup>d</sup> a short letter from Mr Harrison of the 19<sup>th</sup> Nov<sup>r</sup> when there was a great Animosity & Clamour in Leaden Hall Street, occasioned by an Information given in by Mr Arbuthnot against Mr Naish for Malversation in China, much the same as was given in the year preceeding against Mr Fitzackerley 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 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.<sup>55</sup>

These were not the only allegations made against Cowan. In 1730 Robert Adams wrote to London stating that Phipps and Cowan had 'sent coffee by y<sup>l</sup> way of Goa to Portugall' and that the Company thought it had been defrauded.<sup>56</sup> At the same time, Adams wrote to Hezekiah King that although he was convinced that 'they dabble in such Durty & foule worke ...' he thought that they would 'come of w<sup>th</sup> impunity ...' because 'Y<sup>t</sup> Court of Directors are too divided'.<sup>57</sup> The division amongst the Directors lay squarely with the patronage and kinship issue, as each man supported his own client, or clients, hence Cowan's immunity against charges levelled at him remained as long as he had the numbers in the Court of Directors. P.J. Marshall, writing about Bengal in the latter part of the eighteenth century, found that little had changed as the Company was still sundered by factions, and quoted Governor Warren Hastings complaint of the 'curse of patronage'.<sup>58</sup>

<sup>55</sup> Cowan to Richard Bouchier, 6 August 1732, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1M.

<sup>56</sup> British Library (hereafter known as BL), H/MISC/37, *Letter Books of Robert and Mrs. Adams. Letter Book Commencing July 2<sup>d</sup> 1729/30 and ends July 11<sup>h</sup> 1732*. Robert Adams to Francis Dabbadie, 25 January, 1730, p.II.

<sup>57</sup> Robert Adams to Hezekiah King, 25 January 1730, *ibid*.

<sup>58</sup> P.J. Marshall, *East Indian Fortunes: The British in Bengal in the Eighteenth Century*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1976, p.183.

A somewhat lesser known member of the 'Clubb' was Matthew Martin, a man described as being of 'untraced parentage'.<sup>59</sup> He became the MP for Colchester from 1722-1727, and again from 1734 until 26 February 1742. He was Mayor of Colchester in 1726, and high steward 1746. He was in the Directorate of the East India Company 1722-29, and again in 1732-1740.<sup>60</sup> Martin had served as a captain in the Company, and must have gained a vast amount of credit for his actions when he successfully defended his ship, the *Marlborough*, and her cargo valued at £200,000, against three war ships from France. This was not his only connection with the Company, as he married Sarah Jones who was the daughter of another East India Company captain.<sup>61</sup> Cowan's first contact with Martin was over the matter of his deceased son's estate in 1728. It is most likely that Martin, Jr, had been employed at Mocha as Francis Dickinson, the then Chief at the Company's Factory in Yemen, was involved with settling the estate of the deceased man.<sup>62</sup> Martin, Snr., had written to thank Cowan for his efforts, and Cowan chose to continue the correspondence offering his services to Martin, but the letters petered out early in 1731. Martin, by that time, was no longer in the Directorate and his value as a patron was thereby reduced, or perhaps the support Cowan desired was not forthcoming.<sup>63</sup> With the lesson learned from his experience with Thomas Woolley, Cowan realised that it did not pay to waste time and effort on those who were unwilling or unable to make a commitment.<sup>64</sup> On this particular occasion Cowan cut his losses and pursued other more lucrative benefactors.

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<sup>59</sup> I.R. Christie, *British 'non-elite' MPs 1715-1820*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1995, p.47.

<sup>60</sup> Sedgwick, *op.cit.*, Vol. II, pp. 243-244.

<sup>61</sup> *ibid.*, p.244.

<sup>62</sup> Cowan to Matthew Martin, 3 September 1729, PRONI RCP D654/B1/2A.

<sup>63</sup> Cowan to Matthew Martin, 6 January 1729 & 3 September 1729, *ibid.*

<sup>64</sup> See above, Chapter 3, pp.136-137.

An associate of both Cowan and Charles Savage was Peter Delaporte, and he too became a patron of Cowan's, but, unlike Savage and Stert, Cowan had remained in contact with him from an early stage of his East Indian career.<sup>65</sup> Delaporte was a thread merchant, and his father, James, was also a London merchant, and they were descended from a Huguenot family. Peter was a Director of the South Sea Company from February 1715 until February 1721.<sup>66</sup> The connections between Cowan, Savage and Delaporte can be traced back to 1707 when all three signatures appear on a Portugal Merchant's Petition.<sup>67</sup> By the time Cowan was in residence in Mocha he had resumed his association with Delaporte, and in 1724 he was already complaining about his location, stating that if there was such a place as Purgatory then Mocha definitely fulfilled the criteria.<sup>68</sup> In 1726 he informed Delaporte that Mocha was to be closed and went on to say how pleased he was: 'for I am heartily tired of this cursed place which only impaired my health without enriching my pocket.'<sup>69</sup> Holden Furber has shown that Mocha was an important strategic trading port, and not only for the large shipments of coffee to England. It was used extensively for Indian country trade by several of the East India companies, and it was also relevant to the trade in the Red Sea, and for the pilgrims on their way to Jedda.<sup>70</sup> Cowan wrote in such terms to safeguard his privacy, and he certainly did not leave the Red Sea as a financial loser. In 1724 he informed his father that 'I begin to get a little money but I can't say I'm rich ...'<sup>71</sup> The East India Company ordered that the 'settlement' be closed in 1725 as

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<sup>65</sup> Cowan used several different versions of Delaporte's name but for consistency I have chosen to use the spelling from Delaporte's own signature in TNA, SP 89/8, ff.3-24, *Secretaries of State: State Papers Foreign, Portugal*, The Portugal Merchants, 1707. For Charles Savage, see above, pp.183-185.

<sup>66</sup> J. Carswell, *The South Sea Bubble*, The Cresset Press, London, 1960, p.277. Delaporte's gross assets in 1721 were listed as £34,931.

<sup>67</sup> TNA, SP 89/8, ff.3-24, *op.cit.*

<sup>68</sup> Cowan to Peter Delaporte, 8 July 1724, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1B.

<sup>69</sup> Cowan to Peter Delaporte, 2 June 1726, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1C.

<sup>70</sup> H. Furber, *Bombay Presidency in the Mid-Eighteenth Century*, Asia Publishing House, Bombay, 1965, pp.32-35.

<sup>71</sup> Cowan to John Cowan, 8 July 1724, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1C.



they deemed it to be ‘beneficial to the chief and to the English country-traders’ but not to the Company.<sup>72</sup> As the order was never carried out it can be surmised that at least some of the Directors were not averse to their instructions being ignored. Furber provides evidence that, more than a decade later, nothing had changed, and that men like Francis Dickinson, Thomas Waters and William H. Draper prospered at Mocha at the expense of the East India Company.

Cowan thanked Delaporte for his patronage and also for his actions on his behalf with the East India Company Directors:

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 . . . and if any dependence can be had on promise I may expect further favour and preferment.<sup>73</sup>

Here in 1726 was a clear reference to his aspirations, and two years later he wrote again describing the Directorate of the East India Company as the gentlemen of the ‘head Clubb’ and asking Delaporte to ‘pray give them my humble service’.<sup>74</sup> It is not hard to imagine Cowan’s desire to join that exclusive club in order to partake of the advantages that went with membership. Soon after being appointed as the successor to the Governor of Bombay, Cowan was already canvassing support for his elevation to membership of the ‘Clubb’ upon his eventual return to England. He was confident enough to state that he did not ‘despair of making one amongst them if God spares my life a few years.’<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Furber, *op.cit.*, pp.38-39.

<sup>73</sup> Cowan to Peter Delaporte, 2 June 1726, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1C.

<sup>74</sup> Cowan to Peter Delaporte, 30 August 1728, PRONI RCP D654/B1/2A.

<sup>75</sup> *ibid.*

Cowan expressed gratitude to Delaporte for his recommendations to Sir Mathew Decker and Mr Wordsworth, and talks of his old friends ‘Sir Ric<sup>h</sup>’ and ‘Savage’.<sup>76</sup> ‘Sir Ric<sup>h</sup>’ was later revealed to be Sir Richard Hopkins, a London MP from 1724 to 1727, director of the Royal Exchange Assurance, and sheriff and alderman of London. He was a South Sea Company Director brought in after the scandal of 1721, and he rose to be sub-Governor from 1733 until his death in 1736.<sup>77</sup> He was a Turkey Merchant, and said to be worth £100,000 at his death.<sup>78</sup> After sending his regards to Sir Richard, Cowan added: ‘The account you give me of our Lisbon acquaintance is very acceptable, and I hope in a few years to make one in your Society’.<sup>79</sup> Hopkins was another part of the large circle of merchants that Cowan and Delaporte knew through their Lisbon business ventures. While there is no evidence to show that Cowan corresponded directly with Hopkins he still managed to include him in the network by utilising the services of others like Delaporte. By keeping his lines of communication open, albeit by remove, Cowan was ensuring that should he need the services of someone like Hopkins he did not have to make a ‘cold call’. His extensive network meant that his name was often mentioned, and each offer of services made through a third party, added another opportunity to remind a particular patron of his client’s existence.<sup>80</sup>

Delaporte obviously kept Cowan up to date with the financial affairs of their mutual acquaintances in Lisbon: ‘I rejoyce at their prosperity but at nothing so much

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<sup>76</sup> Cowan to Peter Delaporte, 30 August 1728, PRONI RCP D654/B1/2A.

<sup>77</sup> Cowan to Peter Delaporte, 20 January 1731, PRONI RCP D654/B1/2B; Christie, *op.cit.*, p.48.

<sup>78</sup> Sedgwick, *op.cit.*, Vol. II, p.149. Sir Richard was married to Ann, daughter of the London merchant William Lethieullier. Several members of the Lethieullier family were involved in the Directorates of the East India Company, the Bank of England and the South Sea Company. See also Marston-Acres, *op.cit.*, pp.40, 62, & 96, and Dickson, *op.cit.*, pp.259, 264, & 430.

<sup>79</sup> Cowan to Peter Delaporte, *loc.cit.*

<sup>80</sup> Cowan to Mrs Macrae, 15 July 1725, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1C; Cowan to Henry Cairnes, 15 April 1723, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1A; Cowan to Captain Benjamin Braund, 6 January 1729, PRONI RCP D654/B1/2A.

as your telling me you have surmounted your SS Stock and continue the same friendly cheerfull delaporte I left you.’<sup>81</sup> This reference to the South Sea Company relates to the punishment meted out in 1722 to the Directors held responsible for the Company’s failure. It was held that Delaporte, whilst a Director, was not a member of the inner clique, and he was subsequently treated more leniently than some others.<sup>82</sup> Even if Cowan did grumble a lot he always seemed to be able to cope with harsh conditions, character assaults by fellow workers, even being attacked by pirates, but the one thing that really depressed him was the lack of, or more particularly, the loss of money – and not just his own. The losses incurred by his friends and patrons affected him almost as much as his own pecuniary difficulties, hence his genuine delight in his friend’s escape from punitive financial measures.

At the end of his first year as Governor of Bombay, Cowan cheerfully reported to Delaporte that his health was ‘pritty well’, that Bombay Island was ‘verry pleasant and sufficiently supplied with the necessarys of life’, including two or three ‘tolerable companions’, and that his ‘natural genius’ was leading him into ‘trade’.<sup>83</sup> From this description it sounds as though Cowan had happily settled into his new position as Governor, and was enjoying the rewards such a situation brought with it. Even if it was meant to be tongue in cheek, his comment on his ‘natural genius’ must have contained what he believed to be a grain of truth. He had known all along where his talents lay and how he could best fulfil his promise. All he had needed was the right location, the support of patrons and friends, and, above all, an opportunity to justify their trust.

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<sup>81</sup> Cowan to Peter Delaporte, 2 June 1726, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1C.

<sup>82</sup> Dickson, *op.cit.*, pp.118-119; Carswell, *op.cit.*, p.254.

<sup>83</sup> Cowan to Peter Delaporte, 30 December 1729, PRONI RCP D654/B1/2B.

Of the other Portugal Merchants known to Cowan, one definitely went out to India. He was Thomas May, and he arrived there at about the same time as Cowan. His signature was on several merchants' petitions from Lisbon from 1707 until 1715, and at least three of those also carried Cowan's name.<sup>84</sup> Thomas May served the East India Company at Surat, but his time in India was relatively short as he died in 1722. William Phipps, then Governor of Bombay, authorised that he be replaced by Mr Henry Lowther and Mr Henry Draper, as Storekeeper and Provisional Marine Paymaster respectively.<sup>85</sup> It is also possible that the family tradition in Portugal was continued, as another Thomas May was active in the Lisbon Factory during the 1730s, alongside William Stirling and William Lowther.<sup>86</sup>

Nathaniel Sedgwicke is the other merchant whose name is linked in the previously mentioned correspondence from 1715.<sup>87</sup> In January 1731 Cowan replied to a letter from Sedgwicke with reference to a nephew of the latter. Cowan was surprised that Nathaniel had not applied to William Phipps, the previous Governor of Bombay, 'who was somewhat of a relation & to whom your nephew was recommended.'<sup>88</sup> This nephew was William Sedgwicke who arrived in India in 1725, and remained in

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<sup>84</sup> TNA, SP 89/89, ff.3-24, *Secretaries of State: State Papers Foreign, Portugal*, Portugal Merchants Representation of their Grievances, No.1, 1707 to Earl of Galway. Signatures included Peter and Nathaniel Delaporte, Robert Cowan, Thomas May, and Charles Savage Jr.; TNA, CO 388/20, *Trade Bundle*, p.54. Memorial from the Lisbon Factory to Mr Worsley concerning their Grievances their Trade lyes under. Dated 19<sup>th</sup> June 1715, No.5. Signatures include Robert Cowan, Thomas May, Nath. Sedgwicke; *ibid.*, Petition from British Merchants in Lisbon 2<sup>nd</sup> August 1715, Signed by Robert Cowan, Thomas May, Nath. Sedgwicke, *et al.*; TNA, SP 89/23, ff.322-323, *Secretaries of State: State Papers Foreign, Portugal*, Statements on a Disciplinary Matter, Lisbon, 13 December 1715. Signed by Thomas May, *et al.*

<sup>85</sup> OIOC, E/4/459, *Abstracts of Letters Received from Bombay (1709-1725 incomplete)*, Bombay Castle, August 17<sup>th</sup> 1722. Signed by William Phipps.

<sup>86</sup> TNA, SP 89/37, f.191, *Secretaries of State: State Papers Foreign, Portugal*, Letters from Lord Tyrawley, Mr Stert and Consul Compton to the Secretaries of State, January 4 1730 to December 21 1734. List of names of those members who voted for each of the two Candidates included: Thomas May, William Stirling, William Lowther.

<sup>87</sup> TNA, SP 89/23, ff.111A-112, *Secretaries of State: State Papers Foreign, Portugal*, Statement of Welcome to Henry Worsley from the Lisbon Merchants, 7<sup>th</sup> Xber 1714. Signed by Nath. Sedgwicke, Thomas May, *et al.*

<sup>88</sup> Cowan to Nathaniel Sedgwicke, 20 January 1731, PRONI RCP D654/B1/2B.

Bombay until he retired to England in 1759.<sup>89</sup> Cowan's first aim was to gain patrons, and his second was the cultivation and constant care of these benefactors. He could not readily understand anyone who did not use the system to its utmost, as he felt that to ignore the network was to court danger. He therefore expressed hope that Nathaniel Sedgwick's lack of communication with Phipps was due to 'a multiplicity of business than forgetfulness' and he suggested that Sedgwick might have more success promoting his nephew's interests in England rather than through the Company servants based in India. Apart from his familial connection with Phipps, Sedgwick knew at least part of the Cairnes' family, as he informed Cowan that 'Mr Cairnes' was suffering from 'the gravills' which Cowan perceived as being far more dangerous to his friend's health than 'his old Companion the gout.'<sup>90</sup> Sedgwick clearly had influential friends in England, and Cowan advised him to seek patronage closer to home. This short but telling letter illustrates yet again the importance Cowan placed upon both written and spoken communications between the patron and his client, as well as emphasising the rewards that could be realised by taking advantage of kinship ties. William Sedgwick retired with a 'fortune' of approximately £10,000 – which was not a great return for thirty-four years in the Company's service.<sup>91</sup>

The third member of the Lisbon Merchants group was John Upton. He was in Portugal during Cowan's time there, as his signature appears next to those of John Eyles, Thomas Cooke and Son, Charles Savage Jr., Gilbert Heathcote, Joseph Eyles

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<sup>89</sup> G.W. Forrest, (ed) *Selections from the Bombay Secretariat*, Vol. II, Government Central Press, Bombay, 1887, p.202.

<sup>90</sup> Cowan to Nathaniel Sedgwick, *loc.cit.*

<sup>91</sup> Forrest, *loc.cit.*

and Peter Delaporte in a document dated 1715.<sup>92</sup> He was obviously known to Cowan, because the latter wrote to him in 1732 about some goods that had been sent out for Arnoldus Pauuw, and a Bill of Exchange for William Phipps.<sup>93</sup> Cowan was also very much involved in trade matters with Captain Richard Upton. Cowan confirmed a transaction with him in 1728:

... desire youl interest me in any sume not exceeding forty thousand Rup<sup>s</sup> in such a ship & stock as you shall employ for a voyage from the Coromandel Coast to the port of Surat next season for which timely remittance shall be made you to Madrass.<sup>94</sup>

The value of Cowan's investment in this particular venture was approximately £5,000. This was at a time when Cowan had recently bought two ships, for one of which he paid £2,450.<sup>95</sup> When these purchases were added to his interest in Captain Upton's trip, and in stock of £4,875 in another voyage to Mocha, he must have outlaid over £13,000 in a very short period, and this was less than four years since he had claimed he had made a 'little money'.<sup>96</sup> It is likely that he was involved in other deals at the same time, and it can be seen that such substantial investments significantly increased his chances for making profits.

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<sup>92</sup> TNA, SP 89/89, ff.86-87, *Secretaries of State: State Papers Foreign, Portugal*, Merchants of Portugal Recommendation of a Chaplain to the Factory at Lisbon, 1715.

<sup>93</sup> Cowan to John Upton, 20 January 1732, PRONI RCP D654/B1/2C; Forrest, *op.cit.*, p.47. Arnoldus Paauw was listed as a Junior Merchant in 1728-1729 at a salary of £30 per annum; OIOC, E/3/115 *Original Drafts of Despatches to Bengal, Madras and Bombay, 1725-51*, To Our Governour and Council of Bombay 27th February 1729, para 62: Paauw was confirmed by the Company in the appointment as Assistant to the Bank.

<sup>94</sup> Cowan to Captain Richard Upton, 30 March 1728, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1C.

<sup>95</sup> Cowan to Henry Lowther, 27 March 1729, *ibid.* A year later Cowan wanted to sell the *Fame* for at least R<sup>s</sup> 6500 (£812), and although he probably paid more for the ship, that is the value I have included in the total of his investments.

<sup>96</sup> Cowan to Martin French, 27 March 1728, *ibid.* Cowan wrote 'so I bought the *Fame*', and 'the Balls which ship I have bought at R<sup>s</sup> 19600'.

There was speculation a year later that Upton would embark on a trading venture to China, although Cowan did not believe it would eventuate.<sup>97</sup> He was correct in his assumption and mentioned the defunct scheme in a letter to Upton in April, 1729:

‘Govr Macrae writt me somewhat dryly upon my being so largely concerned with you in a New & Secret Scheem as he tearms it, I wish you had been able to put it in Execution & I should not have much feared its Answering our Expectations.’<sup>98</sup>

The thrill of stealing a march over one of his peers is quite obvious from the tone of Cowan’s letter. Any further opportunities between the two men were lost because Richard died on 5 May 1729.<sup>99</sup> There were at least three other Uptons in the company’s service during Cowan’s time in India.<sup>100</sup> Of these three, Cowan corresponded with the supercargo Anthony Upton in 1730 thanking him for his letter and wishing him happiness and prosperity.<sup>101</sup> Arthur Upton was listed as 8<sup>th</sup> in the Bombay Council in 1728, and must have been well known to Cowan. William was also a Captain but with a poor record in the Company’s employ.<sup>102</sup> Cowan judiciously distanced himself from William, whom he described as being: ‘not equal to any Employ that requires either Judgement or Genius tho he abstaines from liquor’.<sup>103</sup> Richard, Anthony and William Upton were brothers, but it is not clear whether Arthur

<sup>97</sup> Cowan to Henry Lowther, 5 March 1729, *ibid.*

<sup>98</sup> Cowan to Captain Richard Upton, 5 April 1729, PRONI RCP D/654/B1/1C.

<sup>99</sup> Cowan to Hezekiah King, 24 May 1729, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1E. Upton died on board the *Elizabeth*.

<sup>100</sup> Forrest, *op.cit.*, Vol. I, p.171: The three were: Anthony, a Supracargo and resident of Bombay for eight years (no date provided although the list follows a previous date of 1738 which would tie in with Cowan’s letter in 1730); Arthur who was listed as 6<sup>th</sup> in Council in Bombay 1728-29, and William, an East India Company Captain c.1723. There is also reference to a Free Merchant by the name of William Upton in Bombay. A fourth brother, Nicholas, died in Bombay in 1721.

<sup>101</sup> Cowan to Anthony Upton, 25 February 1730, *ibid.*

<sup>102</sup> K.N. Chaudhuri, ‘The English East India Company’s Shipping (c.1660-1760)’ in *Ships, Sailors and Spices: East India Companies and their Shipping*, eds J.R. Bruijan, & F.S. Gaastra, Neha, Amsterdam, 1993, p.65.

<sup>103</sup> Cowan to Henry Lowther, 4 February 1730, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1E.

was of their immediate family. Arthur was a common name in this particular family, and it is likely that they were all related.<sup>104</sup> Although their part in Cowan's career is relatively small, this group is indicative of the effectiveness of kinship strength in the Company's service.

John Sherman of Lisbon played an important part in attempting to settle Robert's affairs in the failed partnership of Cowan and Lort. Again this was a friendship that Cowan had maintained during his early years in the East, with correspondence existing as far back as 1723.<sup>105</sup> Cowan had written to Sherman in 1724 complaining of receiving 'a very impertinent letter' from his former partner Lort, but added that although he desired to repay his creditors he was finding that it was not quite so easy to make money in India as he had thought.<sup>106</sup> Cowan appointed Sherman in 1730 as his Attorney for the Portuguese creditors.<sup>107</sup> He wrote many long letters to Sherman in which he discussed Company and personal trade matters. For example, in 1724 he complained about Mocha and the price of coffee, and by the middle of the following year he had added to his list of grievances that the climate at Mocha did not agree with him.<sup>108</sup> Even though he wrote that he had received compliments from the East India Company Directorate about the quality of his work in the Persian Gulf, he said, as he had to Peter Delaporte, that he regretted his choice of location.

My coming hither was my own choice I might have gone to Surat  
but I was informed this was a place to get more money in and that

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<sup>104</sup> I am indebted to Dr. Jean Agnew for confirming this information about the Upton family.

<sup>105</sup> Cowan to John Sherman, 8 November 1723, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1B.

<sup>106</sup> Cowan to John Sherman, 11 December 1724, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1C.

<sup>107</sup> Cowan to John Sherman, 30 November 1730, PRONI RCP D654/B1/2B.

<sup>108</sup> Cowan to John Sherman, 8 July 1724, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1B; Cowan to John Sherman, 15 July 1725, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1C.



overruled me formerly it certainly was so, but now trade declines and there's no other perquisite attends my post.<sup>109</sup>

Again Cowan seems to have conveniently forgotten that this posting was considered to be the stepping-stone to the Governorship of Bombay, and that must have been the major perquisite that attracted him in the first place. Cowan's version of private trade opportunities in his letters always included perceived failures. As the majority of these letters went through the Company mail system they could easily be read by those in positions of authority, some of whom Cowan considered to be his adversaries. For the benefit of such readers, he played down any successes that he achieved in his private trading. Cowan was not alone in taking advantage of the situation. As the abuse of the privileges granted to Company servants grew, the Court had to rethink its attitude towards private trade, and by the middle of the eighteenth century it had brought in tighter controls over its servants' activities. Cowan serves as a classic example of the system as it stood in the first half of that century.

Cowan sounded pleased to be able to report to Sherman the arrival of Captain Westerbane on the Company ship from England in 1725, whom he said had 'used the Portugall Trade formerly and had given me a great deal of Lisbone news.'<sup>110</sup> It is not inconceivable that Westerbane brought private and confidential messages directly from Sherman and others in Portugal to the then Chief of Mocha. Cowan admonished Sherman about a lack of letters 'these three years past' at the end of 1726, although it is likely that this was written in order to obfuscate the true state of his affairs with Sherman.<sup>111</sup> Cowan expressed his concern about the state of political allegiances in Europe, and that the fragility of the situation could lead to war. He thought that Spain

<sup>109</sup> Cowan to John Sherman, 15 July 1725, *ibid.*

<sup>110</sup> Cowan to John Sherman, 15 July 1725, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1C.

<sup>111</sup> Cowan to John Sherman, 3 December 1726, *ibid.*

and Portugal would align against England, France and Prussia in order to protect the Portuguese 'Brazil trade', as their diamond market was otherwise known. He believed that even if this caused 'some blows with them in these parts', English weaponry was superior, but his main concern was the effect of war upon trade matters in India and, in particular, his and Sherman's mercantile dealings.<sup>112</sup> The perceived threat did not in any way deter Cowan from making plans for his enrichment. He may have been a little more cautious in his ventures, but it certainly did not stop him.

A year later international affairs had settled to Cowan's satisfaction, as he despatched some goods for his sister Mary in Londonderry on a Portuguese ship bound for Lisbon, and consigned them to John Sherman's care.<sup>113</sup> It is clear from a letter Cowan wrote to Sherman in December 1727 that he and Sherman were contemplating a joint venture in trade of goods suitable for the Portuguese market.<sup>114</sup> This indicates that the correspondence was not as one-sided as Cowan had previously alleged. The regularity of Cowan's letters suggested he was in receipt of replies, as he was not a man to waste time and effort on lost causes. Cowan was concerned because the goods Sherman had requested could only be obtained from Bengal, and he knew the ships from that factory would arrive too late to catch those bound for England that season. He suggested that they purchase a year in advance, and added that 'I would willingly make a tryal & shall endeavour it next year ...'<sup>115</sup> He advised Sherman of the items that he had despatched to his care for his sister, and requested that he ensure that they were safely delivered to Mary. He said that, if need be, Sherman could draw on Henry Cairnes if customs had to be paid on those items. He added:

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<sup>112</sup> Cowan to John Sherman, 3 December 1726, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1C.

<sup>113</sup> Cowan to Samuel Davey, 22 December 1727, *ibid*

<sup>114</sup> Cowan to John Sherman, 22 December 1727, *ibid*.

<sup>115</sup> *ibid*.

In the said Box is a small parcel directed to yourself containing 3 p<sup>s</sup>  
 fine Chints & one piece of Kincobbs of which I desire your  
 acceptance with one of the two Goa stones you'll find in the Box  
 ...<sup>116</sup>

The first two of these items were fabrics. Chintz was a painted or stained calico, and Kincob was a rich Indian stuff that was embroidered with gold and silver. The third article, the Goa stone, was used as a medicine to counteract fever. It was in the form of a hard ball and consisted of several drugs. These gifts were presumably payment, or at least part-payment, for Sherman's efforts on Cowan's behalf.

The subject of Company servants sending goods to Britain was still a matter of concern to Cowan when, in August 1728, he again wrote to Sherman stating that an Act had been implemented in England forbidding the importation of any East India goods directly into Ireland.<sup>117</sup> Cowan suggested a way in which this impediment could be overcome:

this I fear will render it very difficult or Impossible for you to forward to my Sister the things I sent you for her by the Portuguese Ships last year, unless Some master of a Ship belonging to Derry will undertake the running of them.

Added to his worries was the latest directive about private trade to Europe that was to effectively stifle any joint venture plans made by Cowan and Sherman.

Upon better information I likewise find tis Contrary to my Covenant to trade to Europe in the Portuguese Ships & that upon information of such a practice it might endanger my post in the Company's Service which I must therefore think no more of, neither so I believe it would answer the purpose in considering the length of time involved in having goods brought from Bengall, paying dutys inwards and outwards at Goa, besides all the troubles & difficulty of getting them ... there.<sup>118</sup>

<sup>116</sup> Cowan to John Sherman, 22 December 1727, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1C.

<sup>117</sup> Cowan to John Sherman, 30 August 1728, PRONI RCP D654/B1/2A.

<sup>118</sup> Cowan to John Sherman, 30 August 1728, PRONI RCP D654/B1/2A.

He begrudgingly admitted that he must therefore be ‘satisfied with our country trade in our own bottoms which is pritty considerable’, which he estimated was worth about £12,500 per annum.<sup>119</sup> This is clearly an admission that country trade was more extensive and more lucrative than he had previously stated. If this amount is taken to be a conservative valuation, it meant that Cowan, during his time as President, handled at least £80,000 of country trade in his own ships. Added to this were his profits from other joint trading ventures, as well as those from the previous seven years in India and Mocha, plus his profits from allowable private trade to England, which makes the possibility that Cowan’s fortune was £150,000 seem plausible.<sup>120</sup> It must have been very frustrating for Cowan to be thwarted by the introduction of so many new rules and regulations just as he was within grasp of the Governorship of Bombay, and the opportunities such a position and its location could offer to a man with a talent for business.

When he was firmly established as Governor of Bombay, he again lamented the trials and tribulations caused to him by the recalcitrance of his former partner, Griff Lort. He was particularly upset because Lort had not complied with his request to repay Sherman, for he, too, had lost money in the collapse of Cowan’s business in Lisbon. He promised Sherman that he would receive a greater percentage than the rest of his creditors, and wished that there were less difficulties involved in Company servants sending presents to their friends. He reiterated his desire to repay his creditors, ‘I am very desirous of doing it since it has pleased God to bless my endeavours with moderate success.’<sup>121</sup> He explained that his inability to do so was because the Company had placed restrictions on Servants drawing of bills that season.

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<sup>119</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>120</sup> For estimates of Cowan's fortune, see Chapter 10, pp.352-353.

<sup>121</sup> Cowan to John Sherman, c.30 November 1730, PRONI RCP D654/B1/2A.

He had probably hoped to use his projected trade dealings with Sherman as an alternative way of repaying his debt to him. Whatever his plans, he was yet again frustrated in his designs. He also mentioned that Lort had kept all the Company's books, which, if taken at face value, implies that Cowan did not have control of his financial concerns at that particular time. He asked Sherman, as his Attorney, to write to Lort in Pembroke, South Wales, to acquire a copy of abstracts from those books as he desired to treat 'with the Creditors about a Composition', and in the meantime he would forward his own list of debits and credits.<sup>122</sup> It remains unknown whether Sherman was successful in this endeavour or whether he even tried to deal with the seemingly uncooperative Lort. These instructions have the appearance of a smokescreen used by Cowan to make it look as though he was doing his utmost to settle his affairs, but that he was constantly being thwarted by his ex-partner. Such plans and offers would have looked well to his supporters, especially those in the East India Company Directorate. It also gave Sherman the opportunity to make the right noises about a settlement, in order to keep Cowan's creditors quiet.

Cowan expressed considerable concern to Sherman about the effect on the market for diamonds by the reputedly large find of the precious stones in Brazil. He claimed this meant that diamonds were now dearer in India than they were in England.<sup>123</sup> For many years the shipment of diamonds had been a reliable and well-practised method of transmitting money back to England or Europe, and Cowan used this form of transferral.<sup>124</sup> The import of such stones to England as a perquisite of

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<sup>122</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>123</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>124</sup> H. Furber, *John Company at Work: A Study of European Expansion in India in the Late Eighteenth Century*, Octagon Books, New York, 1970 (1948). p.6.

private trade was, at one stage, the only item that was sanctioned by the Company.<sup>125</sup> Cowan invested over £1,200, the proceeds of a coral sale, in diamonds for a Phillip Mendes da Costa in 1730/1, and advised him that for the balance owing he had drawn a Bill on William Phipps.<sup>126</sup> Cowan was utilising yet another branch of his network to advance his own cause, or this may have been another transaction with, or for, William Phipps.<sup>127</sup> Regardless of who benefited from this trade, it was the only correspondence between Cowan and Mendes da Costa.

In a letter to Sherman, Cowan referred to his predecessors making between thirty and forty per cent profit on their diamond purchases and thereby ensuring that they were able to make their fortunes, but he added that this was no longer a viable option because of the increased cost of diamonds in India. Included in the group who had made such fabulous profits were men like Edward Harrison. He is said to have returned to England with a fortune, which is not surprising if the figures from just two of the voyages he made to China are in any way indicative.<sup>128</sup> Remaining in close contact with his previous Portuguese trading associates and friends allowed for lucrative trading for both parties, but particularly so for Cowan, as these goods were unrecorded by customs.<sup>129</sup> Friendly ships' captains could have easily transported such small items as a return for patronage favours granted by Cowan.

Five Portugal merchants who were in Lisbon during the first two decades of the eighteenth century were Nathaniel Delaporte, William Savage, Thomas

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<sup>125</sup> P. Anderson, *The English in Western India*, Smith Taylor and Co., Bombay, 1854, p.147.

<sup>126</sup> Cowan to Philip Mendes da Costa, 7 September 1729, PRONI RCP D654/B1/2A; Cowan to Philip Mendes da Costa, 10 January 1730 & 20 January 1731, PRONI RCP D654/B1/2B.

<sup>127</sup> *ibid*; Cowan to William Phipps, 28 August 1730 & 20 January 1731, *ibid*.

<sup>128</sup> Pritchard, *op.cit.*, p.252. The gross sales value of Harrison's goods on two voyages of the *Kent* (1704 and 1707) was £27,563.

<sup>129</sup> Krishna, *op.cit.*, p.202.

Scattergood, and Richard and Sampson Sterl. These men remain shadowy figures, as there is little information available about them or their careers before or after Portugal. Nathaniel Delaporte was related to Peter, and must have been known to Cowan as all three signatures are on a petition of merchants' grievances from Lisbon in 1707.<sup>130</sup> William Savage's name appears on three documents from Portugal over the period 1711-1715, and although none of these items carried Cowan's signature there is evidence that Robert was in Lisbon at various times between 1707 and 1715, and in all probability they were known to each other.<sup>131</sup> Whether William was related to Charles Savage, Jr, is unclear, but a familial relationship was more than likely.<sup>132</sup>

Following the line of frequent family connections in trade, it is likely that Thomas Scattergood, a merchant signatory to a petition from Lisbon in 1715, was related to the Madras merchant, John Scattergood. As Thomas's business life in Portugal coincided with that of Cowan, so did part of John's period in India overlap with Cowan's time there. Moreover, in March 1722, John Scattergood and Thomas Hill persuaded Robert to join the subscribers in a list for the hire of the *King George* from William Phipps for a voyage to China.<sup>133</sup> The total value of subscriptions to this venture was Rs 108,000 (£13,500), of which Scattergood took the largest share of 20,000 Rupees (£2,500), and even though he was still in the early stage of his career in India, Cowan invested Rs 5,000 (£625).<sup>134</sup> Scattergood would not have had to try

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<sup>130</sup> TNA, SP 89/89, ff.3-24, *Secretaries of State: State Papers Foreign, Portugal*, Portugal Merchants Representation of their Grievances No.1, 1707 to Earl of Galway. Signed by 'Peter and Nat. Delaporte', Robert Cowan, Thomas May, Charles Savage, Jr., *et al*

<sup>131</sup> TNA, SP 89/89, ff.3-24, *ibid*: TNA, SP 89/25, ff 246-255, *Secretaries of State: State Papers Foreign, Portugal*, Principal Merchants in Lisbon ... Statement on Trade to James Stanhope [Principal Sec. of State] Lisbon, 31 July 1715. Signed by Robert Cowan, *et al*.

<sup>132</sup> William was not Charles Savage's father, as the latter was known as Charles Savage, Jr.

<sup>133</sup> OIOC, MSS EUR C 387/3, *Papers of John Scattergood*, p.236, March 1722.

<sup>134</sup> TNA, C106/170 I/14, *Exchequer and Chancery: Master Richard's Exhibits: John Scattergood vs Raworth*, Correspondence and Accounts relating to trade with India and China, 1698-1719. Subscription Paper for a China Voyage on y<sup>e</sup> King George No.64.

too hard to interest Cowan, because the former's reputation as an astute businessman was well known, and he left a fortune estimated to be between £50,000 and £100,000.<sup>135</sup> A greater incentive for Cowan to join the venture was the fact that John Scattergood was in receipt of William Dawsonne's patronage, something that Cowan solicited for himself shortly after this business pledge.<sup>136</sup> Accumulating goodwill was part and parcel of the patronage cycle.

Although Cowan was in no apparent hurry to settle his Portuguese business affairs, he did request one particular payment be made in 1731. He told John Gould, Jr. that he desired that Samuel Holden be paid £343/8/4. By this action Holden was 'taking his discharge in full for the debt due from the unfortunate house at Lisbon, which for many reasons I choose to discharge prior to all others'<sup>137</sup> On the same day he wrote to Holden advising him of the proposed settlement arrangements and requested that Holden grant the following:

in return I beg the continuance of your friendship & that youl joyn the rest of my friends in supporting my interest with the gentlemen in the direction of the East India Company among whom I know you have a great influence<sup>138</sup>

As stated, Holden was already one of Cowan's patrons. He was a Russia Merchant, and had dealings in Lisbon.<sup>139</sup> He was also the Governor of the Bank of England, and

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<sup>135</sup> R. Grassby, 'The Personal Wealth of the Business Community in Seventeenth Century England', *Economic History Review*, XXIII, 1970, p.227.

<sup>136</sup> OIOC, MSS EUR C 387/2, *Papers of John Scattergood*, p.386, November 1719; Cowan to Elizabeth Gould, 12 October 1723, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1B: Cowan referred to James Macrae's 'powerful Patrons' who included Elizabeth's father, John Gould, and 'Mr Dawsonne & their friends can do anything ... and as I pretend to Some Share in their favour I shall endeavour to deserve it'.

<sup>137</sup> Cowan to John Gould, Jr., 20 January 1731, PRONI RCP D654/B1/2B.

<sup>138</sup> Cowan to Samuel Holden, 20 January 1731, *ibid.*

<sup>139</sup> Sedgwick, *op.cit.*, Vol. II, p.139.



this would have exerted considerable influence on Cowan to repay him immediately.<sup>140</sup> The fact that Cowan was so deeply indebted to his friends in England for favours granted at that time, would also have had some bearing on his sudden decision to repay this long-standing debt.<sup>141</sup> It was a negligible amount, and as Cowan clearly had sufficient funds to spend well over £4,500 to purchase his ships, it is obvious that such a small sum could have easily been repaid at anytime during the previous decade. Moreover, Holden was hardly in a position to have needed the money as he left an estate valued at about £60,000, so the sudden decision probably had more to do with politics than honour.<sup>142</sup> Holden was appointed as chairman of a committee set up by Dissenters in 1732 to consider the repeal of the Test and Corporations Act. Robert Walpole stacked the committee with ‘moneyed men’ and others who were dependent upon him to ensure that they reached the right conclusion. The result of their inquiry was that the repeal application was pigeonholed, and was to be dealt with at a more appropriate time. Holden was suitably rewarded for his efforts, and became MP for East Looe in 1735.<sup>143</sup> As Cowan was contemplating a political career on his return to England, this small debt might have denied him obtaining optimum backing from his patrons, and explained this sudden desire to repay Holden.

The Eyles brothers, John and Joseph, were part of the Portugal merchants group at the same time as Cowan, but he did not count them amongst his patrons as he did not refer to them as such, nor did he correspond with either of them. This is somewhat surprising given their prominent position in the merchant and civic

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<sup>140</sup> Roberts & Kynaston, *op.cit.*, p.247. Holden was involved in the Directorate of the Bank of England from 1720 until 1740; G.P. Judd, *Members of Parliament 1734-1832*, Archon Books, Hamden, Connecticut, 1972 (1955), p. 231. Holden was the MP for East Looe until his death in 1740.

<sup>141</sup> Sedgwick, *op.cit.*, Vol. II, p.144; Marston-Acres, *op.cit.*, p.81.

<sup>142</sup> Sedgwick, *op.cit.*, Vol. II, pp. 144 -145.

<sup>143</sup> Sedgwick, *ibid.*

communities of London, as well as their extensive kinship connections. Their names only appear on one petition from Lisbon in 1715 and it might well be that their stay in Portugal was of a short duration.<sup>144</sup> It is possible that Cowan was, at that time, back in England, although his signature is attached to a petition from Portugal dated 31 July 1715. John was the elder of the two brothers, and they were the sons of Sir Francis Eyles a former Governor of the Bank of England.<sup>145</sup> They both became Members of Parliament, and their involvement in the Bank of England, the South Sea Company, the East India Company, and the City of London must have meant that they were able to grant substantial amounts of patronage.<sup>146</sup> By the time Cowan joined the East India Company, their Directorate appointments had lapsed, and it was more beneficial for him to pursue the patronage of current Directors of the Company.<sup>147</sup> As previously shown, Cowan was never shy in promoting himself with anyone he thought could be of assistance to him, which makes it surprising that he did not attempt to enlist at least their friendship, if not their patronage. There is no evidence to show that Cowan was on familiar terms with the Eyles family, and it must be assumed that he was either unable, or unwilling, to take advantage of any patronage or friendship they could have extended towards him.

These interconnectedness of these members of the Lisbon Factory indicates just how tightly knit that community was during this period, and once again shows the importance of family and kinship ties in a trading and employment network that

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<sup>144</sup> TNA, SP 89/89, f.31, *Secretaries of State: State Papers Foreign, Portugal*, Merchants of Portugal Recommendation of a Chaplain to the Factory at Lisbon 1715. Signed by John Eyles, Joseph Eyles, *et al.*

<sup>145</sup> Dickson, *op.cit.*, p.106.

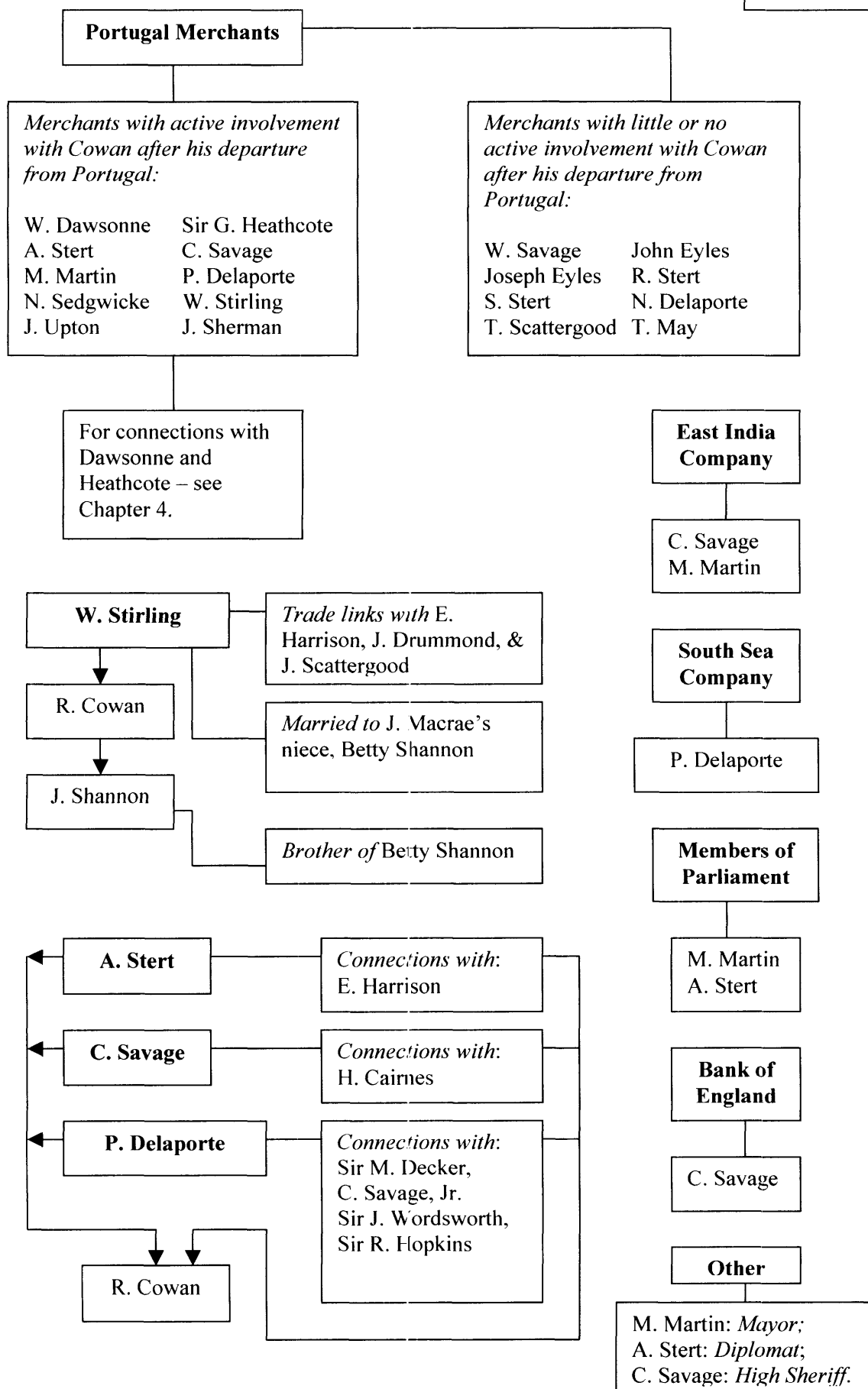
<sup>146</sup> Marston-Acres, *op.cit.*, pp.80, 94; N. Rogers, 'Money, land and lineage: the big bourgeoisie of Hanoverian London', *Social History*, IV, 1979, p.439. John and Joseph were both aldermen, as was their father, and five other relatives also held that rank.

<sup>147</sup> *ibid.* John was Director of the East India Company 1710-1713, and again in 1717-1720; Joseph was Director of the East India Company, 1714 -1717, and again in 1721-1722.

traversed the world. Even though there is little communication between some of these men, the very fact that they worked alongside each other in Lisbon and that some then also decided to work for the East India Company, or were related to others who journeyed to India, must tie them together. To have colleagues with a shared history and whose trading habits were also familiar was a great incentive to work together. Maintaining links with Portugal would have also helped East India Company servants to return illicit goods to England by a circuitous route. Such associations must have helped bridge the gap from their old life to their new role in what must have seemed to be an isolated and alien country. Trust based on various kinship, friendship or trading matters, gave them confidence to venture their hard earned capital on what were always risky trade deals. The perceived usefulness of patrons in the East India Company Directorate was sometimes limited by their incumbency, but there were exceptions to this rule, for example William Dawsonne. Obversely, it would seem that as the Directors could not expect any immediate return for their aid through political support from their clients, that there must have been some other type of repayment apart from aid granted to other clients. The most logical form would have been through trade agreements in which clients like Cowan included their patrons in their own private trading ventures. Familiarity with other residents of the sub-continent served to reinforce the patronage links so vital to their survival. Without allies amongst Company servants there was little prospect of successful trading or promotion, and this aspect of East India Company careers will be discussed next.

## Chapter 5 – Portuguese Connections

**Legend:**  
 Connection: —  
 Patronage: —▶



## Chapter Six:

### The Patronage Network within India

**‘take care to cultivate so valuable a friendship.’<sup>1</sup>**

This chapter will examine why it was not only essential for East India Company servants to have distinguished patrons in England, but that it was also equally necessary to build a supplementary patronage network in India. Without the support of local patrons it was impossible to achieve promotion, or be privy to lucrative private trading ventures. Cowan acquired patrons in India who played parts of varying significance and duration in his progress in the Company’s service. Apart from providing immediate aid, there was always the possibility that some of these men would eventually become members of the Directorate where they could continue to influence the fortunes of their clients. As was the case in Leadenhall Street, the higher the rank, the greater were the opportunities to grant assistance. When Cowan arrived in India he had already acquired James Macrae’s support, but as the latter was a ship’s captain it seemed at the time that he would only ever be a visitor, not a resident and this, whilst helpful, was not sufficient local support. Cowan used this friendship as a basis on which to ingratiate himself with others in powerful positions.

The first to assist Cowan upon his arrival in India, no doubt motivated by a recommendation from Captain Macrae, was Charles Boone. Cowan said in 1726 that

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<sup>1</sup> Cowan to John Fotheringham, 20 May 1725, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1C.

he 'never doubted Gov<sup>r</sup> Boone's hearty friendship, he was my first and Chief benefactor.'<sup>2</sup> Boone's period of aid to Cowan was somewhat limited in India, but he was initially willing and able to offer assistance upon his return to England in 1722.<sup>3</sup> Cowan expressed his thoughts to Henry Cairnes about Boone's invaluable friendship and patronage, and added that, in return for this support, he would 'take care that he suffers no reproach from my conduct nor ungratitude for his protection'.<sup>4</sup> As with so many of those employed in the service, Boone had family connections in the East India Company through his great uncle Christopher who had been a merchant and a commissioner in the Company in 1660.<sup>5</sup> Boone returned to England after the expiry of his term as Governor, and he became the MP for Ludgershall from 1727 until 1734. He was also in the Directorate of the East India Company from 1729 until his death in 1735.<sup>6</sup>

Cowan's correspondence with Boone dates back to April 1723, and it was maintained for the next ten years. Theirs was never an easy relationship, but one that required a considerable amount of effort on Cowan's part.<sup>7</sup> Within a few months of its establishment, their patron-client association made Boone and Cowan targets for an attack by John Braddyll. Braddyll insinuated that Cowan was merely working for the

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<sup>2</sup> Cowan to Henry Cairnes, 2 June 1726, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1C.

<sup>3</sup> W.S. Desai, *Bombay and the Marathas up to 1774*, Munshiram Manoharlal, New Delhi, 1970, unpaginated, List of the Governors of Bombay 1668 -1784. Boone's governorship was terminated on 22 January 1722.

<sup>4</sup> Cowan to Henry Cairnes, *loc.cit.*

<sup>5</sup> R. Sedgwick, *The History of Parliament: The House of Commons 1715-1754*, H.M.S.O. London, 1970, Vol. I, pp. 471- 472. In a further connection, Charles married Jane, the daughter of Daniel Chardin, a merchant of Fort St George and France, sometime before 1710. Jane died 28 November 1710 at Fort St. George, and Boone later married Mary Garth, the widow of George Evelyn; Cowan to John Courtney, 29 August 1728, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1C. Cowan advised Courtney that: 'Gov<sup>r</sup> Boone maryd to the widow Evelin a lady of £1000 p annum'.

<sup>6</sup> Sedgwick, *op.cit.* p.471.

<sup>7</sup> Cowan to Charles Boone, 6 November 1723, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1B.

ex-Governor, not for the Company.<sup>8</sup> This assault on Cowan and Boone's characters can be attributed to Braddyll's disappointment in being overlooked for the position of Chief of Surat. William Phipps was the person responsible for granting such preferments, but he was under a significant amount of patronage obligation to the former Governor. Cowan wrote to Boone explaining that Braddyll's failure to gain promotion was due to the fact that Phipps considered loyalty to patrons as a pre-requisite in Company servants.<sup>9</sup> He added that Phipps would scarce give Braddyll 'much of his confidence while he is so sensible of his ingratitude to you.'<sup>10</sup> This 'ingratitude' stemmed from the time, *circa* 1722, when Braddyll had plotted against Boone, to the extent of threatening to take his life. This extraordinary behaviour led to his arrest. He was expelled from Bombay, fled to Goa, and at some stage sought, and gained, the protection of Captain Matthews.<sup>11</sup> Lingering resentment must have caused any of Boone's protégés to be a fair target for Braddyll. This was just the opening skirmish in a prolonged attack, and it was several years before overt hostilities were declared between Braddyll and Phipps. Cowan had made his choice on the men most likely to be of assistance to his career, and John Braddyll, although he was the Chief Justice of Bombay, simply could not hold a candle to either the man who now held the position of Governor of that city, or to the ex-Governor who had become a member of the East India Company Directorate. Allocation of allegiance was as simple as that.

John Braddyll was something of a Jekyll and Hyde character. In 1720 he was appointed Chief Justice of Bombay, and simultaneously served as the Company's

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<sup>8</sup> Cowan to William Dawsonne, 28 October 1723, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1B.

<sup>9</sup> Cowan to Charles Boone, 6 November 1723, *ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> Colonel J. Biddulph, *The Pirates of Malabar* Smith, Elder & Co., London, 1907, p.181; G.W. Forrest (ed) *Selections from the Bombay Secretariat*, Government Central Press, Bombay, 1887, Vol. II, pp.4 – 7. For details of Captain Matthews' complaints see below, pp.218-220,228,233.

Accountant. Although he resigned from the former position because it entailed too much extra work, he had again taken on the job, after his reinstatement in the Company's service.<sup>12</sup> In 1728, when Braddyll was appointed Chief at Tellicherry, Cowan described him as 'a timorous & irresolute man'.<sup>13</sup> Braddyll was either a consummate actor or Cowan completely misread his character. The latter may well have been true if the following passage was his genuine assessment of Braddyll:

I do not apprehend we shall have any more disturbances or Extravagant expences at Tellicherry since Mr Braddyll a man of very Pacifick temper & natural frugality is gone to succeed Mr Adams ...<sup>14</sup>

Braddyll's main patron was John Heathcote, and in a letter to Edward Harrison in 1731 Cowan was extremely careful with the wording of his report: 'I can't say much of Mr Braddyll, tho he is a good Company's servant.'<sup>15</sup> Harrison, and anyone else who saw the letter, was at liberty to read whatever he chose into this reflection. Cowan must have known about Braddyll's attack on Boone in 1722, and when added to the allegations he made against Cowan and Boone in 1723, it is difficult to reconcile a man of 'very Pacifick temper' with someone who, only five years earlier, had contemplated murdering the head of the Bombay factory. It was most certainly an inappropriate appraisal of the man. Three years later and Cowan had completely altered his opinion of Braddyll, whom he now described as a 'most unaccountable creature & unworthy of any man's correspondence'.<sup>16</sup> Henry Lowther concurred with Cowan, saying that

<sup>12</sup> P.B.M. Malabari, *Bombay in the Making: Being mainly a History of the Origin and Growth of Judicial Institutions in the Western Presidency, 1661-1726*, T. Fisher Unwin, London, 1910, pp.233, 462.

<sup>13</sup> Cowan to Edward Harrison, c. August/October 1728, PRONI RCP D654/B1/2A.

<sup>14</sup> Cowan to Edward Harrison, 20 March 1728, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1C.

<sup>15</sup> Cowan to Edward Harrison, 12 September 1731, PRONI RCP D654/B1/2C. A. Das Gupta, *Indian Merchants and the Decline of Surat c.1700-1750*, Franz Steiner Verlag, Wiesbaden, 1979, p.275. Das Gupta states that Braddyll had been described at one stage as a man of 'base principles and an inveterate liar'. For John Heathcote see also Chapter 4, pp.166-168.

<sup>16</sup> Cowan to William Phipps, 8 September 1731, PRONI RCP D654/B1/2C.



Braddyll was ‘...a strange creature he is as ever was heard of.’<sup>17</sup> One historian wrote, that, as Braddyll eventually became Chief at Tellicherry, it showed that almost any bad behaviour, even a murder threat, could be forgiven by the Company. Biddulph states that the Directors may have only drawn the line at behaviour that posed a threat to Company trade.<sup>18</sup>

Dismissal charges against Company employees for various offences and indiscretions were often sent by the Directorate, but because of the time lapse they were not always implemented, and sometimes the decisions were reversed. Examples in the first half of the eighteenth century include those of Hugh Barker for dishonesty, and Samuel Greenhill for having dealings with the Ostend Company.<sup>19</sup> James Hope was dismissed by William Phipps for failing to pass on cheap chintzes to the Company, but this was never enforced and was probably a retaliatory act as Hope had aligned himself with the incumbent brokers in Surat, the Rustumjis, thereby incurring the wrath of Phipps.<sup>20</sup> William Cordeux and Captain John Fotheringham were charged with endeavouring ‘to raise a mutiny among the soldiers’ and their dismissals were confirmed, but both were given a second chance, even though Cowan had labelled Cordeux as a ‘profligate wretch’, and the East India Company had named him as a ‘loose vicious person’.<sup>21</sup> William Henry Draper was accused by Cordeux of embezzling cash, and was suspended by the Company, but was shortly thereafter reinstated. This

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<sup>17</sup> Lowther to Robert Cowan, 30 August 1731, PRONI RCP D/654/B1/5A – 64.

<sup>18</sup> Biddulph, *loc.cit.*, p.181.

<sup>19</sup> S. Bhattacharya, *The East India Company and the Economy of Bengal from 1704 to 1740*, Luzac & Co. Ltd., London, 1954, pp.67,70,144; I. B. Watson, *Foundation for Empire: English Private Trade in India 1659-1760*, Vikas Publishing House Pvt Ltd., New Delhi, 1980, p.266. Hugh Barker was employed at both Mocha and Bengal and he fled from Bengal after his dismissal. He was at that time employed as Import Warehouse Keeper on an annual salary of £40; P.J. Marshall, *East India Fortunes: The British in Bengal in the Eighteenth Century*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1976, p.228.

<sup>20</sup> D.L. White, *Competition and Collaboration: Parsi Merchants and the English East India Company in 18<sup>th</sup> Century India*, Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt Ltd., New Delhi, 1995, pp.76-77.

<sup>21</sup> Cowan to John Fotheringham, 23 October 1727, PRONI RCP D/654/B1/1C; OIOC, E/4/450, *Bombay Abstract Letters Received, Bombay General*, 1 January 1728.

occurred at the time of Cordeux's own problems, and would have been lodged to cast doubt on his accusers, especially as Draper was one of Cowan's protégés.<sup>22</sup>

John Lambton and Thomas Waters, who were based in Bombay and Bandar Abbas, were both dismissed from the Company's Service in 1729. Lambton's dismissal was because of his correspondence 'touching the Management of our Affairs under your [Cowan's] Presidency,' and the downfall of Waters was brought about by alleged fraud.<sup>23</sup> Lambton was reinstated in 1731, the Company instructing that he should be 'taken in as sixth of Council all past shall be forgiven'.<sup>24</sup> Their cases will be discussed more fully later in this chapter because of the allegations that they had raised against Robert Cowan.<sup>25</sup>

Edward Page and Thomas Rammell were suspended, and both turned against the Bombay Board in late 1730. Rammell was involved in deals that Cowan made when he bought coffee privately and later sold it to the Company, allegedly at a profit. He denied this to Phipps stating that he sold it 'at the same price they bought for from other people'.<sup>26</sup> Page and Rammell were returned to England at the beginning of 1731 with Thomas Waters.<sup>27</sup> Even Governors were not beneath reproach and John Stackhouse, President of Fort William, 1732-1739, was dismissed because he was seriously in

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<sup>22</sup> OIOC, E/4/450, *Bombay Abstract Letters Received, Bombay General*, 1 January 1728, para. 12. The Directorate had 'found it necessary to recall Mr Draper & suspend him the Service during the Company's pleasure'; OIOC, E/3/115, *Original Drafts of Despatches to Bengal, Madras and Bombay, 1725-51*, To Our Governour and Council of Bombay, 27th February 1729, para 62. 'finding the Charges exhibited against him nothing immediately detrimental to the Company they have restored him to the Service'.

<sup>23</sup> OIOC, E/3/115, *op.cit.*, Our Governour and Council of Bombay, 7th March 1729, para. 44.

<sup>24</sup> OIOC, E/4/450, *Bombay Abstract Letters Received, Bombay General*, 12th September 1731 para. 121.

<sup>25</sup> See below pp.214 -215,226,241-243,246,249.

<sup>26</sup> Cowan to William Phipps, 3 February 1731, PRONI RCP D/654/B1/2B.

<sup>27</sup> OIOC, E/4/450, *op.cit.*, 20th October 1730, para. 81 Mr Thomas Rammell of Council dissenting from the Board, and in a letter reviles and arraigns the late and present President and Council for which suspended him; Cowan to William Phipps, 20 October 1730, *ibid.*, For Rammell and Page see also Chapter 4, pp.160,165, and Chapter 5, p.186.

debt.<sup>28</sup> Cowan was himself removed from the Presidency for alleged irregularities regarding a Portuguese ship. The tone in his letter of defence is spirited, and he was eventually exonerated of the charges.

To clear myself from which false, malicious and villainous assertions, as far as time, place and the nature of things will allow of, I do hereby solemnly declare and swear on the Holy Evangelists, so help me God, that I was not ever interested or concerned, in any respect whatever, nor was I any ways profited or gainer by the said ship 'Europa's' voyage, or by her touching at this Port, otherwise than by a present of Six Hams, eight dozen of French Oporto wine and a Pound of Snuff made me by the Commander of the said ship on his first arrival, and the usual perquisite allowed by the President of one per cent of the silver belonging to the said ship 'Europa' coined in the Hon<sup>ble</sup> Companys Mint;<sup>29</sup>

From these examples it can be seen that the Directorate was influenced both by reports from the men on the spot, and from those returning who bore grudges against fellow employees. Men like Braddyll, who threatened murder, were treated more leniently than those like Lambton, Greenhill and Cowan whose alleged offences were against the Company's interests. This punitive action by the Company proves that Cowan's decision to always pursue the Company's interests with vigour was the correct one.

Like so many other names in the history of the East India Company, that of Braddyll was well represented. John Braddyll had a brother in the Directorate from 1728, which explains why he was given a second chance by the Company. The benefits of forming an alliance with Braddyll were not lost on Robert Cowan, and would explain his more than generous character reading.<sup>30</sup> A foot in both camps, whilst

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<sup>28</sup> Bhattacharya, *op.cit.*, p.141; Marshall, *op.cit.*, p.233. Stackhouse was believed to be in debt for more than £40,000.

<sup>29</sup> Forrest, *op.cit.*, Vol.II, pp.63-64.

<sup>30</sup> Cowan to John Braddyll, 15 December 1728, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1C.

not strictly ethical, was an insurance policy for the incoming Governor. The brother concerned was Dodding Braddyll, who represented the seat of Lancaster from 1715 until 1722, and who remained in the East India Company Directorate until his death in 1748.<sup>31</sup> Furthermore, John had family support in India as there were at least three other Braddylls employed by the Company.<sup>32</sup> Thomas Braddyll, who retired in 1746 with a reputed fortune of £70,000 after thirty-one years service in Bengal, began his career as a writer, and he served a period as Governor of Bengal.<sup>33</sup> David Braddyll was also Governor in Bengal in the early part of the eighteenth century, and his name appears on a petition in 1713 to improve the private trading rights of Company servants.<sup>34</sup>

John Braddyll also had a brother-in-law, John Robinson, employed in Surat during Cowan's presidency. Robinson clearly enjoyed Cowan's trust, as he was once addressed by him as 'Honest John'.<sup>35</sup> A sea-faring brother of Braddyll did not do so well. Cowan had promised John that his brother was 'designed Commander of the *Swillington*' but his appointment remains in doubt as Henry Lowther had serious misgivings about the Captain's ability to deal with alcohol.<sup>36</sup> Instead, he suggested giving the man another ship to command. Cowan replied that if Braddyll was unfit for command of the *Swillington* then he should not be given the control of the Bombay Ketch.<sup>37</sup> The use of the kinship network in selecting employees meant that they were not necessarily the best people for the job, and when problems arose, as in the above

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<sup>31</sup> L.S. Sutherland, *A London Merchant 1695-1774*, Frank Cass, London, 1962, p.117; Benyon was also a patron of Cowan – see below pp.222-223.

<sup>32</sup> H. Yule, (ed) *The Diary of William Hedges, Esq.*, The Hakluyt Society, London, 1887-1889, Vol.III, p. xlv. A Roger Braddyll was third signatory at Fort St. George, 23 August 1699, and may well have been another member of John's family.

<sup>33</sup> Marshall, *op.cit.*, pp.230-231.

<sup>34</sup> H. Furber, *Rival Empires of Trade in the Orient, 1600-1800*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1976, p.261.

<sup>35</sup> Cowan to John Robinson, 20 January 1731, PRONI RCP D/654/B1/2B; Cowan to John Robinson, 27 October 1729, PRONI RCP D/654/B1/1D.

<sup>36</sup> Cowan to John Braddyll, 21 January 1730, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1E.

<sup>37</sup> Cowan to Henry Lowther, 12 March 1730, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1F.

example, it made remedial action more difficult for the men in authority. By the time the Directorate received notification of the problem, the crisis would often have passed, and any action taken, or any slight perceived, would have been laid squarely at the door of the man in charge at the Factory in India. Thwarted personal and family aspirations meant that John Braddyll was a formidable foe; one, moreover, with strong support in England, and the evidence indicates that he was a man that Cowan, Phipps and Boone had good reason to handle with extreme caution.

In 1723, allegations of bribery against Cowan and Phipps were made by Allan Chambre regarding the appointment of a broker. Cowan mentioned the accusations to the Chief of Surat, John Hope:

[he] has wrote home that Govr Phipps had 80000 Rups [£10,000] for making a new Broker and I 5000 [£625] with a great deal more scandal, which in due time will be calld upon to prove and I hope receive his reward ...<sup>38</sup>

In his reply to Charles Boone, Cowan defended his own position by providing a written deposition to the contrary by the broker concerned. He also inferred that Braddyll, his former accuser, was party to, and thereby approved, the induction of the broker Laldas, at Surat:

... I believe there is as little ground for that or any other slander that the arch villain Chambre has wrote home as what he asserted relating to Govr Phipps & myself about making Laldas Broker, this ship carrys home the said Laldas attestation made in the most solemn manner according to their Rites before the Council at Surat whereas Mr Braddyl was one . . . wherein he declared that he was never directly or indirectly given any money or other Consideration to any person or persons for obtaining the place of Company's broker and I am ready to believe he swears very justly as for myself when I left Surat he made me a present of about five hundred

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<sup>38</sup> Cowan to John Hope, 13 September 1723, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1B.

Rupees [approximately £62/10/-]& the same for Mr Newlin which I supposed no more than Customary or any of the Gentlemen of Councils leaving Surat . . .<sup>39</sup>

Allegations about unorthodox dealings with the Surat brokers were not new. Similar accusations had arisen in 1723 and Cowan had dismissed them summarily:

he [Mr Matthews] has threatened to do strange things when he gets to England. & Gov<sup>r</sup> Phipps & I are to feel his displeasure more particularly than any others but his threats give me no concerns.<sup>40</sup>

These claims involved the dismissal of the Rustumji family as the East India Company brokers in Surat, in favour of Seth Laldas Parak.<sup>41</sup>

The man who made these allegations against Cowan and Phipps was Commodore Thomas Matthews. He had been despatched to the region in 1721, ostensibly to subdue the attacks by pirates upon English shipping.<sup>42</sup> By the time he arrived in India, Matthews had already displayed poor leadership, lack of discretion, and an acerbic and sometimes violent nature.<sup>43</sup> Moreover, it seems that his aim was always to gain his own ends, that is, to act as a private trader, rather than serve the needs of the Company that employed him.<sup>44</sup> It is not surprising that, as his private trading affairs were threatened by the dismissal of the very brokers he depended upon, Matthews was intent upon revenge against those he deemed responsible. His actions in

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<sup>39</sup> Cowan to Charles Boone, 6 November 1723, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1B. Boone had notified Cowan of these allegations. This matter, including Cowan's involvement, has already been discussed in Chapter 2, pp.89-91; Cowan to Robert Newlin, 16 April 1724, *ibid.*, Newlin was appointed to the agency in Gombroon, [Bandar e 'Abbas] Persia in 1724; OIOC, E/4/450, *op.cit.*, 30 September 1728 para. 121. Newlin died there on 2 June the same year – he was insolvent.

<sup>40</sup> Cowan to James Macrae, 15 April 1723, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1A.

<sup>41</sup> Watson, *op.cit.*, p.265.

<sup>42</sup> Biddulph, *op.cit.*, pp.170-171.

<sup>43</sup> *ibid.*, pp.170-172, 178, 184 -185.

<sup>44</sup> *ibid.*, p.183; J. Keay, *The Honourable Company: A History of the English East India Company*, Harper Collins, London, 1991, p.262.

this instance included lending his support to the local private traders, and to the extraordinary journey to London of Nowroji Rustumji to present his case against the Bombay council in pursuit of monies owed to him.<sup>45</sup> Matthews's decision to pursue his vendetta was extremely risky as Cowan and Phipps were already strongly entrenched with their network of supporters in the East India Company Head Office.

Cowan's early optimism about the inability of Matthews to wound either himself or Phipps proved to be correct, because in 1725 it became known that Matthews was being investigated in Leadenhall Street.<sup>46</sup> Such enquiries into the behaviour of the complainant must have seriously damaged or even negated Matthews' charges against Phipps and Cowan. All of the allegations must have been settled to the satisfaction of both Cowan and Boone as their correspondence continued and, by late 1725, Cowan was able to state that Charles Boone was still his friend despite the accusations made against himself and Phipps. Never a man to mince words, he bluntly stated to Henry Cairnes: 'no I cant be a Journey Man to anybody, be the pay ever so good'.<sup>47</sup> Whatever his faults and failings, Cowan never wavered from the defence of his good name in business matters, and these attacks had obviously touched a raw nerve. Cowan did not want the world to believe that he was in the pay of another man. For others there may have been only a fine line of differentiation between accepting patronage and being a hireling, but for Cowan there was a definite distinction.

Cowan desired a decent situation in the Service in India, and aimed to further his own opportunities as well as those of the Company and, as ever, he set his sights

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<sup>45</sup> White, *op.cit.*, pp.72-73; Watson, *loc.cit.*

<sup>46</sup> Cowan to William Phipps, 7 May 1725, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1C.

<sup>47</sup> Cowan to Henry Cairnes, 20 December 1725, *ibid.*

high. He, unlike Matthews, was quite prepared to work hard for the Company's interests, as long as that effort brought rewards for his own benefit. He told Edward Harrison that at the end of his term in Mocha he hoped to 'leave the Islands & the Companys affaires in a much more flourishing Condition than I found them'.<sup>48</sup> It must be remembered that the time Cowan was in charge in Mocha coincided with the period of highest coffee transactions by the Company. Amounts imported to England had risen from 250 tons in 1711 to 1,200 tons by 1724.<sup>49</sup> Cowan's letters to Hezekiah King, Stephen Law, Henry Lowther, John Heathcote and Martin French, amongst many others, contain numerous references to shipments and orders for the Company's trade. It did not matter to Cowan whether he was serving his own interests or those of the East India Company, because he simply enjoyed the cut and thrust of all trade deals.<sup>50</sup> He expressed his dreams and his motivation to Henry Cairnes:

You desire me to be particular in Explaining my desires. I dare say I need not tell you I desire & want to be in the best post the Company have in their Gift in India that I may the sooner be in a Condition to return & enjoy yours & the rest of my friend's company in Europe, but tis not what I desire but what you and they can procure for me...<sup>51</sup>

The emphasis is on what Cowan believed could, or should be, provided for him, and that the prospects of all Company servants lay fairly and squarely in the hands of their patrons. He felt that his achievements in Goa and Mocha, on the Company's behalf, were all that was needed to confirm that he was capable and trustworthy of holding a responsible and authoritative station. He was always unambiguous in stating his aims,

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<sup>48</sup> Cowan to Edward Harrison, 12 September 1731, PRONI RCP D/654/B1/2C.

<sup>49</sup> B.P. Lenman, 'The English and Dutch East India Companies and the Birth of Consumerism in the Augustan World', *Eighteenth Century Life*, 14 February 1990, p.57. See below p.222,224,232 and also Chapter 2, pp.96-97.

<sup>50</sup> Cowan to Hezekiah King, 27 September 1729, & to Stephen Law, 1 October 1729, & to Henry Lowther, 29 June 1729, PRONI RCP D/654/B1/1D; Cowan to John Heathcote, 6 January 1727, PRONI RCP D/654/B1/1C; French to Robert Cowan, 21 November 1725, PRONI RCP D/654/B1/4C, 15A-G.

<sup>51</sup> Cowan to Henry Cairnes, 20 December 1725, PRONI RCP D/654/B1/1C.



and, equally, he did not equivocate on what he expected in return for his services to the Company. He knew that promotion to the rank of Governor would bring with it a larger salary but, more important, better perquisites through increased opportunities for private trade. Robert Cowan summed up his attitude towards patronage, and how best to use the system in a letter to one of his own protégés, Captain John Fotheringham. Having brought Fotheringham to the notice of William Phipps, he was delighted to hear that the Governor had given him control over one of his own private trading vessels, the *Morning Star*. His advice to Fotheringham was to ‘take care to cultivate so valuable a friendship.’<sup>52</sup> Cowan believed this was sound advice as it was something that he practised assiduously over the years of his service with the Company.

In June 1726 Cowan told Boone that he felt William Phipps would have transferred him to a position in Surat if he requested it, but such a posting did not appeal to him because of internal problems in that region. He thought taking that situation would work against his ambitions to become Governor of Bombay.<sup>53</sup> These were the same reasons that he had named in his rejection of the position at Surat in the first place. He wanted then, and still desired, a position that gave him the opportunity to prove his worth to the Company, but he never forgot his over-riding desire to make his ‘competency’. He stated that in North Yemen: ‘there are no honest perquisites attending the Chiefship & I can’t steal nor rob as some of my predecessors have done’.<sup>54</sup> He also said that ‘the trade of this place during my three years Chief Ship has

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<sup>52</sup> Cowan to John Fotheringham, 20 May 1725, PRONI RCP D/654/B1/1C.

<sup>53</sup> Cowan to Charles Boone, 1 January 1726, *ibid*.

<sup>54</sup> Cowan to John Gould Jr., 2 June 1726, *ibid*.

been of so little advantage to my Honble Masters as to myself'.<sup>55</sup> Announcing the closure of the Mocha Factory in the middle of 1726, he also took the opportunity to complain of his misfortunes to Boone:

I have been verry much indisposed & the trade is upon so tottering a foundation lyable to such impositions and hazards, that I durst never ingage deeply in it so as to make any advantage . . .<sup>56</sup>

Whether these claims were true or not are hard to verify, but he might have been unlucky in his investments and sustained losses. This seems unlikely, as this period had been the boom time for the Mocha coffee trade, and he was heavily involved in that business.<sup>57</sup> The more likely scenario was that he was bluffing in order to gain a position back in India, and crying poor to hide his private trade successes.

Some patrons played relatively small parts in Cowan's life but he seems to have had an uncanny knack of taking advantage of even tenuous associations. Richard Benyon was based in India at Fort St. George during Cowan's period of tenure in Mocha. Benyon departed in 1725 for his return journey to England, and was estimated by Cowan to be worth £50,000. He had married to a Mrs Fleetwood who had ventured out to India the previous year. Cowan described Benyon and his ambitions thus: 'a young man' and that he and his wife 'now return to cut a figure, here they team it, she

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<sup>55</sup> Cowan to Henry Lyell, 8 June 1726, PRONI RCP D/654/B1/1C; N.B. Dirks, *The Scandal of Empire: India and the Creation of Imperial Britain*, The Belknap Press of Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2006, pp.7-9, 13, 28.

<sup>56</sup> Cowan to Charles Boone, 8 June 1726, PRONI RCP D/654/B1/1C.

<sup>57</sup> B.P. Lenman, 'The English and Dutch East India Companies and the Birth of Consumerism in the Augustan World', *Eighteenth Century Life*, Vol. 14, February 1990, p.57; J.F. Bulsaro, 'Markets and Traders in India during the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries', eds K.N. Chaudhuri, & C. Dewey, *Economy and Society*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1979, p.153; Das Gupta *op.cit.*, p.242. Das Gupta corroborates Cowan's heavy involvement in private trading, stating that Cowan was 'for some time the undisputed master of trade across the Arabian Sea'.

has made a good voyage.’<sup>58</sup> The couple did manage to achieve this goal, as Benyon became, in due course, a Director of the East India Company and a Member of Parliament.<sup>59</sup> Cowan’s business affairs with Benyon had begun in 1723 and were clearly ongoing in 1726.<sup>60</sup> Richard had a supercargo brother, Charles, in the Company’s service during the 1720s, and Cowan and James Macrae favoured him as a client on several occasions during that period.<sup>61</sup> Benyon was a patron of Cowan’s for at least a couple of years after his return from India, but the relationship apparently ceased after 1728.<sup>62</sup> Benyon continued his business affairs by becoming a ship-owner, and was in partnership with Dodding Braddyll, the older brother of John Braddyll.

Three years had elapsed since Cowan had defended his loyalty to the East India Company, and now in 1726, although he was still vigorous in his endeavours to protect his colleagues and his Service reputation, he was equally adamant about his rights to legitimately pursue his own business interests:

I have every year been much indisposed without reaping any Benefits equal to the fatigue and pain I have undergone, you verry prudently advise me to consult my own interest as farr as is consistent with reputation & honesty, & next that of the Company’s I do not pretend to so much disinterestedness as to neglect my own advantage when I have an opportunity of promoting it under the restrictions you mention . . .<sup>63</sup>

In this letter Cowan stated that he had willingly endured personal hazards, including risking his health in the hot climate of Mocha, in order to improve the Company’s

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<sup>58</sup> Cowan to ‘Madam’, 20 December 1725, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1C.

<sup>59</sup> Sutherland, *loc.cit.*

<sup>60</sup> Cowan to Richard Benyon, 4 June 1723, & to Hez<sup>ah</sup> King, 15 March 1724, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1B; Cowan to Richard Benyon 20 May 1725, & to Nath<sup>l</sup> Turner, c. 12 July 1726, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1C.

<sup>61</sup> Cowan to Richard Benyon, 18 July 1724, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1B; Cowan to James Macrae, c. April 1725 & Richard Benyon, 2 June 1726, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1C.

<sup>62</sup> Cowan to Richard Benyon, 25 September 1728, PRONI RCP D654/B1/2A.

<sup>63</sup> Cowan to Henry Cairnes, 2 June 1726, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1C.

trading from that place. Whether it was by his own efforts, or that he was simply in the right place at the right time, there can be no doubt that he had achieved this goal in at least the coffee sector.<sup>64</sup> Officially, for the East India Company Directorate as a whole, their servants' loyalty was equated with increased sales and profits for the Company. Unofficially, for individual Directors, loyalty meant providing patronage when required, and continued involvement in country trade deals. Loyalty amongst the East India Company servants, however, depended entirely on personality and ambition, and, at times, was non-existent.<sup>65</sup>

Cowan's chances of improving his situation appeared to be thrown into doubt later that year when Boone was voted out of the Directorate.<sup>66</sup> Cowan must have felt that he was to be thwarted yet again but, even as he commiserated over Boone's misfortune with Henry Cairnes, he still managed to keep his own ambition focussed:

I am hartily sorry for Govr Boone's hard fate because I love and respect him & such disappointments will I know very sensibly affect his Generous Spirit, you may depend in whatever Station I am pleased I shall as hitherto always conform to the Company's Rules & Consult their Interest in all my actions ...<sup>67</sup>

Again, he repeated his pledge of allegiance to the Company, with a further reassurance to Cairnes that he would not place himself in a position wherein he could be accused of neglecting the Company's interests. Without Boone in the Directorate, the cultivation of Edward Harrison, and the Cairnes and Gould connections were even more crucial to Cowan's prospects. Holden Furber states that the trend from 1713 onwards was for the Governors of Bombay to favour their own and other company

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<sup>64</sup> See above p.220,222.

<sup>65</sup> See below p226.

<sup>66</sup> Cowan to Charles Boone, 12 January 1727, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1C.

<sup>67</sup> Cowan to Henry Cairnes, 12 January 1727, *ibid*.

servants' private trade over the Company's transactions. Cowan was an exception to this rule as he wanted to remain in India, and the way to ensure that he could continue to expand his own fortune was to protect the Company's trade.<sup>68</sup> This must have been a particularly tense time for Cowan, as his chance of promotion to a good position was highly likely, provided he maintained sufficient support in Leadenhall Street. Phipps had recommended Cowan to Edward Harrison's protection by late 1723, indicating that Phipps also enjoyed Harrison's patronage.<sup>69</sup> Cowan confided to Cairnes:

... Govr Phipps whose friendship I'll take care to preserve, I think I have a fair chance to succeed him when he thinks fitt to quitt the Government unless a successor is sent him from England for Mr Adams pretentions are cut by this last General Letter, in the particular from the Court of Directors to Mr Phipps which I have seen, there's no mention made of me to succeed him as you hint, I know not what there may be in that from the Secret Committee but if it is left to his choice I am pretty secure.<sup>70</sup>

Fifteen months later his patience was rewarded and he was able to write with profuse thanks to Edward Harrison upon receiving notification of his promotion to Governor of Bombay to take effect at the end of William Phipps term of office, which he saw as the 'Company's mark of distinction & favour.'<sup>71</sup>

Cowan occasionally diverged from straight business and commerce letters, as he was not averse to indulging in social gossip whenever such opportunities arose, especially when the news concerned one of his patrons. He imparted the information

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<sup>68</sup> Furber, *op.cit.*, p.135.

<sup>69</sup> Cowan to John Gould, 29 October 1723, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1B; 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.112.

<sup>70</sup> Cowan to Henry Cairnes, 12 January 1727, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1C.

<sup>71</sup> Cowan to Edward Harrison, 20 March 1728, *ibid.*

to John Courtney in Surat in August 1728 of Charles Boone's second marriage. The important point to Cowan was not that the ex-Governor had married again, but that his new wife was a widow who possessed an income of £1,000 per annum.<sup>72</sup> Cowan liked to keep a close eye on such matters, as there was always the possibility of further enlarging his patronage network. A widow with a fortune must certainly have had some valuable connections. In a letter to William Phipps in 1729, Cowan rather optimistically hoped that Boone would not take the side of the two men who held a grudge against him for his part in their dismissal from the Company.<sup>73</sup> Cowan's hopes were dashed because by 1731 Boone had given credence to the complaints made by Waters and Lambton, and the correspondence between Cowan and Boone diminished from this point.<sup>74</sup> No longer certain of Boone's support, Cowan decided to dispense with his patronage. He was not short of other valuable supporters.

One of those men was, of course, Boone's adversary William Phipps. He had been the Chief of Mocha, Yemen, and was Governor of Bombay from 9 January 1722 until 10 January 1729.<sup>75</sup> He had originally been in Bombay (circa 1713) where he had acquired a somewhat dubious reputation, which was, in some ways, similar to that of John Braddyll. It had been alleged that he used threatening and intimidatory behaviour, and, on one occasion, even physical violence, towards fellow council members.<sup>76</sup> This action resulted in his resignation from the Company's Service just before he was to be removed from office by order of the Directorate. Either he suffered a complete

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<sup>72</sup> Cowan to John Courtney, 29 August 1728, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1C.

<sup>73</sup> Cowan to William Phipps, 6 July 1729, & to Charles Boone, 25 Sept 1728, PRONI RCP D654/B1/2A. The two men involved were Thomas Waters, see below p.226, and Chapter 4, pp.164-165, and John Lambton, see below pp.241-242,246.

<sup>74</sup> Cowan to Charles Boone, 20 January 1731, PRONI RCP D654/B1/2B.

<sup>75</sup> K.N. Chaudhuri, *The Trading World of Asia and the English East India Company 1660-1760*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1978, p.371; Desai, *loc.cit.*

<sup>76</sup> Chaudhuri, 'The English East India Company', pp.103 -104.

character change or he learned to keep his temper under control, as he returned to the Company's service to attain the two lucrative and responsible positions already mentioned. It is more likely that his character remained essentially the same, as there was at least one later instance when he was thwarted in a business plan, and he exerted punitive measures in reprisal against a country Captain.<sup>77</sup>

The captain concerned was Francis D'Abbadie, and the dispute arose over his refusal to sell his ship to a consortium comprised of Phipps, Cowan and Lowther in 1727.<sup>78</sup> It is not surprising that D'Abbadie declined to sell as he had, after thirteen years in the East, just invested £16,000 in the ship he commanded. After this refusal, which upset the private trading plans of the consortium, the Captain's career disintegrated. Phipps, as Governor, used his powers to direct D'Abbadie's trading ventures into unviable areas, and to eventually have the unfortunate man arrested.<sup>79</sup> Without the protection of Phipp's patronage the captain's days as a successful trader were numbered. He eventually left India in early 1731, having been forced to sell his share in the ship for approximately £587.<sup>80</sup> Cowan advised his friend Martin French that:

I believe you'll hear no more of Capt Dabbadie's demands he & his family went passengers on the Windham to England where I believe he will give Mr Phipps some trouble for he is the most litigious man I ever heard of.<sup>81</sup>

D'Abbadie had good grounds for complaint about his treatment, but it is obvious from Cowan's remarks that he was in full agreement with Phipps. As for Cowan's

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<sup>77</sup> H. Furber, *Bombay Presidency in the Mid-Eighteenth Century*, Asia Publishing House, Bombay, 1965, p.30.

<sup>78</sup> Watson, *op.cit.*, p.118.

<sup>79</sup> Furber, *loc.cit.*.

<sup>80</sup> OIOC, D/99, *Correspondence Memoranda, 1725-30*. The Case of Cap<sup>t</sup> Francis Dabbadies Complaining Great hardships he suffered by President Phipps & Others in Bombay, undated. p.341.

<sup>81</sup> Cowan to Martin French, 9 February 1731, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1G.

relationship with Phipps, he had astutely aligned himself as a member of the Governor's team from at least the beginning of Phipps' presidency which was a little over a year after Cowan's arrival in India. Regardless of Phipps's unpredictable nature the two ambitious men seemed to make a successful team. Their long association was, however, to be dogged by a series of attacks on their probity.

In June 1724 Cowan said that Commodore Matthews and a Captain Benfield were regarded as Phipps's greatest enemies, but that Governor Phipps could rely on him to inform the Company of the true state of the Presidencies.<sup>82</sup> As well as his client's faithful espousal, Phipps had at least three relatives in India to support him in the Service. The first was Daniel Small, who was a ship's captain until his death at Mocha on 17 June 1726. Cowan organised as decent a funeral cortège as possible, and referred to the unfortunate man as 'poor Captain Small'. He was referring to Small's untimely death rather than his pecuniary state, as there is a report of a Captain Small's widow, in possession of a £15,000 fortune, remarrying in 1737.<sup>83</sup> This marriage was to a Captain Hunter, and it could well have been David, nephew of James Macrae, as he had returned to England in 1733.<sup>84</sup> The second family member was Henry Higden, who was originally employed as Assistant to the Accountant in Bombay in 1728 at an annual salary of £15. Within a year he had gained Cowan's patronage, and he became a Supercargo on one of the latter's ships, the *Balls*.<sup>85</sup> The third was a Mr. Murphy who was only briefly mentioned in a letter from Cowan to Jeremiah Jones that named both

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<sup>82</sup> Cowan to William Phipps, 28 June 1724, PRONI ECP D654/B1/1B.

<sup>83</sup> *The Gentleman's Magazine*, October 1737, p.637.

<sup>84</sup> TNA, C108/94-95, *Chancery: Master Farrers Exhibits Accounts and Correspondence*, Major John Roach, 1727-1738. Roach to Captain David Hunter, 31 January 1733.

<sup>85</sup> Forrest, *op.cit.*, Vol. II, p.47; Cowan to William Cowan & Henry Higden, c. April 1729, PRONI D654/B1/1H.



Higden and Murphy as kinsmen of the Governor of Bombay.<sup>86</sup> By soliciting and providing aid for these relatives of Phipps, Cowan was realising some of his obligations to that man.

Cowan returned to Bombay in the middle of 1724 citing ill-health, and he must have felt that questions could be raised in Leadenhall Street as to whether this was correct procedure. Cowan justified his actions in his correspondence to at least one of the Company Directors, and added that Phipps and the Council approved his journey.<sup>87</sup> It is likely that Cowan chose to return to Bombay at this particular time in order to shore up his prospects of promotion in the Company's Service, rather than on the health grounds he cited. Phipps sent Cowan to the Company's factory at Carwar, just south of Goa, at the end of his visit to Bombay in order to facilitate the closure of the settlement after problems with the local Rajah.<sup>88</sup> A far more logical move was for Phipps to have employed someone located nearby, for example Robert Adams, rather than wait for Cowan to make the journey to Bombay, and for him then to undertake a further trip south to settle what appears to have been a fairly small matter. This expedition was used in part to justify Cowan's trip to Bombay. Cowan wrote that he was 'hurrying from place to place'. He said that he would return to Mocha, but that he would be back in Bombay by the following September.<sup>89</sup> In a letter to Henry Lyell, Cowan wrote of his unexpected stay in Carwar, and added that unfortunately he would not have time to conclude the Company's reforms there, as he was due to return to North Yemen.

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<sup>86</sup> Cowan to Jeremiah Jones, 13 February 1727, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1C.

<sup>87</sup> Cowan to John Gould, 9 September 1724, *ibid.*

<sup>88</sup> Cowan to William Phipps, 5 December 1724, *ibid.*

<sup>89</sup> Cowan to Mrs Macrae, 8 December 1724, *ibid.*

Although Cowan seemed to take advantage of any excuse to return to Bombay, he was astute enough to realise that he could not overplay his alleged ill health. His comment in a letter accurately reflects the President's expectations: 'no body near Govr Phipps can eat yr company's bread without earning it.'<sup>90</sup> Cowan knew exactly how to earn his bread, and that was by endorsing any actions taken by Phipps on the Company's behalf, and also in continuing to work hard in order to improve the company's profits and to enrich them both through their private trade matters.<sup>91</sup> In this letter, Cowan gave the impression that he was desirous of making a speedy return to Mocha, and also wrote of changes in the leading men in the East India Company. He spoke of remaining in touch with the most important men in the Directorate to reinforce his promotion chances, but at the same time he flattered Phipps by stating 'But I shall have a greater dependence on yr Hon<sup>r</sup> Recommendation to the Gov<sup>r</sup>.'<sup>92</sup> Whether he had by that stage successfully ensured that Phipps would endorse him as his successor remains conjecture but he was more confident, and seemed content to return to his position in Mocha. Bearing in mind that Phipps was then only in his second year as President he was clearly teasing Cowan with his talk of returning at an early date to England, and by keeping his clients and subordinates guessing, he forced their continued allegiance and compliance to suit his own aims.

Cowan considered that he should be seen not just as another contender for the most lucrative position on the west coast of India, but as the only suitable person for the Governorship. He had two major advantages over most aspirants. He had impressed his friend and colleague, the incumbent President, with his business and negotiating skills, and he had attained the backing of numerous patrons within the

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<sup>90</sup> Cowan to Henry Lyell 8 December 1724, PRONI RCP D/654/B1/C.

<sup>91</sup> Cowan to William Phipps, 10 March 1725, *ibid*.

<sup>92</sup> Cowan to William Phipps, 5 December 1724, *ibid*.

East India Company. There was a serious contender for the position – Robert Adams – who at some stage had received the endorsement for the position from the Directorate. To his friend, Henry Cairnes, he wrote that Phipps

has got as much as will satisfy him & talks of going home next year. I doubt not but there are sundrys who solicit to succeed him but if nobody is appointed from England Mr Adams from Calicut is already named by the company, tho I verry much question his filling the chair while there are so many gentlemen at home out of employ ...<sup>93</sup>

Adams was based at Calicut, and later at Tellicherry, both subordinate factories to Bombay, on the Mallabar coast. In fact, Adams was extremely at home in this region as he had lived there since childhood.<sup>94</sup> During this crucial time Cowan remained isolated at Mocha in the Persian Gulf. The ‘man on the spot’ must have always been favoured to win the post, and this explains Cowan's frequent trips to Bombay during his tenure as Chief of Mocha.

One way to gain advantage over an opponent was to discredit him. Cowan sewed the seeds of doubt about Adams's worthiness to John Gould, Snr.

Gov<sup>r</sup> \_\_\_\_ is resolved to go home in December 1725 and if by that time a successor is not appointed from England Mr \_\_\_\_ must succeed him how worthily I won't take upon me to say ...<sup>95</sup>

In another letter written the same day, Cowan actually named the successor as Mr Adams.<sup>96</sup> However, at some stage Adams fell foul of the Directorate, and, although he claimed that his actions were made with their endorsement, the Company rescinded his

<sup>93</sup> Cowan to Henry Cairnes, 9 September 1724, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1C.

<sup>94</sup> N. Rajendran, *Establishment of British Power in Malabar, (1664 to 1799)*, Chugh Publications, Allahabad, 1979, p.75.

<sup>95</sup> Cowan to John Gould Snr., 9 September 1724, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1C.

<sup>96</sup> Cowan to Henry Cairnes, 9 September 1724, *ibid.* Cowan stated ‘but if nobody is appointed from England Mr Adams from Calicut is already named by the company’.

appointment in 1726.<sup>97</sup> Cowan's suspicions about Adams's suitability seem justified when he wrote to Edward Harrison in 1728 to inform him of the unusual circumstances surrounding Adams's departure from Tellicherry. He apparently left without handing over his keys, and the letter of authority to his successor, Mr. Braddyll.<sup>98</sup> Adams later raised allegations against Cowan and Phipps to Captain Francis D'Abbadie claiming that the duo had sent coffee to Portugal by 'way of Goa', and hinted that the East India Company thought it had been defrauded. He thought that as a result, Cowan would be 'sent for home', and John Braddyll installed as the Bombay Governor.<sup>99</sup> Phipps and Cowan survived this attack probably due to the fact that Phipps was entrenched in Leadenhall Street, and was therefore well placed to defend their integrity.

Cowan's concern in his letters returned to the problems that Phipps was experiencing in his 'publick & private affairs', and his own impatience to hear from the Directorate in Leadenhall Street, presumably about his chances of succeeding Phipps as Governor.<sup>100</sup> These constant references to his impending retirement must have taxed Phipps's patience at times and he may have remained in the Presidency for as long as he did simply from spite. Another letter followed hot on the heels of the previous communication when Cowan announced that he had received some good news from England with the arrival of Captain Westerbane. With obvious delight he announced to Phipps that 'The Company is prosecuting Mr Mathews vigourously,' over alleged trading with a 'Pyrat'.<sup>101</sup> Furthermore, 'the naughty Commodore' was alleged to have been conducting his own private trade when he was employed to protect the Company's

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<sup>97</sup> Rajendran, *op.cit.*, pp.73-74.

<sup>98</sup> Cowan to Edward Harrison, c. August/September 1728, PRONI RCP D654/B1/2A.

<sup>99</sup> BL, H/MISC/37, *Letter Books of Robert and Mrs. Adams: Letter Book commencing Jan'y 2<sup>d</sup> 1729/30 and ends July 11<sup>th</sup> 1732*. Adams to Francis Dabbadie, London, 25 January, 1730. See also Chapter 5, p.186.

<sup>100</sup> Cowan to William Phipps, c. May 1725, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1C.

<sup>101</sup> Cowan to William Phipps, 2 May 1725, *ibid.*

interests.<sup>102</sup> Another, almost gleeful, letter followed five days later with the news for Phipps that his 'dear friend' Matthews was to be tried by a High Commission Court of the Admiralty.<sup>103</sup> This legal action against Matthews must have come as welcome news to Phipps. How swiftly the fortunes of Phipps had turned around and, with them, those of Cowan.

Only six months later Cowan and Phipps' probity had been called into doubt yet again. Notice of this latest accusation was brought to Cowan's knowledge in December 1725 by his friend James Macrae:

I must acquaint you of a paragraph in Natt<sup>a</sup> Gould's letter wherein he tells me there is a story at home that Mr Phipps & you have made an agreement that he shall leave the Governm<sup>t</sup> in your hands & that if he and his friends can get you established then you are to allow him a considerable share in the Profits. Mr John Gould & other Friends have taken great pains to render this story ridiculous which he hopes is in a good measure effected. I should be very sorry to find there is any Truth in this story.<sup>104</sup>

In a letter to John Gould, Jr, Cowan referred to Phipps planned return to England and to the allegations contained in what he considered to be:

the scandalous report of Gov<sup>r</sup> Phipps agreeing with me for a pension annually, provided he could procure me the succession, can never be believed by anyone who knows anything of my carracter or temper . . . I must do Mr Phipps the justice to assure you on my word of honour that he never gave the least intimation or hint that ever he expected any the smallest acknowledgement for the favours he has done me but I am persuaded his good offices proceeded from true friendship & the opinion he had of my poor services . . .<sup>105</sup>

<sup>102</sup> Chaudhuri, *op.cit.*, p.110; Biddulph, *loc.cit.*, Cowan to James Macrae, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1C.

<sup>103</sup> Cowan to William Phipps, 7 May 1725, *ibid.*, Chaudhuri, *op.cit.*, pp.110-111.

<sup>104</sup> Macrae to Robert Cowan, 13 December 1725, PRONI RCP D654/B1/4A.

<sup>105</sup> Cowan to John Gould Jr., 1 January 1726, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1C.

Macrae advised Cowan that he did not need such arrangements with William Phipps to advance to the Presidency, and furthermore, he, Macrae, had the assurances of ‘a very good friend’ in the Direction in this matter. To reinforce this, he added ‘You may be assured of all my Interests serve you.’<sup>106</sup> This is a classic example of the work of the London based patrons, as they could not have known whether the allegations were true or not, but following Macrae’s advocacy they were prepared to defend their man with alacrity.

These accusations may not have been without foundation because in 1731 Cowan committed to paper the following words to Phipps: ‘I shall continue to remitt you annually by way of China 15000 R<sup>s</sup> & of no more any other way until receiving your further orders.’<sup>107</sup> At an exchange rate of about eight rupees to the English pound, this is a substantial sum, approximately £1,875 per annum, and such large, regular and obviously on-going payments must at least give some credence to the allegations made some six years earlier. That the money was shipped through China, and not the East India Company’s regular routes also adds to the mystery. To disprove the claims was almost impossible because of the double impediment of time and distance, but he was certainly capable of putting forward a good, and eloquent case. His other option was to rely on the effectiveness of his patrons to quash the accusations and rumours, and his representatives were strong enough to overcome any charges levelled against him.

These particular broadsides against Phipps and Cowan emanated from John Hope, who was at that stage a resident of Bombay, but they surfaced in London through

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<sup>106</sup> Macrae to Robert Cowan, 13 December 1725, PRONI RCP D654/B1/4A.

<sup>107</sup> Cowan to William Phipps, c. September 1731, PRONI RCP D654/B1/2C.

one of Hope's patrons, John Drummond.<sup>108</sup> It is likely that a friend of Hope, Henry Lowther, who was also a protégé of Drummond's, played a part in the dispute.<sup>109</sup> Lowther wrote to Drummond in April 1725 from Deal, Kent, prior to his return to India, strenuously defending Hope against allegations made by Phipps. He said that 'Mr Phipps charge against Mr Hope surprises me very much, should he make good his allegations the other has long deceived mankind' and offered to

...dive more into the bottom of this and several other things, and as you have given me the liberty to trouble you I shall take the freedom to let you know the truth.<sup>110</sup>

The reference to Hope is about his suspension in 1723 from his position as Chief of Surat. Obviously the order for such an action originated from Governor Phipps, but it was Cowan, who was then still based in Bombay, who advised Hope of his suspension, and said that his conduct 'in relation to Mr Wych and suspected attachment to the interest of the late Brokers' was the cause of his troubles.<sup>111</sup> Anyone who had supported the ousted Brokers must surely have been a target for the new regime under Phipps. Cowan stressed that he had tried to defend Hope's position, but eventually he had to comply with the decision in order to maintain his own integrity. His explanation can have been of little comfort to Hope.

... the same have been taxed as luke warm in the Company's affairs, till at last there was no room left for me, to oppose the torrent without rendering myself noxious to my Superiors.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> Malabari, *op.cit.*, pp.233, 327; G.K. McGilvary, 'East India patronage and the political management of Scotland', PhD thesis, Open University, 1989, p.133.

<sup>109</sup> *ibid.*, Das Gupta, *op.cit.*, p.190. Das Gupta states that 'Henry Lowther arrived as a factor at Surat in 1719'; Forrest, *op.cit.*, Vol. II, p.3. At some stage between 2 July 1723 and 1 January 1724 Lowther was promoted to the rank of Junior Merchant. This promotion doubled his pay from £15 to £30 per annum. As he returned to England at or about this time, he served only 20 days at this rank.

<sup>110</sup> NAS, *Abercainry*, GD24/1/464C/ff.69-71. Lowther to John Drummond, Deal, 6 April 1725.

<sup>111</sup> Cowan to John Hope, 16 October 1723, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1B.

<sup>112</sup> *ibid.*, Das Gupta, *op.cit.*, pp. 181-193. Das Gupta gives a very detailed account of the affair of the Brokers, including Hope's suspension,

Hope retaliated by appealing to his friends in Leadenhall Street. This exchange of letters inevitably led to a rallying of the various supporters behind the two antagonists. At this point Lowther, who had once been Captain Matthews' agent, combined with the opponents of Phipps, Boone and Cowan.<sup>113</sup> This arrangement was not to last because at some stage Lowther switched allegiances. He and Cowan became firm friends and staunch business partners sometime after Lowther returned to India in 1725. Upon his return he must have realised that in order to advance in the Service he needed not only patrons in England, but also the backing of the incumbent Governor and his cronies. Even the best and most influential of patrons in England could not work miracles if the man in charge of local patronage decided to withhold his favour. Cowan wrote to Henry's brother, Sir William Lowther in 1731, stating that he and Henry had been 'intimately acquainted' since he had arrived in the East and that his brother's 'affability and good sense' had recommended him.<sup>114</sup> In a complete volte-face on his return to India, Lowther became a determined supporter of William Phipps, to the extent that he and Cowan were both accused by Captain D'Abbadie of being 'creatures' of Phipps.<sup>115</sup>

Cowan vigorously defended Phipps' actions against Hope, denied any suggestion that he had anything to gain from the latter's downfall, stated that all ambitious men must have enemies, and concluded that evidence existed to show that Phipps's action was justified:

... nor do I believe his writing the Company of Mr Hope's mismanagement was with a view to my advantage, so much as for their information & tho I have allways lived in strict friendship with

<sup>113</sup> Das Gupta, *ibid.* p.190. Das Gupta states that Lowther was Matthews' agent in 1723, and joined Bombay Council, 27 September 1725.

<sup>114</sup> Cowan to Sir William Lowther, 11 December 1731, PRONI RCP D654/B1/2C.

<sup>115</sup> Watson, *loc.cit.*



Mr Hope & am his wellwisher, by what I can hear there was good grounds for that charge against him.<sup>116</sup>

He referred to this incident three years later in a letter to Charles Boone, and although Hope had retired from the Company's service he was still a resident in Bombay in 1727, and sparring amongst the supporters of the two families of brokers resurfaced intermittently.<sup>117</sup>

By September 1726, Cowan was back in Bombay after a lengthy and severe attack of gout. He was even further indebted to Phipps by this stage for his intervention with Edward Harrison, to whom Cowan had apparently written a particularly acerbic letter. Cowan's letters written whilst he was suffering from gout are easy to recognise from his usual measured and carefully tempered efforts. Whilst incapacitated he always sounded churlish and impatient, and sometimes decidedly tetchy. He apologised to Harrison stating that the letter referred to was written whilst he was in such a condition: 'I confess I wrote that letter under a good deal of bodily indisposition.'<sup>118</sup> Phipps had described the letter as being couched in 'terms too hot from servants to their masters'.<sup>119</sup> The actual contents of the offending letter remain a mystery, as any extant letters to Harrison in the appropriate time span simply consist of his usual client to patron reports. Cowan merely made a note of a letter that he despatched to Harrison on the *Greenwich* on 4 September 1725, and that one might have been the culprit.<sup>120</sup> As Phipps was not known for his placid and even temper, this communication to Harrison must have been really over the top. Cowan described his feelings about the rebuke he had received from the Directorate thus:

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<sup>116</sup> Cowan to John Gould, Jr., 1 January 1726, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1B.

<sup>117</sup> Das Gupta, *op.cit.*, p. 193.

<sup>118</sup> Cowan to Edward Harrison, 6 September 1726, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1C.

<sup>119</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>120</sup> Cowan to Edward Harrison, 4 September 1725, *ibid.*

tis somewhat shocking to a generous spirit to be censured by his supervisors, throu the mistake or misinformation of one of their officers which was my case, when at the same time his conscience bears him witness that he has acted with the utmost Zeal and Integrity in their Service ...<sup>121</sup>

The image of the ‘generous spirit’ conjured by this passage is that of a wounded and subservient person and it is difficult to imagine someone with the sheer verve and vitality that Cowan possessed ever fitting the picture he presented here of a forelock tugging Company servant. He always played his game boldly, at times ruthlessly, and always to win.

Phipps still appeared undecided upon his retirement date in 1726, and Cowan suggested further trading deals between them, if Phipps decide to remain for another year.<sup>122</sup> Regardless of all his valuable connections in the East India Company, and elsewhere, he still felt his career prospects were in abeyance. He confided to Henry Cairnes that he would ‘preserve’ William Phipps’s friendship and that he still thought he had a chance to succeed to the Governorship even though the last General Letter from the Company had not mentioned the appointment. Although Cairnes whispered confidential assurances to his friend about his promotion, Cowan was never one to count his chickens before they had hatched.<sup>123</sup> He was destined to wait another two long years, as Phipps did not officially relinquish his post until the beginning of 1729. Cowan’s astute private business dealings, especially those involving Phipps, may well have led to the latter deferring his return to England. Cowan may well have contributed, albeit unwittingly, to the delay in his career advancement by simply being too good at making money.

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<sup>121</sup> Cowan to Edward Harrison, 6 September 1726, PR/ONI RCP D654/B1/1C.

<sup>122</sup> Cowan to William Phipps, 7 May 1726, *ibid.*

<sup>123</sup> Cowan to Henry Cairnes, 12 January 1727, *ibid.*

Cowan must have been disconcerted when he heard the news in June 1727 from Captain David Hunter who had recently arrived in Madras that: 'Govr Phipps will be permitted to continue as long as he pleases which I am afraid will be too long.'<sup>124</sup> The Company's policy on length of service as Governor was haphazard. Cowan wrote to Robert Lennox after James Macrae's retirement that he had 'contrary to the advise of his wellwishers stayd six months too long' which he added had 'given his Enemys ane opportunity of rejoycing at his fall'.<sup>125</sup> However, during the period from 1668 to 1784, there were eighteen men appointed as Governor of Bombay, and their average term was 6.36 years. Included in those statistics are two Presidencies of over ten years.<sup>126</sup> Even more relevant was the length of term of Cowan's three predecessors: William Aislable, Charles Boone and William Phipps, who served seven years one month, six years two months, and seven years respectively.<sup>127</sup> One historian claims that Cowan's length of tenure was 'unusual' but these figures show that was not the case.<sup>128</sup> Throughout the eighteenth century, extended terms of Governorships were the norm rather than something unusual, and it is strange that Cowan thought Macrae's short extension of office should have incurred criticism, when rigid adherence to the rule was not usual.

As Cowan had already been in the East for over six years at this stage, he was genuinely concerned that he was running out of time. A further extension of Phipps's term of office must have seemed as though he was forever to be denied his chance to

<sup>124</sup> D. Hunter to Robert Cowan, 15 June 1727, PRONI RCP D654/B1/4A, 15A-B.

<sup>125</sup> Cowan to Robert Lennox, 30 July 1730, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1F.

<sup>126</sup> Desai, *loc.cit.* The two Governors who served terms of more than ten years were Sir John Gayer, 17 May 1694 – November 1704 and William Hornby, 26 February 1771 – January 1784.

<sup>127</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>128</sup> H.D. Love, *Vestiges of Old Madras 1640-1800*, Vol. II, John Murray, London, 1913, p. 224.

redeem his position in society. Cowan's other patron in India, James Macrae, sought to reassure him yet again about his prospects:

I have a letter from my good friend, Mr Drummond, wherein he assures me he will use all his Interest for your Service, and desires me to write to all my friends, that you may succeed Mr Phipps, which I shall do by the January ships with pleasure, I heartily wish it may succeed.<sup>129</sup>

Even with these assurances Cowan still had a whole nerve-racking year ahead of him. He well knew that there were many who could and, given the opportunity, would work against him during that period. Cowan was only one of many participants in the patronage game, and he was not alone in attempting to make a fortune. As well as these hazards, he also had to face the ravages of the Indian climate and the terrible toll it inflicted upon the Company servants.

It was with great delight in January 1728 that Cowan was able to inform Macrae of his receipt of the news about the appointment of the new Governor of Bombay.

As I am sure you Interest your self in every thing that regards my welfare I perswade my self youl be pleased that I tell you the Court of Directors have unanimously by this ship appointed me to succeed Govr Phipps when he thinks proper to resign the Government which I believe will be next December.<sup>130</sup>

How gratified he must have been to be able to include the word 'unanimously' in this letter. All his hard work to garner the approval of such a large and diverse group of men had finally paid off. Always aware of the conventions and the importance of

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<sup>129</sup> Macrae to Robert Cowan, 27 September 1727, PRONI RCP D654/B1/4A.

<sup>130</sup> Cowan to James Macrae, 18 January 1728, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1C.

continuing to appease his patrons, Cowan even in his joy did not fail to acknowledge the assistance he had received from Macrae.

I am not the less oblinded to your Hon<sup>r</sup> for your readiness to write your friends on my behalf as well as for the good offices you did me with them while in England for both I render you my harty acknowledgements<sup>131</sup>

To Henry Lowther he proudly relayed John Drummond's praise of his 'negotiations' at Mocha that were considered to be 'verry satisfactory to the comp<sup>y</sup>', and this achievement must have contributed to the Directors' decision in his favour.<sup>132</sup> This is further evidence that Cowan did work hard for the Company, as well as himself. Confiding to Martin French in 1729 Cowan still exhibited some insecurity over his fate, as he feared that Henry Lyell had died and that Edward Harrison would now 'carry the greatest sway in the India House'. Perhaps he was concerned about possible consequences of that rash letter four years earlier, and he added that he would feel more certain of his future once William Phipps had arrived in London, and could further protect his position.<sup>133</sup> Notwithstanding his nervousness about Harrison, he included him amongst those he felt had contributed to his success, and that they all approved of what he termed his 'Conduct' and that he would 'endeavour to deserve the continuance of their good opinion.'<sup>134</sup>

His concerns surfaced again in correspondence to Henry Lyell in the last quarter of 1729. Cowan now feared damage could be inflicted upon him when John Lambton arrived back in England following his dismissal from the Company's

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<sup>131</sup> Cowan to James Macrae, 18 January 1728, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1C.

<sup>132</sup> Cowan to Henry Lowther, 17 August 1729, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1D.

<sup>133</sup> Cowan to Martin French, 8 October 1729, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1E.

<sup>134</sup> Cowan to James Macrae, *loc.cit.* He named the following men as providing him with valuable support within the East India Company: Mathew Decker, Edward Harrison, Henry Lyell and John Drummond.

service.<sup>135</sup> According to the East India Company records, Cowan suspended Lambton because the latter had ‘too freely corresponded with another of our Servants’. Amongst the charges levelled against Lambton were those of libel, ‘scandalous correspondence’ and corruption of a young man in the Secretary’s Office.<sup>136</sup> Amongst Lambton’s papers, Cowan discovered what he deemed to be false allegations of him drawing bills for his own account at Mocha. In case any accusations arose against his predecessor, Cowan shortly thereafter wrote to Lambton’s patron, Charles Boone.<sup>137</sup> He stoutly defended William Phipps, and, by so doing, protected his own position. To the Directorate, Cowan and Lowther said that Lambton’s complaint ‘rose from hearsay, malice and pique’.<sup>138</sup>

Cowan launched a counter-attack against Lambton’s close friend Thomas Waters, Chief of Bandar Abbas.<sup>139</sup> Their battle was one that lasted for some considerable time because Waters took his case back to England, and Cowan warned William Phipps in February 1731 that ‘Waters designs to go to law with you ...’.<sup>140</sup> Waters had been suspended and recalled to Bombay because of ‘some fraudulent practices lately discovered in his management of the Comp<sup>y</sup> affairs’.<sup>141</sup> Cowan wrote:

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<sup>135</sup> Cowan to Henry Lyell, c. September 1728 - January 1729, PRONI RCP D654/B1/2A; Das Gupta, *op.cit.*, pp.190 -191. John Lambton was promised the position of Landpaymaster by Cowan, but the position was given to Cowan’s friend and ally, Henry Lowther. In a letter to Thomas Waters, Lambton vented his spleen about being denied his promotion, and, to add insult to injury, he had discovered that Lowther had also been promised the position as Chief of Surat. He, in the meantime, was to be given the Chiefship of Anjenjo – a position he was ‘determined to decline’.

<sup>136</sup> Cowan to Charles Boone, 25 September 1728, PRONI RCP D654/B1/2A; Das Gupta, *op.cit.*, pp.192 -193.

<sup>137</sup> Cowan to Charles Boone, 10 January 1730, PRONI RCP D654/B1/2B.

<sup>138</sup> OIOC, E/4/450, *Bombay Abstract: Letters Received, Bombay General*, 22 January 1731, para.112.

<sup>139</sup> Cowan to Thomas Waters, 30 December 1726, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1C. Cowan congratulated Waters on his appointment as Chief of Gombroon.

<sup>140</sup> Cowan to William Phipps, 3 February 1731, PRONI RCP D/654/B1/2C; Watson, *op.cit.*, p.217.

<sup>141</sup> Cowan to Martin French, 18 October 1728, *loc.cit*

the most servile adulation and flattery I have seen Mr Waters guilty of to Mr Phipps when his prisoner, behind his back he has treated his Carracter with the most scurrilous reproaches.<sup>142</sup>

He said that Phipps had been informed of this gross disloyalty, and that if he, Cowan, had not been so far away, he would have been able to calm matters. This was a tricky situation as it involved Cowan taking a stand against one of Boone's clients, in order to defend both Phipps and himself who, to further complicate matters, were also Boone's protégés. Cowan added that he hoped Boone retained his 'good opinion' of him.<sup>143</sup> Waters was dismissed from the Service, and made to repay the money he had defrauded the Company, although he requested, and was granted, permission to remain in Bombay.<sup>144</sup> As so often happened with such squabbles, all appears to have been resolved, and Waters was back in Bombay in 1733, again serving under Cowan, as 8<sup>th</sup> in Council.<sup>145</sup>

Two years into his Governorship and Cowan was once more concerned over attacks on him in England. He referred his friend Henry Cairnes to John Gould at the beginning of 1730 for information on his 'Behaviour in my Publick capacity & how my conduct is approved of. I do my best to give Content . . .'<sup>146</sup> Although Henry Cairnes had suffered personal financial misfortune a couple of years earlier he still retained some influence within the upper echelons of business and society.<sup>147</sup> There were stories circulating of a dispute between Charles Boone and William Phipps and, being a client of both men, Cowan was naturally concerned lest he offended either patron. He told

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<sup>142</sup> Cowan to Charles Boone, 10 January 1730, PRONI RCP D654/B1/2B.

<sup>143</sup> Cowan to Charles Boone, 12 September 1731, PRONI RCP D654/B1/2C. Waters must have changed his mind about remaining in Bombay because Cowan reported that: 'Mr Waters of his own accord went home on the Lothalier'

<sup>144</sup> Cowan to Matthew Decker, c. 1 September 1729, PRONI RCP D654/B1/2A.

<sup>145</sup> Forrest, *op.cit.*, Vol. I, p.169.

<sup>146</sup> Cowan to Henry Cairnes, 10 January 1730, PRONI RCP D654/B1/2B.

<sup>147</sup> See also Chapter 3, pp.117-118.

George Morton Pitt, the Governor of Fort St. George, that he hoped that Edward Harrison would act as intermediary between the two men. Always fearful of collateral damage from such disputes, he added 'I depend on the powerfull patronage of Gov<sup>r</sup> Harrison & my own integrity to ward off any blow that may be designed me by my Adversarys ...'<sup>148</sup> The disagreement was clearly of a serious nature as he warned Henry Lowther of imminent problems the same day as his letter to Pitt. He began by stating that 'Mr Phipps has found more trouble in England than he expected', and added:

Mr Dodding Braddyll is making interest to gett his brother removed to Surat but I think that if your friends are not verry indolent they may easily keep you where you are, you must expect that Govr Boone will do you all the disservice he can. He & Mr Phipps seem to be at open Warr...<sup>149</sup>

The repercussions of a quarrel in Leadenhall Street were felt half way around the world, and were amplified by the intricate nature of the patronage and kinship network. Whatever the problems that existed between his two patrons, Cowan prudently maintained his correspondence with both men.

Cowan was to learn early in his Presidency that achieving such a rank was not the most difficult challenge that he would have to face. Keeping the position was to prove just as much of a battle, despite having William Phipps as a staunch supporter in Leadenhall Street. Phipps's support of Cowan may have annoyed other servants more than Cowan's actual success. The attacks on the duo were, in the main, directed at Phipps, thereby leaving some openings for dealings with the current Governor. Clearly

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<sup>148</sup> Cowan to George Morton Pitt, 23 August 1730, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1F.

<sup>149</sup> Cowan to Henry Lowther 23 August 1730, *ibid.*, Cowan to Edward Harrison, 22 January 1732, PRONI RCP D654/B1/2C. Sir Matthew Decker and John Drummond were known to be major patrons of Lowther, but it is also possible that he also numbered Edward Harrison and William Phipps amongst his 'friends' as he had appointed them as his attorneys by January 1732.



some of these longer serving men, like Adams, felt slighted by the nomination William Phipps made to the Directorate for his replacement, especially if they too were recipients of his patronage. A direct opponent of Cowan was a John Wallis, but as he did not arrive in India until January 1727 it is hard to see why he considered himself as a potential governor after only two years of residency in India.<sup>150</sup> Cowan wrote to Hezekiah King, Chief of Anjenjo, 1728-1732, in September 1728 that Wallis had been:

ordered Chief of your factory in case Mr Orme had not been removed the Council seem to intertain a good oppinion of his integrity & cappacity, I believe however they will find themselves mistaken for I don't see any signs of his reformation more than that he is about taking to him a wife which perhaps may settle him<sup>151</sup>

John Wallis was made Second in Council at Anjenjo, a subordinate factory to Bombay on the Mallabar Coast, in 1729 but he was either a born troublemaker or for some reason he fell foul of the ruling elite in India. Whatever the cause, he had managed to incur the enmity of the hierarchy, and his chances of a successful career were diminished. There was little love lost between Cowan and Wallis, as shown by this message sent by Cowan to Hezekiah King:

Mr Wallis goes on this gally with his lady I hope he will not prove troublesome to you but if he should and you can fix any irregular or unfair practices upon him he will meet with no favour here.<sup>152</sup>

This introduction to his new Chief did not augur well for Wallis's future. A year later Cowan complained to William Phipps about Wallis' behaviour.

You will hear of Mr Wallis' behaviour at Anjanjo which occasiond his being recalld from thence. Such a composition of vanity, impudence & Ignorance I never mett within one man if the Court of

<sup>150</sup> Cowan to Thomas Watters, 4 January 1727, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1C.

<sup>151</sup> Cowan to Hezekiah King, 20 September 1728, *ibid.*

<sup>152</sup> Cowan to Hezekiah King, 8 January 1729, *ibid.*

Directors will accept or encourage such Correspondence, theyll frequently be entertained with Elaborate Epistles from their Settlements in India, tho I think Scarce with any Equal to Mr Watter's notable performances.<sup>153</sup>

At least Cowan acknowledged that he did not consider Wallis to have descended quite to the level of another of his adversaries. The list had grown by October of that year to include Messrs Thomas Rammell and Edward Page, whom, when grouped with Waters, were described by Cowan as being as 'full of Rancour & Mallice as can be imagined'.<sup>154</sup> As both Rammell and Page were by this time on their way back to England, their anticipated concerted attacks on Cowan, following so closely on those made by Lambton and Wallis, must have caused him some serious concern.<sup>155</sup>

From these examples it can be seen that it was hard work for men like Cowan to retain their positions of trust with their patrons when disgruntled men returned to England. Some men, many of whom failed to make even a 'competency' let alone a fortune, were willing to caste aspersions on the characters and business dealings of those more fortunate men who remained in India. Such tales were occasionally used to cover their own misdemeanours or failings, and, as such, it was an understandable method of defence. It must have been very difficult to assess from such a distance the veracity of such attacks, and the appropriate level of response required. Added to this was the need for Servants to keep abreast of the ever-shifting allegiances and alliances within the East India Company Directorate. Cowan had cause to comment on his

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<sup>153</sup> Cowan to William Phipps, 26 January 1730, PRONI RCP D654/B1/2B.

<sup>154</sup> Cowan to William Phipps, 20 October 1730, *ibid.* Rammell was stationed in Mocha during Cowan's chiefship there; OIOC, E/4/450, *Mocha and General*, 6 August 1725, para. 88. The letter was signed by R. Cowan, Thomas Rammell, *et al.*, Forrest, *op.cit.* Vol II, p.47. Thomas Rammell was 5<sup>th</sup> in Council on a salary of £40 per annum 2 July 1728 – 1 January 1729.

<sup>155</sup> OIOC, E/4/450, *Bombay Abstract Letters Received*, *Bombay General*, 22 January 1731, para.106, 'Mr Thomas Rammell and Mr Edward Page return on these ships'.

gratitude to his benefactors when it is clear that without their combined efforts on his behalf he might well have incurred the censure of Sir Josias Wordsworth:

Mr Phipps & some other of my friends in London have assured me that you [Wordsworth] have been so good as not to suffer some insinuations made to my prejudice to make any impression on you to my disadvantage ...<sup>156</sup>

He finished his letter with the statement that his reply to the charges made against him was already on its way to England.

Not only was he under attack from returning company servants, but his network had also informed him of the schemes of someone in England who was desirous of supplanting Cowan in his position in Bombay, and who was using another Company patron, Henry Lyell, to support his pretensions.

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.<sup>157</sup>

This letter shows that even after death a very influential patron could still be used in order to rally support. Cowan went on to say that he was aware of his obligations to the Company and that his Presidency was 'a much enjoyd station', but most tellingly he added 'tis difficult to please everybody'.<sup>158</sup> Cowan was beginning to realise that there was a price to pay for the glory he had aspired to and, seemingly against all odds, won. Again he mentioned that attempts were made to discredit him through his friendship with William Phipps, and he said that although he would be guided by his

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<sup>156</sup> Cowan to Josias Wordsworth, 20 January 1731, PRONI RCP D654/B1/2B.

<sup>157</sup> Cowan to Henry Lyell, 20 January 1731, *ibid.*

<sup>158</sup> *ibid.*

predecessors 'maxims', he would certainly follow 'the Dictates of my own reason.' He finished his letter with a plea for Lyell's continuing friendship.<sup>159</sup> He wrote to Arthur Sturt early in 1732 that he had already 'acquired a pritty fortune', but as the Company knew all about their Servants affairs, he was loath to 'make any Considerable Remittances so early in my government they might take it in their heads to recall me sooner than I desird'. He said that his health continued 'tolerably good' and that 'a verry few years more will make me perfectly easy in my circumstances'.<sup>160</sup>

Whilst he was still under threat from these accusations, Cowan remained responsible for the well-being and sustenance of some of his erstwhile enemies, until he received clear direction from the Company on their future. One such instance of this dilemma was the case of Mr Wallis.<sup>161</sup>

Wallis through his dismission from the Service is become an object of charity, I never was an enemy to his person but to his follys . . . I will endeavour to put him in a way of getting his bread until the Company's pleasure concerning him is known.<sup>162</sup>

Cowan was a gruff, wily and self-promoting character, and a healthy dose of cynicism will question whether his motives were actually altruistic, or whether he saw a possibility for profit in assisting Wallis to get his 'bread'. He was never hesitant in promoting the interests of clients if he felt such actions could result in kudos for himself. Cowan wrote to Henry Lyell in 1728 that he thought the greatest charge that could be made against him was that he was too friendly with Phipps.<sup>163</sup> Considering how intricately they were involved in trading together, and that Phipps had definitely

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<sup>159</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>160</sup> Cowan to Arthur Sturt, 20 January 1732, PRONI RCP D/654/B1/2C.

<sup>161</sup> See above pp. 222-246.

<sup>162</sup> Cowan to William Phipps, 8 September 1731, *loc.cit.*

<sup>163</sup> Cowan to Henry Lyell, c. September 1728, PRONI RCP D654/B1/2A.

provided Cowan with enormous and sustained support during his career with the East India Company, it would be an understatement to classify them as mere friends. They were accused of various improprieties by several persons, and it is hard to believe that some of the allegations did not contain a grain of truth.

Cowan was a diligent correspondent throughout his time in the East India Company's service and this worked both to his advantage and against him. As the correspondence could be read by any number of people in the Company's employ, it was only sensible to apply caution in reference to private trade, but the correspondence also provided Cowan with a platform to advise his patrons of his dealings and to defend his actions against any detractors. From the examples cited above, it can be seen that the company was prepared to overlook such misdemeanours as murder plots amongst their employees, but they did come down fairly heavily on anyone considered to be working against the Company's interests. However, men, like Thomas Waters, who fell out of favour were more often than not given a second chance, and this was probably due to a combination of patrons' efforts on their behalf, and staff shortages caused by the high attrition rate amongst Company servants.

Cowan, having achieved the rank of Governor, not only had to maintain and nurture the patronage he received, but also had to facilitate some form of repayment for the favours granted to him for his long list of supporters. With such a complicated network of patrons and business dealings it must have been a more or less fulltime occupation to ensure that favours were adequately repaid. Cowan had to ensure that he worked adequately for the Company's interests, whilst endeavouring to make his own fortune and improving those of his patrons, and simultaneously providing aid for

his own clients and those of his patrons. The various methods of repayment included political and mercantile support, as well as provision of reciprocal patronage, both vertical and horizontal, in various amounts, down to gifts of varying values for those who provided lesser degrees of patronage. These methods will be described and evaluated in the following chapter.

## Chapter Six - Connections

*Legend:*

Connection: —

Patronage: —→

### East India Company Directors and Servants in England and India

