

## Chapter Seven:

### Methods of Repayment

**‘but not want of zeal for their service’<sup>1</sup>**

In the early eighteenth century there were three methods, two obvious and one less so, by which payment could be rendered for patronage bestowed by members of the East India Company in London. Of the two more common procedures, one was through the continuation of the vertical patronage system, of the type dealt with in the previous chapter, by extension to other clients of patrons. Included in this method of repayment was horizontal patronage, that is, aid granted to men of similar rank within the Service, and this avenue will be explored in Chapter Eight. The second was in the form of gifts of diverse kinds that were sent back to England, for the personal benefit of patrons or their family members. In Cowan’s correspondence there is ample evidence of both of these methods. The third method was through joint trading ventures between the Company servant in question and those to whom he was indebted, and, occasionally, some of their clients, but it is one that is difficult to prove conclusively. Company servants did not explicitly write of such transactions, but their detailed communications indicate that such information was of more than a passing interest to their patrons.

In research on The East India Company’s Accountant-General’s Ledger, No.38, Mildred Wretts-Smith discovered that nearly 85 per cent of the Company’s

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

Directors were 'interested in private trade' in 1680-1681, and there is no valid reason why the situation would have altered dramatically by the 1720s and 1730s.<sup>2</sup> For example, Portugal merchant and East India Company Director, William Braund, was known to be a 'shipping director', who was involved with his brother's business dealings as well as being a part-owner in four other vessels.<sup>3</sup> The intricate patronage network helped the Directors by putting them in the way of financial dealings with a wider cross section of mercantile adventurers. These included men like Robert Cowan and Henry Lowther, thereby giving them access to a greater business and trading circle. Such diversification, which included loss minimisation, was the great advantage of the provision of patronage. Spreading their investments, meant smaller outlays, and made their private dealings much less noticeable to prying eyes within the East India Company itself. Private trade was more of a necessity than a luxury for Company servants as it acted as a method of compensation for the extremely low wages they received. Consequently, this attracted men who either looked for an opportunity to make money quickly, or needed to re-establish their financial affairs. To both groups, an ordinary low salary, either at home or abroad, was of little use.

An opportunist like Robert Cowan was drawn to the possibility of not only retrieving his good name, but also to achieve a standing in society, along with what he deemed to be a 'competency'. The Directors must have realised that the type of person who was attracted to the East – especially someone who aimed at being a high-flyer – would not risk his life for a moderate or even a merely respectable reward. The opportunity to make a fortune was the magnet and that is why salaries, despite advice

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<sup>2</sup> M. Wretts-Smith, 'The Business of the East India Company 1680-1681', *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, Vol. I, No.2, Oct.-Dec. 1963, p.115.

<sup>3</sup> L.S. Sutherland, *A London Merchant 1695-1774*, Frank Cass, London, 1962, p.14.

to the contrary, were kept at such ridiculously low rates.<sup>4</sup> Making the employees work independently to achieve success was also a way of ensuring their own enrichment. Like the servants in the East, the Directors of the East India Company also received very little in the way of remuneration.<sup>5</sup> It must have suited the Directors to employ some potential magnates amongst the general dross of Company servants, and then to place these men under obligation by providing patronage, with the ultimate aim to increase their own fortunes. They achieved this by becoming involved in joint trading ventures both within the East, as well as the more conventional direct trade to England of sanctioned goods. Holden Furber in *The Bombay Presidency in the Mid-Eighteenth Century*, states that private trade doubled from the mid 1720s to 1742, and that the number of ships operating in the region increased by approximately 65 per cent.<sup>6</sup>

A detailed inquiry into the attempts made by the East India Company to control private trade can be found in I.B. Watson's *Foundation for Empire: English Private Trade in India 1659-1760*. Watson argues that by the late seventeenth century the Company, having granted and changed private trading rights on numerous occasions, finally decided to merely control its 'excesses'.<sup>7</sup> Control over 'excesses' meant that the Directors were giving authorisation for trade to continue, but exactly how did they decide where to draw the line in private trade? In fact this so-called reform was simply protecting the status quo, whilst giving an outward appearance of tackling what was perceived by outsiders to be a problem

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<sup>4</sup> P. Anderson, *The English in Western India*, Smith, Taylor & Co., Bombay, 1854, p.20.

<sup>5</sup> J.M. Bourne, *Patronage and Society in Nineteenth-Century England*, Edward Arnold, London, 1986, p.59. Bourne states that in the nineteenth century Directors received £300 and the Chairman and Deputy Chairman £500 per annum.

<sup>6</sup> H. Furber, *The Bombay Presidency in the Mid-Eighteenth Century*, Asia Publishing House, Bombay, 1965, p.44. Furber estimates that country shipping increased from about 3000 tons to somewhere between 6,000 and 7,000 tons during that time. The number of ships rose from 17 to 28.

<sup>7</sup> I.B. Watson, *Foundation for Empire: English Private Trade in India 1659-1760*, Vikas Publishing House Pvt Ltd., New Delhi, 1980, pp.74 -77.

In the latter part of the seventeenth century the Company had finally decided that it was impossible to eliminate private trade, both within the East, and to England and Europe. Under controlling measures certain goods were prohibited for Company servants to ship to England. These were mainly the exotic textiles, including Pintado quilts, chintz, silks, and doreas, but also included some of the more prosaic cottons and calicoes.<sup>8</sup> Some items were left entirely to the private traders including those fabrics that were laced with metallic threads, a factor that reduced their shelf life in damper climates, and presumably diminished their profit-making potential.<sup>9</sup> It must have been somewhat tedious for long-term servants in India to know exactly which items were legitimate, as the rules regarding prohibited goods could, and did, change from time to time. A classic example of this was the profitable private diamond trade, which was sanctioned by the Company until June 1680, when it suddenly became an East India Company monopoly item.<sup>10</sup> One can imagine the chagrin of any returning Company servants caught by this sudden change in the rules. This prohibition was promptly amended four months later because of the custom of retiring servants using diamonds as a convenient method of returning their investments to England.<sup>11</sup> Company servants who were fortunate enough to return were generally those with robust constitutions that had allowed them a lengthy career, thereby giving them the time to amass varying amounts of assets. This acquired wealth meant that the men had financial and political clout. No wonder the Act was hurriedly amended.

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<sup>8</sup> Wretts-Smith, *op. cit.*, pp.103 -105.

<sup>9</sup> *ibid.*, p.105.

<sup>10</sup> *ibid.*, p.114.

<sup>11</sup> *ibid.*

At the same time as permitting these concessions for trade to England, the Company allowed its servants to indulge in private trade within the East.<sup>12</sup> It was extremely difficult to enforce restrictions on private trade from such a distance.<sup>13</sup> The inability to regulate the amount of trade meant that despite servants being restricted, under the terms of their covenants, to a certain amount of private trade, these limits were often exceeded.<sup>14</sup> Cowan's papers clearly illustrate the situation in the early eighteenth century of one of the Company's servants at one of the factories in the East. Such extensive trade might well have impinged on the Company's profitability, and even its economic viability, at certain times during the eighteenth century. Cowan said that in 1728 he was 'concerned yearly' in 'country trade in our own bottoms' to the value of £12,500.<sup>15</sup> That amount excluded any joint ventures in which he was involved. The Directors had deemed country trade to be unprofitable for the Company, which enabled them to take advantage of investing in such schemes - without any obvious conflict of interest arising. J.M. Bourne argues that for the nineteenth century it would be 'easy to overestimate personal benefit' made by patrons as, by then, it was clear to parliamentary committees and *The Times* newspaper that, in general, patronage was granted without 'interest' on a basis of generosity.<sup>16</sup> This was not necessarily so in the early eighteenth century. With only a remote expectation of political support, high mortality and personal failure rates, there was little chance for appointed family, or kin members to take wealth and kudos back

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<sup>12</sup> B.B. Misra, *The Central Administration of the East India Company 1773-1834*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1959, p.380.

<sup>13</sup> P. Marshall, 'Private British Trade in the Indian Ocean before 1800', in *India and the Indian Ocean* eds A. Das Gupta & N. Pearson, Oxford University Press, Calcutta, 1987, pp.280-281.

<sup>14</sup> Misra, *op.cit.*, pp.380-381; 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. 91. Cowan, as Governor, was required to provide a bond of £10,000; I am indebted to Dr. I.B. Watson for the following information on tea allowances: OIOC, B/53, *Court Books*, p.79. For example, in 1714 the allowance for tea in private trade was 2 cwt per one hundred tons of shipping space, and it was subject to a duty of 5 per cent with any excess realising a fine of 20 per cent of gross sale value.

<sup>15</sup> Cowan to John Sherman, 30 August 1728, PRONI RCP D654/B1/2A.

<sup>16</sup> Bourne, *op.cit.*, pp.61-62, 81.

to England. The only real opportunity for patrons to recoup their expenditure was to partake in joint ventures with their clients.

When Directors were as much concerned with matters that would advantage themselves, as on those to benefit the Company, then such trading deals certainly fit snugly into the grand scheme of patronage.<sup>17</sup> Why, if not for the chance of self-enrichment, would such men risk their reputations on someone like Cowan? The majority of his patrons were well-established and successful businessmen, and it was hardly worth their while to work tirelessly for Cowan if all they were to gain was a few gifts, or a little career assistance for a remote relation or friend. A shrewd investment in diamonds or several lucrative joint country-trading ventures would have justified the hazards involved in bestowing patronage. Moreover, as the president of each of the Factories in India was responsible for the trading decisions of his region, it was logical for the Directors to be able to rely upon and, if necessary, influence that man. What better way to control the Governor than by obligation, and to use the threat of withdrawal of support as an incentive to constantly gain good results both for the Company and private investments? Obversely, by trading on behalf of his patrons, the client was also protecting his own private trading perquisites and his position in the Company.

Cowan was aware of the risks involved in exceeding his trading allowances. He planned to send seventy-six bales of coffee valued at £1,000 to William Phipps in 1731.<sup>18</sup> On reflection he changed his mind, and sold the coffee to Captain Westcote to

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<sup>17</sup> P. Nightingale, *Trade and Empire in Western India 1784-1806*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1970, pp.8-9.

<sup>18</sup> Cowan to William Phipps, 12 September 1731, PRONI RCP D654/B1/2C.

‘avoid censure’, because he thought the shipment could give ‘some Umbrage at home’.<sup>19</sup> There was a fine line in these dealings, and Henry Frankland, Governor of Bengal 1726-1728, clearly respected the situation. He told Cowan that the Company was indulgent with regards to servants private trade dealings but that the privilege had been abused by some ‘Unthinking Gentlemen’.<sup>20</sup> James Macrae launched a stinging attack on Cowan, claiming the latter had issued an ‘edict’ on private trade, which Macrae felt was contrary to Company interests.

Why must we enjoyn all persons whom we shall employ to Surat or to any other settlement under your Presidency not to make any Contract but with the advice or at least not previous to the knowledge of the Honb<sup>le</sup> Company’s Chief residing there. What good purpose for the Company’s interest or for the General Benefit of Trade (To which our Masters are on all occasions so indulgent can this clause serve) People here can see no reason for that stretch of authority.<sup>21</sup>

Macrae added that it was an ‘unwarrantable Usurpation of the rights of other Men . . . I am sorry I can’t as heretofore wish you success without exception’. Cowan, by trying to control private trade in Surat, had crossed the line as far as Macrae was concerned. According to a somewhat surprised Cowan, the President and Council of the Madras factory were similarly incensed.<sup>22</sup> Cowan wrote of this attack to William Phipps stating that he had received a ‘very tart letter from Governor Macrae’, which he said was insolent and ill-mannered to ‘those who in all other respects are his equals, to say no more.’<sup>23</sup> Judging by Macrae’s reaction on this point, it was deemed important to at least appear to pay lip service to the Company’s rules and regulations.

<sup>19</sup> Cowan to William Phipps, 20 January 1732, PRONI RCP D654/B1/2C. Instead, Cowan remitted £1,000 in bills to Phipps.

<sup>20</sup> Frankland to Robert Cowan, 19 January 1727, PRONI RCP D/654/B1/4B, 16A.

<sup>21</sup> Macrae to Robert Cowan, 20 December 1725, PRONI RCP D654/B1/4B, 21A-C. Original emphasis.

<sup>22</sup> Cowan to James Macrae, 5 May 1726, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1C.

<sup>23</sup> Cowan to William Phipps, 7 May 1726, *ibid.*

Private trade both within the region and to England carried its fair share of risk. The hazards included the ever-present threat of piracy, over-supply, spoilage, and the possible loss of a ship and its cargo due to bad weather conditions. Loss minimisation on most trade was covered by investing in a wide variety of goods and in shared ownership of cargoes.<sup>24</sup> To give an example of local trading, in one letter to Cowan, Captain Martin French refers to cargoes that included guns, rice, iron shot, sword blades, cardomoms, rosewater, and raisins.<sup>25</sup> Private trade goods returning to England were subject to limitations, and to duties levied by the Company. At times these charges appeared to be fairly substantial, although the amount of profit to be made was similarly impressive. On one voyage of the *Wyndham* in 1733 the actual percentage rates made by the first and second mates on their cargoes were much reduced by East India Company charges but still yielded a handsome 18.5 per cent and 27 per cent respectively.<sup>26</sup> However, the two men made £345 and £505 respectively on the sale of their goods.<sup>27</sup> Taken in context, this was at a time when Cowan, as Governor of Bombay, was being paid an annual salary of £300.<sup>28</sup> Edward Harrison, one of Cowan's patrons in Leadenhall Street, was well aware of the amount of money that could be made by investing in these voyages, as he had been the Captain of an East Indiaman in the early years of the eighteenth century. On two

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<sup>24</sup> R. Davis, *The Rise of the English Shipping Industry in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, MacMillan & Co. Ltd., London, 1962, pp.82-83. Davis states that ownership of vessels was usually, but not always, divided into units measuring between eighths and sixty-fourths, thereby reducing an individuals' loss should the ship founder or be captured by pirates. Similarly, Cowan and his associates frequently hedged their bets by taking shares, but not necessarily of regimented amounts, in the cargo of a ship bound for various ports in the East. In such cases they generally invested a rounded sum of money, for example 1000 or 1500 Rupees.

<sup>25</sup> French to Robert Cowan, 21 November 1725, PRONI RCP D654/B1/4C, 15A-G.

<sup>26</sup> K.N. Chaudhuri, *The Trading World of Asia and the East India Company 1660-1760*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1978, pp.211-212. Chaudhuri states that on one Bengal expedition a net profit was expected of 144 per cent.

<sup>27</sup> E.H. Pritchard, 'Private Trade between India and China in the Eighteenth Century 168-1835', *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, Vol. I, 1957-58, pp.251-252. R. Shuter, 1<sup>st</sup> Mate, invested £969, paid charges of £545, and sold his goods for £1,859. M. Woodford, 2<sup>nd</sup> Mate, invested £609, paid charges of £661, and sold his goods for £1,875.

<sup>28</sup> See also Chapter 1, p.43.



voyages on the *Kent* in 1704 and 1707 the gross sales value of his goods came to £27,563. Unfortunately the cost of these goods is not available, but after he had paid charges he was left with £15,050, and one suspects that he had made more than a reasonable return on his investment.<sup>29</sup>

Trade was not, however, limited to fabrics from India and other Eastern countries. For East India Company Directors merely trading in items such as permitted fabrics, whilst profitable because of the market size in England, was unlikely to have achieved a large return on an investment, but there were other items that provided very good rewards for the shrewd investor. The most convenient and profitable of all were diamonds. A cargo of diamonds was much easier to ship than one of fabric, as it required little space, and was not liable to suffer damage in transit. Fabric could easily be eaten by rodents or spoiled by contact with water. Cowan is alleged to have returned to England with a substantial number of these precious stones. Cowan's sister's family jewels, known as the Down diamonds, are believed to have been brought back from India by him. This collection included a 'waistband at least three inches wide and composed entirely of brilliants amounting to 1,225,' and a 'scroll necklace and collet bracelet.'<sup>30</sup> If Cowan was responsible for the purchase of these jewels, it is highly likely that he also traded extensively in the precious stones. Indulgence in such trade ventures by members of the Directorate and those in high positions in India, was most likely to have been the real reason behind the vacillations of the East India Company over the issue of private trade for Company servants.

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<sup>29</sup> Pritchard, *op.cit.*, p.251. In Appendix III on p.238 Pritchard shows some private trade figures for selected years between 1699 and 1774 which are incomplete, but nevertheless indicate that it was not unusual to make 100% profit on the investments from China.

<sup>30</sup> H.M. Hyde, *The Londonderrys: A Family Portrait*. Hamish Hamilton Ltd., London, 1979, p.14.

Diamond transactions were not uncommon as the following examples show. In 1729 Major John Roach dispatched at least one substantial diamond to Edward Harrison. This stone was duly placed in ‘Beryon’s’ hands, and Harrison lamented the necessity of having to cut the ‘fine thing’ again, which incurred further weight loss, but made it an ‘extreamly perfect’ stone. Richard Benyon was a fellow Director of the East India Company, a ship-owner, former Governor of Madras, and patron of Robert Cowan. Harrison was furthermore concerned with the effect on the value of precious stones of the reports of a massive diamond mine in Brazil, and added that he was ‘glad’ that ‘the ear rings did not come’.<sup>31</sup> Benyon told Harrison that prior to the Brazilian discovery, the re-cut stone would have fetched £1,500.<sup>32</sup> A year later Harrison was still hoping to dispose of the stone in the not too distant future.<sup>33</sup> Yet another year on and Harrison and Benyon still had the diamond, and laid the blame for failing to sell the item squarely on the Portuguese and their Brazilian mine. At this time there was a hint of needing a matching stone to facilitate a sale.<sup>34</sup> This form of remittance may have been chosen because in 1729 Harrison had warned Roach against sending money back through the Company’s ‘cash’ system. He said that ‘large sums’ made some ‘illwishers very inquisitive to find out if some unlawful trade is not carrying on’.<sup>35</sup> This is direct evidence that the amassing of large amounts of money by Company servants was not unusual during this period, and shows that it was far more common than previously believed. Not once in Harrison’s letters does he refer to this stone as being Roach’s, although it may have been a joint venture between the two men. Harrison hinted of connections with the European diamond market when he wrote that ‘The Dutch letters were taken care of ~’, with the prudent use of a symbol

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<sup>31</sup> TNA, C108/96, *Chancery: Master Farrer’s Exhibits*, Harrison to John Roach, 18 January 1730.

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

<sup>33</sup> *ibid.*, Harrison to John Roach, 15 February 1731.

<sup>34</sup> *ibid.*, Harrison to John Roach, 10 February 1732.

<sup>35</sup> *ibid.*, Harrison to John Roach, 5 February 1729.

instead of a word.<sup>36</sup> There is evidence that Harrison was involved in the diamond trade at this time because Cowan mentioned at least one incident of trading some stones on Harrison's behalf, and it involved a transaction in 1730 with the Viceroy of Goa where a Bill of Exchange was to be invested by Cowan 'in Diamonds' for Harrison.<sup>37</sup>

Harrison was not the only East India Company Director to deal in precious stones from India. Having successfully re-established his business by 1720, John Drummond was once again dealing in timber, wine and, not surprisingly, diamonds.<sup>38</sup> The person responsible for the Indian part of the 1725 diamond transaction was his business agent, Hugh Campbell.<sup>39</sup> Campbell was employed as a writer at Fort St. George under the aegis of another of Drummond's clients, James Macrae.<sup>40</sup> The shipment, addressed to Drummond and Sir Thomas Brand, was sold for £1,600, remitting, after commission and brokerage fees, the sum of £1,493/8/8.<sup>41</sup> This would not have been an isolated trading deal, but prudence led Cowan and his business partners to disguise details of dealings to maintain their privacy. It is likely that they explicitly wrote of certain transactions in order to allay suspicion amongst other Directors in Leadenhall Street. As diamonds were a known currency for the East India Company servants, complete silence on the subject would have raised questions. Other correspondence could well have been sent through parties trading with Holland

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<sup>36</sup> TNA, C108/96, *Chancery: Master Farrer's Exhibits*, Harrison to John Roach, 18 January 1730.

<sup>37</sup> Cowan to Edward Harrison, 10 January 1730, PRONI RCP D654/B1/2B.

<sup>38</sup> G.K. McGilvary, 'East India patronage and the political management of Scotland', PhD thesis, Open University, 1989, p.90.

<sup>39</sup> *ibid.*, p.133. McGilvary states that by 1732 Drummond had promoted Campbell to the rank of Factor.

<sup>40</sup> NAS, *Abercainry*, GD 24/1/464/N/7, London, 8 July 1725. 'Account of Sale of Sundry Bulses of Diamonds sent on board yr Ship Compton Captn William Mawson Commander and Consigned by Mr Hugh Campbell of Fort St. George to Sir Thomas Brand and John Drummond Esq and sold by us to Mr Shales by yr broker Isaac Nime ...'

<sup>41</sup> *ibid.*

or Portugal, and perhaps Harrison's 'Dutch letters' that were 'taken care of' were such items.

William Phipps was also involved with the trade in precious stones, and he was openly disappointed in the value of a diamond that Cowan had sent to him. Cowan thought that he could have sold the stone in Bombay at a profit of about £62, and, to compensate Phipps, he wrote that he would send another diamond on board the *Wyndham*.<sup>42</sup> Of course, this might have been merely an excuse to cover the delivery of another diamond, because a pair would have been much more valuable than a single stone. The clue about the amount of profit Cowan expected to make on the stone in Bombay was a guide for Phipps as to the true worth of the diamond. This was not the extent of Phipps's interest in diamonds as Cowan stated that he had not had the opportunity to speak with their Broker about more stones but instead he had briefed Henry Lowther to discuss the matter with Laldas.<sup>43</sup> Cowan and Phipps obviously had an arrangement for the regular remittance of precious stones, and mention of an individual diamond, and its comparatively low value, might have been made deliberately to focus attention onto that item, thereby deflecting investigation of wider trafficking. Cowan told Phipps about three diamonds that one was a 'rose' of about '30 ruttys' of which the asking price was 'Eight hundred rupees', but if the price fell to '650 Rupees the ruddy' he would purchase the stone. This meant that he was authorised to pay £2,437 for one diamond.<sup>44</sup> Cowan was scathing of another stone that was intended for Captain Lyell, and perhaps destined for his relations in Leadenhall Street. He wrote to Henry Lowther that he would 'return Laldas his

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<sup>42</sup> Cowan to William Phipps, 20 January 1731, PRONI RCP D654/B1/2B.

<sup>43</sup> See Chapter 2, p.89-9 for information on the Brokers.

<sup>44</sup> Cowan to Henry Lowther, 15 May 1729, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1H.

scurvey \_\_\_\_\_ diamond' which he would not even show to Lyell 'at the price he mentioned.'<sup>45</sup> There was no further mention of this transaction.

Coffee was also a lucrative trading commodity, and the early part of the eighteenth century saw its sales reach unprecedented peaks. For the period that Cowan held the Governorship of Mocha (1721-1726) total coffee sales reached £540,989.<sup>46</sup> Company imports of coffee for the two years 1723-1724 alone amounted to £287,975.<sup>47</sup> John Drummond, through his client Henry Lowther, was significantly involved in private country trade in coffee from Mocha on at least two occasions in 1725 and 1727.<sup>48</sup> The amount invested was £18,750.<sup>49</sup> Although coffee was classified as a Company item, there were ways of avoiding this restriction on trade, as it could be sent as a personal gift, with the possibility of sale by the recipient. Cowan alone sent numerous bales of coffee to family, friends, patrons and those he wished to impress, both in India and England. In three months in 1724 he sent 'small bales' to Mrs Cairnes and Mrs Betty Shannon in England, 'a small parcel' to the company Secretary, Thomas Woolley, and 'some coffee' to William Phipps in Bombay.<sup>50</sup> This was at a time when coffee was expensive, and a bale was worth nearly £38, thereby making these very generous gifts indeed.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Cowan to Henry Lowther, 26 January 1730, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1E.

<sup>46</sup> Chaudhuri, *op. cit.*, pp.521-522. Table C.9 - Imports of Coffee (Mokha).

<sup>47</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> McGilvary *loc. cit.*, NAS, *Abercairny*, GD 24/Sect.1/464/C, f.75, Lowther to John Drummond 6 April 1725; NAS, *Abercairny*, GD 24/Sect 1/464/ N-O, f. 23, Lowther to John Drummond, 31 December 1727.

<sup>49</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> Cowan to Mrs Cairnes, 8 July 1724, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1C; Cowan to Mrs Betty Shannon, 8 July 1724, & Cowan to Thomas Woolley, 10 July 1724, *ibid.*, Cowan to William Phipps, 15 April 1724, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1B.

<sup>51</sup> Cowan to William Phipps, 15 April 1724, *ibid.* Cowan advised Phipps that 'coffee now up to 182 Spanish dollars'.

Cowan made a rather unusual transaction when he asked a Captain Shepherd to deliver a 'packet of Portuguese' either to any Portuguese trader he met, or with a 'reliable' Captain bound for Portugal.<sup>52</sup> What exactly was meant by the term 'packet of Portuguese' remains unclear, although this may well have been Cowan's intent. These written recommendations might have been deliberately designed to confuse the issue, with a more definite verbal instruction given to the Captain. At that time there was a kind of snuff so named, and the term 'Portuguese' can also mean a particular cut for diamonds.<sup>53</sup> There is often the sense of hidden meanings and even of quiet subterfuge in Cowan's papers. It is known that goods were sometimes smuggled into England by using remote, less populated, and therefore more difficult to patrol, regions of England, including the coastlines of Devon and Cornwall.<sup>54</sup> Cowan had contacts in both counties and it is not beyond the realms of possibility that he, too, used to his advantage the rugged West country coastline with its network of secluded beaches, of which some were inaccessible from the land except at extreme low tide, in order to land prohibited goods. In correspondence with a fellow Governor, John Deane, in 1730 he mentions the major defeat of the Free Trade Bill in Parliament, without personal comment, although one suspects that he was immensely disappointed in the result, simply because he did not applaud the outcome.<sup>55</sup>

There was another method of avoiding trading limitations on restricted items, and that was to send items as gifts to close friends and family members. On more than

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<sup>52</sup> Cowan to Captain Shepherd, 24 January 1731, PRONI RCP D654/B1/5AA.

<sup>53</sup> W.H. Moreland, *From Akbar to Aurangze: A Study in Indian Economic History*, Macmillan & Co.Ltd., London, 1975 (1923), pp. 80-81, 189. As there was a trade in tobacco from India, including exports from Surat, it is possible that it was this item, although there is no mention of other such transactions. The OED has a reference to 'Portuguese' being a kind of snuff in 1708.

<sup>54</sup> Wretts-Smith, *op.cit.*, p.111.

<sup>55</sup> Cowan to John Deane, 9 September 1730, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1F.

one occasion whilst in the service of the East India Company, Cowan sent what seemed to be very generous presents to his young half-sister: His first acknowledged shipment of diamonds occurred in January 1726, when he sent Henry Cairnes what he termed a ‘small Bulso containing a diamond ring’ and he desired that the ring be transmitted to Hugh Henry in Dublin. Presumably this ring was either a personal gift for Mary, or it was to be used by the family for its monetary value. Furthermore, included in the bulse was another ‘fine’ diamond as a present for Henry Cairnes to be cut and set and worn ‘for the sake of him who sends it you’.<sup>56</sup> If the ‘fine’ diamond was like the one referred to by Harrison to Roach, then it was not a mere trinket but a valuable item.<sup>57</sup> What is more intriguing is the comment Cowan made in a postscript to this letter, wherein he stated that he had sent a letter ‘under cover of Mrs Gould with some enclosed to forward to Holland’.<sup>58</sup> Such a remark certainly raises suspicions that Cowan was sending diamonds back to Holland, either on his own behalf or in concert with members of the Gould and Cairnes families. What better way to repay the favours granted by these two families than with a generous trading partnership in the lucrative diamond market?

As the Company was inconsistent on the matter of private trading by its officials, the servants could circumvent any restrictions imposed by using a network of contacts in a third country, for example Portugal, to land goods back in England or Ireland. It was a means that Cowan used at least once, when in 1727 he ordered Samuel Davey to take with him:

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<sup>56</sup> Cowan to Henry Cairnes, 11 January 1726, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1C.

<sup>57</sup> See above p.261.

<sup>58</sup> Cowan to Henry Cairnes, *loc.cit.* A ‘bulse’ was either a package of diamonds or gold dust.

‘a Box containing several things . . . which I send as a present to my sister Mary . . . contrive the safest method of getting them ashore so that the Girl is not disappointed of what I intend her.’<sup>59</sup>

In a letter dated the same day to John Sherman, Cowan said that he had sent ‘to Goa a small box to be delivered to Man<sup>l</sup> Alves Meirintio whom you recommend containing sundry Species of goods to be delivered you & in your absence to Mr Richard Le Grand’.<sup>60</sup> If these goods were all above board, then there was no valid reason for such an elaborate method of delivery. This particular present went from Bombay to Goa, then to Portugal before it reached its final destination, Londonderry. If this was simply a small present for his sister, it was unlikely that he would have gone to such elaborate lengths, especially as he later sent diamonds for Mary to one of the East India Company Directors. However this shipment did cause Cowan some considerable anxiety because in 1727 an Act was passed to limit the Company servants’ use of Portuguese ships to send goods to Europe from India. Cowan reasoned that if information was relayed to the Directorate about the goods he had sent to his sister, such a transaction would conceivably have endangered his ‘post in the Company’s Service’ as it was ‘Contrary to my Covenant to trade to Europe in the Portuguese Ships’. He did hint to John Sherman that a way round this problem was to find a ship’s captain from Derry who was willing to take the goods to Ireland.<sup>61</sup> This raises the question of why Cowan contemplated going to such extraordinary lengths if he only wanted to send his sister a gift of a few metres of cloth, or a Goa stone. The effort involved seems to hint at something far more valuable being shipped than just a few metres of cloth, or a fever remedy.

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<sup>59</sup> Cowan to Samuel Davey, 22 December 1727, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1C.

<sup>60</sup> Cowan to John Sherman, 22 December 1727, *ibid.*

<sup>61</sup> Cowan to John Sherman, 30 August 1728, PRONI RCP D654/B1/2A.



He managed to either find a co-operative Captain, or another solution to his problem because three years later he organised the delivery of a Goa stone as a present for Mary.<sup>62</sup> In 1732 he more circumspectly sent a small ‘parcel’ of diamonds to his patron Nathaniel Gould in London accompanied by the following instructions: ‘which I design for a pair of earrings for my only sister in Londonderry I desire you will gett them cutt & sett to the best advantage.’<sup>63</sup> Cowan showed his gratitude for Gould’s assistance in this matter by sending him a shipment of Arrack and a gift of some richly embroidered fabric for his wife.<sup>64</sup> Cowan never neglected to proffer gifts to those who executed favours for him, and he diligently endeavoured to repay in kind any acts of patronage towards himself or his friends or family. Here, then, were two instances where it was deemed to be legal to send goods and to openly acknowledge them, and so this begs the question as to why the need to act covertly in other transactions?

Cowan was certainly generous to both friends and to his patrons, and he mentioned a constant supply of rather obvious gifts perhaps in order to allay suspicion of any secret dealings. In January 1731 he sent 2 parcels for John Gould Jr., of ‘Kincobbs’ and ‘6 p<sup>l</sup> of Stich<sup>d</sup> work’, and he clearly instructed the conveying Captain to follow orders about ‘getting them ashore’. What those ‘orders’ were remains in doubt, but there was also a parcel with ‘9 Gold buckles’, which Cowan openly suggested that Captain Beresford might ‘very commodiously put in your pocket.’ Clearly Cowan intended Beresford to smuggle the ‘little box’ into England.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Cowan to John Sherman, 30 November 1730, PRONI RCP D654/B1/2B.

<sup>63</sup> Cowan to Nathaniel Gould, 27 January 1732, PRONI RCP D654/B1/2C.

<sup>64</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>65</sup> Cowan to Captain William Beresford, 24 January 1731, PRONI RCP D654/B1/5AA.

An alternative method of delivering clandestine items, especially with the aid of the Directors concerned, was to slip a small packet of valuable gemstones into the country hidden in a larger gift, for example in a specially marked bale of coffee. Cowan frequently sent personalised packages of coffee to various patrons, as well as friends, throughout his stay in India and Yemen, and therefore he had numerous opportunities to take advantage of such a scheme.<sup>66</sup> One instance was in 1724 when Cowan sent ‘two small parcells of coffee’, which he begged Captain Martin French to accept. They were marked RN No 1 and MF No 2.<sup>67</sup> Cowan generally labelled such items with the recipient’s initials.<sup>68</sup> What makes this particular gift suspicious was the fact that coffee was, at that time, extremely expensive – it was fetching 200 Spanish Dollars, approximately £42, per bale. Two years later the price had slumped to between 80-85 Spanish Dollars.<sup>69</sup> If Cowan had merely wanted to send a token of appreciation in 1724 then something cheaper was far more appropriate, for example fabric, china, or arrack, whereas coffee would have been an affordable present in 1726 when the price had fallen. Cowan’s innate common sense and keen regard to financial matters would have demanded that he practise economy. It is strange that he forwarded not just one, but two parcels of coffee at that time, and neither were sent to powerful patrons who were by far the more logical recipients of such an expensive gift. While the price of coffee was high he sent a bale to the East India Company Secretary, Thomas Woolley. As he was extremely keen to gain Wooley’s patronage, such a costly present was justifiable.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> See above p.261.

<sup>67</sup> Cowan to Captain Martin French, 1 June 1724, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1B. The ‘RN’ probably referred to Robert Newlin to whom Cowan wrote on the same day.

<sup>68</sup> Cowan to Mrs Cairnes, 8 July 1724, *ibid.* ‘PS ‘I have sent you a small bale of coffee marked FC’; Cowan to Mrs Betty Shannon, 8 July 1724, *ibid.*, Cowan to Edward Harrison, 2 August 1725, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1C.

<sup>69</sup> Cowan to William Phipps, 12 June 1726, *ibid.*

<sup>70</sup> Cowan to Thomas Woolley, 1 August 1725, *ibid.*

The first of the two somewhat suspicious bales of coffee was to another Company servant, a Robert Newlin, who had been appointed to Bandar Abbas in April 1724, and the second was directed to Martin French, a ship's captain and, more importantly, a friend and close confidant of Cowan's. As the former man died insolvent only a couple of months later it is unlikely that Cowan owed him any great favours, so it remains a possibility that these two presents disguised a somewhat more remunerative transaction. There is no direct proof that these parcels contained anything other than coffee, but such a gift at that time, and to those recipients, certainly raises doubts as to their true contents and ultimate destination.

Ceramics were also favoured as a gift and Cowan desired that Captain Robert Baillie, on a trip to China in 1728, purchase a 'sett of blew and white Dishes & plates' for John Gould, Jr. He added the proviso that they should be 'as neat and new fashioned as possible.'<sup>71</sup> If a gift was to have measurable success, it had to be of either intrinsic monetary or, in this case, novelty value. The flow of solicited and unsolicited presents continued and on one occasion in 1725 Cowan not only sent a hogshead of arrack and a 'small parcel of coffee' to Edward Harrison, but he had bought a 'China Skreen' in a deceased estate sale and this he also forwarded to his patron as part of the gift package.<sup>72</sup> Cowan used the proceeds of the sale of four bales of coffee to pay for a chaise that he had ordered through Captain Bronsdon, and then asked Captain Westerbane to invest the remainder in 'the best French wine'.<sup>73</sup> This was a particularly complex shipment as there were also fabrics for Mrs Gould and Mrs Cairnes, and a hogshead of arrack each for Sir Matthew Decker, Josiah Wordsworth, and John Drummond. Henry Lyell and John Gould, Jr, were sent arrack but both of

<sup>71</sup> Cowan to Robert Baillie, 27 March 1728, PRONI RCP D/654/B1/1B.

<sup>72</sup> Cowan to Edward Harrison, 2 August 1725, PRONI RCP D/654/B1/1C.

<sup>73</sup> Cowan to Captain William Westerbane, 12 June 1726, *ibid.*

these patrons received a jar of mangoes as well. Captain Bronsdon was to receive a Puntion of Arrack, and Peter Delaporte and Henry Cairnes ‘a small hogshead’ each. There were also three ‘bundles of coffee’ – one each for Frances Cairnes, Betty Gould and Captain Robert Lasinby.<sup>74</sup> This particular exercise was at the time when Cowan was endeavouring to ensure his succession to the Governorship of Bombay, and thus justified the expense such offerings incurred. Gift giving was sometimes an extravagant notion, as on at least one occasion some arrack sent to Charles Boone did not travel well, and necessitated Cowan sending a replacement a year later.<sup>75</sup> It was clearly expected that Cowan would send another gift, and this shows an acceptance that the servants made money from private enterprise. Without such income there was no way that they could afford the cost of these expensive tributes.

Other servants also sent expensive presents. Edward Harrison was pleased with gifts from Major John Roach of ‘the little ruby the colour of which is good’ and Arrack, and although he thanked Roach for ‘the handkerchiefs’ he lamented that they were ‘made too large by one third for common use’. He warned Roach against sending any more ‘Chints’ because they could not be worn in England.<sup>76</sup> Whether these were solicited or unsolicited presents remains in doubt but it is more likely, from Harrison’s comments, that they were unexpected, but very welcome nonetheless.

Sometimes specific requests were made by patrons and, regardless of the problems this occasionally caused, their protégés obviously felt obliged to fulfil such orders. One instance was when Edward Harrison requested some Cambay Stones, and

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<sup>74</sup> Cowan to Captain William Westerbane, 12 June 1726, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1C.

<sup>75</sup> Cowan Charles Boone, 8 July 1724, PRONI RCP D554/B1/1B; Cowan to Charles Boone, 15 July 1725, *ibid.*

<sup>76</sup> TNA, C108/96, *Chancery: Master Farrer’s Exhibits*, Harrison to John Roach, 18 January 1730.

Cowan had difficulty in finding any that were ‘curious’ but collected the ‘best’ that he could find and forwarded them.<sup>77</sup> Novelty value was always a significant element in the choice of presents, and these ‘Cambay’ stones were probably agates, which were fashioned into many items, including bowls, boxes and chests.<sup>78</sup> In pursuing unusual lines, Cowan was obviously impressed with the idea of jars of mangoes as a valuable form of largesse for friends in England, as he asked Francis Dickinson, Chief of Mocha, in 1728, to get as many jars as possible from a Goa merchant, Zacharias Estaphanus.<sup>79</sup> Exotic gifts were not the sole preserve of Robert Cowan, as he suggested to Captain Martin French that a pair of ‘young swans’ would be an ‘acceptable present’ to Governor Phipps.<sup>80</sup> Arrack, as already shown, was another favoured gift and in 1729 Cowan ordered Captain William Reeves to fill twenty Butts, the equivalent of between 2160 and 2800 gallons, with ‘the best Arrack’, for his own use.<sup>81</sup> Cowan also used such items as return thanks for gifts forwarded to him. In one instance, he repaid the gift of two boxes of ‘very good Tea’ with a ‘pipe of Goa Arrack & two chests of Shyrash wine’.<sup>82</sup> This particular transaction was a one-off incident, as there appeared to be no further communication between Cowan and the recipient, James Nash. Small items must have also been greatly cherished because Cowan found it noteworthy to mention that he had sent William Phipps ‘a sett of the freshest newspapers ... and some Garden Seeds’ from Mocha in 1724.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Cowan to Edward Harrison, 8 June 1726, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1C.

<sup>78</sup> *A New Account of the East Indies, being the Observations and Remarks Of Capt. Alexander Hamilton*, Vol. 1, Edinburgh, John Mosman, MDCCXXVII, p.86. The ‘Cambay’ stones could also have referred to Cornelians, but because Cowan specified ‘curious’ stones it is more likely that he was looking for unusual striped markings of Agates.

<sup>79</sup> Cowan to Francis Dickinson, 14 October 1728, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1C.

<sup>80</sup> Cowan to Martin French, 18 October 1727, *ibid.*

<sup>81</sup> Cowan to Captain William Reeves, 26 October 1729, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1E.

<sup>82</sup> Cowan to James Nash, 2 April 1731, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1G.

<sup>83</sup> Cowan to William Phipps 28 June 1724, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1B.

Fabrics were a regular source of repayment and were mainly sent to wives and daughters of patrons. Cowan sent a gift of Dorea to Captain Thomas Bronsdon, which he considered to be 'verry proper for a wedding nightgown' for Bronsdon's daughter, but at the same time as congratulating Miss Bronsdon on her forthcoming nuptials, he made his own offer of marriage, promising that if Bronsdon's daughter would only 'take a tripp to Bombay I'll make her a Governess.'<sup>84</sup> This overture was made shortly after Cowan had received the news that his fiancée, Betty, had married, which meant Cowan was once again a free agent in the marriage mart. A gift to Mrs Nathaniel Gould was Kincob, a rich Indian stuff embroidered with gold or silver, which Cowan thought was a fabric 'well fancyd'.<sup>85</sup> The interest was because it was not an item imported by the Company, and this imbued it with novelty value. In an earlier shipment that included '3 pieces of Gold Striped Doreas' for the 'young Mrs Gould' and '3 p<sup>s</sup> of Kincobs' for Mrs Cairnes, Cowan told Captain Westerbane that he desired him to 'consult with them the proper measures for getting them ashore'.<sup>86</sup>

Captain William Beresford delivered goods on Cowan's behalf in 1731, and it was an interesting shipment inasmuch as not only did it contain some standard gifts for John Gould, Jr., but also a present for the eldest daughter of Sir Matthew Decker, notably a 'small Agatt Coffern'.<sup>87</sup> Was the jilted Cowan currying favour with yet another eligible young lady? Or, more prosaically, was it simply another method to garner Decker's support? To complete this shipment there were a number of items for

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<sup>84</sup> Cowan to Captain Thomas Bransdon, 10 January 1730, PRONI RCP D654/B1/2B.

<sup>85</sup> Cowan to Nathaniel Gould, 27 January 1732, PRONI RCP D654/B1/2C.

<sup>86</sup> Cowan to Captain Westerbane, 12 June 1726, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1C. Cowan knew that Westerbane would see either the ladies or their husbands in London, and would therefore be able to arrange for the safe delivery of these and other items he had despatched.

<sup>87</sup> Cowan to Sir Matthew Decker, 20 January 1731, PRONI RCP D654/B1/2A. 'I hope you'l pardon the liberty I have taken of offering to Miss Decker a small Agatt Coffern which only for its rarity can be worth her acceptance, the stone being larger than any I before mett with, Capt Beresford of the Prince William has it under his care'.

Cowan's predecessor in Bombay, one of which must have caused a stir upon its arrival in England. There were three bags of rice, two chests marked WP, five jars of mangoes and a 'Cage with two Cassowary birds' all of which were to be delivered to 'Gov<sup>r</sup> Phipps'.<sup>88</sup> Cowan profusely apologised for being unable to supply Phipps with the attar that he had desired, so perhaps the birds were offered in recompense. Cowan told Phipps in January 1731 that he might have difficulty in transporting the cassowaries as the ship concerned was carrying a large number of passengers, but, as there was no further mention of the hapless birds, it must be assumed that they took their passage as planned on the *Prince William*.<sup>89</sup>

In a letter in 1730 to his attorney in Portugal, Cowan despatched gifts of material, amongst other goods, for both John Sherman's daughter and for his friend, Richard Le Grand, but ardently wished at the same time that there were less difficulties involved in sending presents to friends.<sup>90</sup> These comments seem somewhat inappropriate when less than two months later Cowan seemed to have confidence enough to send so many presents, including two live birds, in one shipment. While immediate family members were logical and safe recipients of expensive remittances, there was clearly another conduit for such items and they were persons who were included in the wider 'kinship' network. Trusted friends and patrons could have been equally important in such transactions, and sending goods to people like the Gould and Cairnes families did not seem to cause Cowan anywhere near as much angst as shipping alleged 'gifts' to friends and family members.

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<sup>88</sup> Cowan to Captain William Beresford, 24 January 1731, PRONI RCP D654/B1/5AA.

<sup>89</sup> Cowan to William Phipps, 20 January 1731, PRONI RCP D654/B1/2B; Cowan to Matthew Decker, 20 January 1731, *ibid.* Cowan named Beresford as the Captain of the *Prince William*.

<sup>90</sup> Cowan to John Sherman, c. 30 November 1730, *ibid.*

Apart from the above-mentioned transactions, there was a constant flow of gifts within the East India Company service. These were exchanged between Company servants as personal presents, and as a method of repaying patronage. Cowan received many such gifts and they were of an interesting and diverse nature. From Charles Wyard in Honore in 1727 a 'basket of Oranges & six pair of Stockins,' and two years later from John Braddyll, Chief of Tellicherry, he received a 'present of Bird's Nests', and at the same time John Horne, Chief of Bandar Abbas, sent wine and oranges.<sup>91</sup> Sometimes, however, Cowan was a little less than gracious in his response to some gifts. In one instance he thanked Captain Bronsdon for his 'kind present of Hock,' but added that 'tis a wine I dare not touch, because of the gout.'<sup>92</sup> Bronsdon would have been mortified at his unfortunate choice of wine, as it was obviously designed to promote his chances of carrying cargo for Cowan's extensive private trade. As Cowan sent Bronsdon and his daughter generous return gifts a few months later, this reply was obviously not designed to depress the Captain's aspirations, rather to explain his personal tastes for future reference. Cowan did sometimes make special requests for certain items to be sent out, for example his chaise, and more mundane items like wigs, but these were paid for by him.<sup>93</sup> He did make one rather touching request to William Phipps. Most gifts were sent from England without prior consultation, but these particular items were not quite what one would have expected a Governor to desire, above all else, from England. After

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<sup>91</sup> Cowan to Charles Wyard, 8 November 1727, & to John Braddyll & John Horne, 2 April 1729, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1C.

<sup>92</sup> Cowan to Captain Bransdon, 2 September 1729, PRONI RCP D654/B1/2A.

<sup>93</sup> Cowan to William Phipps, 20 January 1731, PRONI RCP D654/B1/2B. Cowan thanked him for the claret and wigs, and requested that the same amount be sent every year. The value of these items was £95/3/10.



wishing Phipps a safe journey he added: ‘forget not to send me every year Some fresh garden Seeds particularly peas & beans, I have this year verry fine Colly Flowers...’<sup>94</sup>

For his part, Cowan sent his fellow workers presents such as wine, including some French varieties, his much-favoured arrack, and in one instance, along with ‘a p<sup>s</sup> of fine Scarlet cloth’, he despatched ‘a repeating watch’.<sup>95</sup> He did not neglect Company servants’ wives either, and in January 1726 sent a ‘Diamond Clasp’ to Mrs Heydon, a ‘hoop ring’ to Mrs Draper, and ‘large Cambay stones’ for Mrs Lowther.<sup>96</sup> This reciprocity was not confined to the mere giving of presents, because mutuality was an integral part of the structure of East India Company service, and it involved a complicated system of obligation and repayment. This form of recompense by gifts was valuable to lowly paid Company servants in India as many of the presents could be sold, so that a monetary gain was made.

The notion of gift giving was widespread, and not merely confined to existing patrons, but it was used to solicit further aid within the Company’s Directorate. It also extended to their family members, and would have been an ideal way to hide illegal transactions in order to avoid the East India Company’s rules regarding private trade. The Company was initially against the idea of private trade, but as the seventeenth century drew to a close, their attitude changed particularly towards what became known as Country trade, that is, trade within the East, which included such destinations as China and various ports in and around the Red Sea. Such activities

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<sup>94</sup> Cowan to William Phipps, 26 January 1730, PRONI RCP D654/B1/2B.

<sup>95</sup> Cowan to Captain Thomas Bransdon, 2 June 1726, & to Captain John Hunter, & to James Macrae, 25 February 1728, & to Monsieur De La Feuillé, 2 March 1728, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1C; Cowan to Captain Martin French, 9 February 1731, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1G. French was the recipient of the cloth and watch.

<sup>96</sup> Cowan wrote ‘By Capt Echlin’, 20 January 1726, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1C; Cowan to Captain Samuel Heydon, 28 June 1724, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1B.

were almost impossible to control from Leadenhall Street, but an attempt was made to keep a limit on private trade to England. Although some goods were still proscribed, a more lenient view was taken on certain items that were allowed into England, for example diamonds.<sup>97</sup> The extremely prompt overturn to the ban on diamonds in the seventeenth century certainly raises the question as to whether the Directors put the Company's, or their own, interests first. Many would have been involved in joint trading ventures with their India based clients, and in *Trade and Conquest: Studies on the Rise of British Dominance in India*, Peter Marshall states that the aim of the 'governors ... was to make their own and other peoples' fortunes through trading at sea'.<sup>98</sup> A less tangible form occurred between Company servants involving reciprocal and horizontal patronage and this method will be discussed in the next chapter.

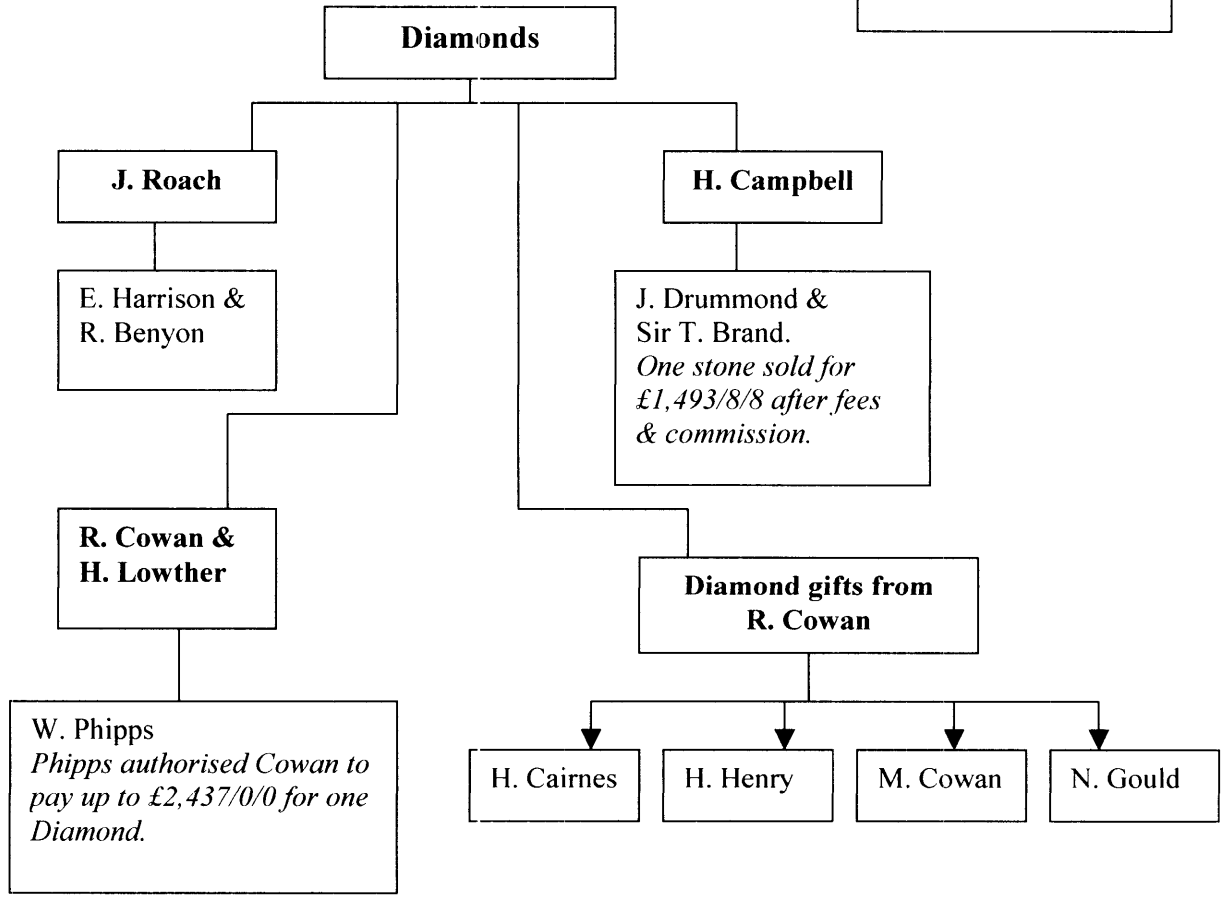
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<sup>97</sup> P.J. Marshall, *Trade and Conquest: Studies on the Rise of British Dominance in India*, Ashgate Publishing Ltd., Aldershot, Hampshire, 1993, Chapter XIII, p.279.

<sup>98</sup> *ibid.*, p.290.

**Chapter Seven - Connections**

*Legend:*  
Connections: ———  
Patronage: ———>



**One shipment of miscellaneous gifts from R. Cowan in 1726**

- |               |                |
|---------------|----------------|
| Mrs. Gould    | Capt. Bronsdon |
| Mrs. Cairnes  | P. Delaporte   |
| Sir M. Decker | H. Cairnes     |
| J. Wordsworth | F. Cairnes     |
| J. Drummond   | E. Gould       |
| R. Lasinby    |                |

## Chapter Eight:

### Reciprocal Advantage

**‘All the good offices in my power ...’<sup>1</sup>**

Apart from the traditional vertical form of patronage in the East India Company, which provided employment, introductions, and, sometimes, political aid, there were other ways to repay favours. In the same way that Cowan maximised the opportunities to be gained by vertical patronage and kinship associations, he enlarged his network even further through obtaining clients of his own. These men were then under obligation to him, and he was able to further extend his network by gaining their aid for even more clients. Many of these networks overlapped and during Cowan's decade and a half in the East, the web became ever more intricately connected.

In his second year as Governor of Bombay, Cowan used a phrase that sums up the system of patronage within India. He wrote to a fellow Governor that he felt they could, and should, be of ‘reciprocal advantage’ to each other. This term hinted of the possibilities that existed for men like Cowan and other favoured East India Company servants, especially his peers, to extend their earning capacities by working together. Developing such business liaisons, including the financial involvement of his patrons, meant that Cowan could at last start to repay his debt of honour to those benefactors.

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<sup>1</sup> Cowan to John Courtney, 20 July 1728, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1C.

By practising reciprocal patronage, by giving new men in the Company's service a helping hand of some description, Cowan could further reduce his obligations to many of the Directors of the East India Company. He stated this much in one of his letters to his patron and friend Henry Cairnes in 1730.

I have this year launched into trade & ships deeper than I designed to have done but I could not resist my inclination which is pritty much bent that way not so much out of a desire of Accumulating great riches as to encourage & provide for people that have pind themselves on me and most of them strangers.<sup>2</sup>

This was quite a responsibility, particularly the welfare of 'strangers' who were all the more numerous in Cowan's case because of the plethora of patrons with whom he had surrounded himself. If he had had only one patron then his life would have been far simpler but then his chance of success and promotion in the Company's service would have been greatly diminished.<sup>3</sup>

Many of the families entrenched in the upper echelons of the Company sponsored men bound for India, for example the Goulds, Edward Harrison and John Drummond. The clients, who were family, friends or, sometimes, political associates, were sent out regardless of their suitability to either such a career or the climate. The high mortality rate at the time meant that there was a constant supply of new faces, and the newcomers often needed assistance either in pecuniary measures to assist establishment, or advice in business methods. Such kinship ties often spread widely to involve more than immediate family members, and included in-laws. Even a remote relationship could bring kudos or even political power through the bounty

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

<sup>3</sup> Cowan to Edward Harrison, 12 September 1731, *ibid*. In this letter Cowan told Harrison that the latter was his 'only patron' – something that was blatantly untrue. It would appear to have been a rather foolhardy thing to say, as Harrison was in regular contact with many of Cowan's patrons in the East India Company Directorate.

India provided to any successful entrepreneur. Cowan often went to considerable lengths to assist family members of his more favoured patrons, but it is doubtful that he exerted as much effort on those with lesser connections. An example of this was when Jeremiah Jones asked Cowan for his patronage in 1727 in order to attain a recommendation for a position as supercargo on one of William Phipps's ships. Cowan replied that this was simply not possible as the job had already been allocated to 'young Mr Higden' - a relative of Phipps.<sup>4</sup> Jones stood little chance of obtaining this placement, as he was third in line, and even the second applicant, 'Mr. Murphy', who also claimed kinship to the Governor, and who had 'the interest of the owners', was still without sufficient support to procure the coveted position.<sup>5</sup> As Cowan was dependent on Phipps' goodwill he was not prepared to jeopardise his own career prospects to further those of someone without powerful allies. In his thesis, G.K. McGilvary argues that there was a definite order in the distribution of much sought after Company positions in the 1720s, and that the decisions were influenced by kinship or political advantage.<sup>6</sup> This view is reinforced by the very reasons that Cowan stated had influenced him in denying Jones's petition.

The benefits of reciprocal patronage varied from individual to individual. For a competent and well-connected businessman it would mean an accelerated rise through the ranks of Company Servants. An otherwise eligible person, but who was deficient in financial resources, would have been given a helping hand. This happened to Cowan on his arrival in India. The third option, run in conjunction with either or

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<sup>4</sup> G.W. Forrest, (ed) *Selections from the Bombay Secretariat*, Vol. II, Government Central Press, Bombay, 1887. pp.33,47. Henry Higden began his career in the East India Company as a Writer, graduated to the rank of Factor before becoming a Supracargo in 1728

<sup>5</sup> Cowan to Jeremiah Jones, 13 February 1727, PRO/NI RCP D654/B1/1C.

<sup>6</sup> G.K. McGilvary, 'East India Patronage and the Political Management of Scotland', PhD thesis, Open University, 1989, p. 131.

both of the previous forms of assistance, was that of prospective joint country-trade ventures. This frequently used method could be described as 'horizontal' patronage, in that it could be granted by a peer group member, or even someone of an inferior rank. It differed from the usual paternalistic or 'vertical' form, wherein assistance was always granted from 'above'. In horizontal patronage, Cowan recommended a protégé to a Company servant of equivalent rank in another region of India, and his client could expect to be offered access to either joint venture opportunities, or placement in the Company's service, or, occasionally, both. During his lengthy stay in India Cowan had many opportunities to practise the various forms of reciprocal patronage, and investigating the men that he dealt with highlights the close kinship network that existed within the English East India Company.

It is apparent how intricate and widespread this network became by looking at those men who patronised Cowan, and their subsequent demands on him. To begin with, there were at least three members of the Gould family represented in the East India Company service, and Cowan came in contact with all them. The first was a Mathew Brandon who was employed as a supercargo from 1723 until his death in March 1726. Cowan wrote to John Gould, Jr., that he would not 'fail to recommend him to his further favour as your Relation, he is already very well introduced into business and I hope will prosper.'<sup>7</sup> Such an entrée into the 'closed' business world of eighteenth century India must have been priceless. With such a paucity of information about this man, it is impossible to ascertain how close a relation he was to the eminent Gould brothers. Cowan obviously felt that he was important enough to warrant his support, but his efforts were to little or no avail. When he reported Brandon's demise

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<sup>7</sup> Cowan to John Gould Jr, 29 October 1723, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1B.

to John Jr., he stated that although Mathew had received four per cent commission 'his debts are more than his effects will pay'.<sup>8</sup> From Cowan's perspective, his inability to further Brandon's career, and to increase his prosperity must have been a cause of concern, as he wanted to impress and repay the people on whom his own career and prospects were still dependent. Successfully providing for Gould family members would have added to his merit points, whereas failure, even through no fault of his own, could have been viewed as letting down his friends.

Thomas Thorowgood arrived in Bombay in 1726 and Cowan acknowledged him as an uncle to the junior John Gould. Cowan generously supplied Thorowgood with money to begin his career in India, and offered to get him an Ensign's Commission in the military service at 'the first vacancy'. Cowan was clearly perplexed as how best to serve this man as he described him as 'not so much a Seaman as I am . . . and he knows far less of Mercantile affairs . . .'.<sup>9</sup> As he was lacking both of these vital skills, Thorowgood's chances for rapid advancement through the Service, even with support from the Chief of Mocha, must have been extremely slim. In 1728 Cowan reported on Thorowgood's welfare, and although he was insistent that Thomas caused him 'no trouble' he qualified this by adding that he gave him a 'great deal of concern' through his 'ill-conduct' which he said made Thorowgood 'miserable'.<sup>10</sup> At this stage Cowan did not elaborate on the problems that beset the man. His behaviour certainly hampered Cowan's attempts to repay the Gould family. It was disconcerting for Cowan, as he clearly relished the opportunity to offer reciprocal patronage to one of their kinsmen. He had the unfortunate task of informing John of the death of this uncle in 1729: 'It was impossible to keep him from

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<sup>8</sup> Cowan to John Gould Jr, 10 September 1726, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1C.

<sup>9</sup> Cowan to John Gould Jr, 9 September 1726, *ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> Cowan to John Gould Jr, 20 March 1728, *ibid.*



strong liquors the immoderate use of which hastened his end'.<sup>11</sup> These two episodes were frustrating for Cowan, but, then as now, there seemed to be no helping some people. The devastating effects of climate and alcohol saved Cowan further problems with Thorowgood.

A far happier connection for Cowan was through his relationship with John Hinde who served the Company for sixteen years in Bengal.<sup>12</sup> Hinde was a cousin of the Gould family members, and he and Cowan were heavily involved in private trade in India. Their relationship was deeper than simply one based on a business level, because in 1729 Robert referred to Hinde as 'my friend'.<sup>13</sup> This was not a term Cowan used lightly in reference to his colleagues in India. John Hinde arrived in Surat from Bengal in April 1723 and Cowan listed him as third supercargo of the ship the *Samuel*.<sup>14</sup> By July 1724 he had been made a factor, and in a letter of congratulation Cowan strongly recommended that he apply to his friends at 'home' to ensure preferment.<sup>15</sup> In 1727 Robert Cowan wrote to Frances Cairnes, to tell her that her cousin Jack Hinde was doing well in Bengal, and was 'universally beloved'.

Cowan's personal letters often acknowledged the debt that he owed to his patrons, for example in that same letter he said he was 'under great obligations to my friends in London for this care and solicitations in my favour . . .'.<sup>16</sup> It should be remembered that Frances was the daughter of John Gould Snr, sister of John and

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<sup>11</sup> Cowan to John Gould Jr., 6 January 1729, PRONI RCP D654/B1/2A.

<sup>12</sup> P.J. Marshall, *East Indian Fortunes: The British in Bengal in the Eighteenth Century*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1976, p.230; H.D. Love, *Vestiges of Old Madras 1640-1800*, Vol. II, John Murray, London, 1913, p.386.

<sup>13</sup> Cowan to Henry Lowther, 1 August 1729, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1D.

<sup>14</sup> Cowan to John Gould, 15 April 1723, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1A.

<sup>15</sup> Cowan to John Hinde, 18 July 1724, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1C.

<sup>16</sup> Cowan to Frances Cairnes, 12 January 1727, *ibid*.

Nathaniel, niece of Sir Nathaniel, and wife of Henry Cairnes. An extra method of repayment to the Gould family was to provide patronage to those recommended to him by John Hinde, thereby indirectly aiding the economic fortunes of Hinde. These people were not necessarily related to Hinde or the Gould family, but the connections meant that, using an analogy to distant cousins, they were patronage recipients 'once removed'. While this scheme gave opportunities to new arrivals it also helped incumbent Company servants. For example, a captain could be given joint venture private cargo to deliver on a short trip thereby increasing his profit percentage, and optimising the use of the ship and simultaneously maximising the owners' gains.

When Hinde thought that Cowan would be made Chief of Surat in 1726 he made a gentle suggestion about the provision of what he deemed as suitable reciprocal patronage. He hoped that Cowan might be 'a little more favourable to the Supra Cargoes than the gentlemen on your side have lately seemed inclinable to be tho you are the best judge what they deserve so I beg pardon.'<sup>17</sup> This rather quaint phraseology illustrated that formalities always had to be observed. In the same year, Hinde requested that Cowan assist a Richard Acton 'as a favour done to me'.<sup>18</sup> Acton, however, was in debt to the East India Company and there was also a matter of reparations due to the Company's broker that hindered or curtailed any aid Cowan might have offered.<sup>19</sup> By July 1727 Cowan was losing patience with Hinde's protégé and in a formal letter to Acton, he concluded with the statement: 'I have something else to do than to attend distracted whimsies'.<sup>20</sup> Cowan was never one to suffer fools gladly, not even those with connections to his most influential patrons.

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<sup>17</sup> Hinde to Robert Cowan, 1 November 1726, PRONI RCP D654/B1/4B: 18A-B.

<sup>18</sup> Hinde to Robert Cowan, 1 December 1726, PRONI RCP D654/B1/4A.

<sup>19</sup> Cowan to Richard Acton, 20 July 1727, *ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> *ibid.*

It is evident by November 1729 that Hinde and Cowan were both indulging in some serious private trade, and although there does not appear to be any conclusive written evidence, it is highly likely that they acted together in some trade matters. A few months later Cowan mentioned that they had it 'in their power to be to each other of Reciprocal advantage'.<sup>21</sup> In 1731 Cowan asked Henry Lowther to remit over £1,100 to Messrs Carteret and Hinde and to debit Cowan's account for this amount. Cowan wrote of a 'cargo of Ophium and Rice' bound for Malacca which he hoped would 'answer according to the scheme Capt Garland laid before us here ...'.<sup>22</sup> As this was addressed to both Edward Carteret and Hinde, it is obvious that the shipment referred to was at least a triple joint venture, and one that was instigated by Hinde. By this stage of his career in India, Carteret was heavily involved in private trade dealings with Hinde in Calcutta, Robert Cowan in Bombay and Henry Lowther in Surat.<sup>23</sup>

In a lighter vein, Cowan sent an unusual reciprocal patronage gift to Hinde in 1731: 'I send you two Beagles tho in so doing I shall disoblige some Ladies here who are as well diverted in hunting of sand larks upon our Strand as you are with your Fox chase.'<sup>24</sup> The repayment of patronage could, and often did, assume strange forms. The fact that Cowan sent this unusual gift to Hinde in preference to his lady friends indicated that he was desirous of maintaining their friendship, and furthering their mutual business arrangements. As these two men were stationed on opposite sides of the country, it is difficult to see what other form of aid Cowan could have bestowed

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<sup>21</sup> Cowan to William Henry Draper, 5 April 1727, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1C. An example to show the extent of Cowan's trade: Cowan stated that a Banian had 'a thousand Robins of Rice of mine left in his hands ...' In the mid eighteenth century a 'robin' weighed 84lbs; Cowan to John Hinde, 15 June 1730, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1F.

<sup>22</sup> Cowan to Messrs. Carteret & Hinde, 30 December 1730, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1G.

<sup>23</sup> PRONI RCP D/654/B1/1D – 1G, *passim*.

<sup>24</sup> Cowan to John Hinde, 23 April 1731, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1G.

upon Hinde. It was obviously not within his jurisdiction to offer promotion to Hinde therefore mutual trading arrangements, reciprocal patronage, and the promise of unusual gifts was the next best method of repayment to a valued member of the Gould family.

John Gould, Jr asked for patronage favours *en masse* in 1731 and Cowan had mixed results in responding to these requests. Cowan acknowledged that ‘Young Munro whom you recommend is a verry sober & sensible youth & will do verry well here’, and that Mr. Draper had ‘always had my countenance’.<sup>25</sup> He also said that he would have assisted Captain Boulton’s nephew if he had not already departed for England, and that Mr. Owen was ‘an assistant in the Accountant’s Office & well esteemd by every body.’ He concluded by stating that although Captain MacNeale, another of John Gould’s clients, was still a prisoner he was continuing his efforts to achieve his release.<sup>26</sup> Out of the five mentioned, Cowan had already been able to bestow patronage on three, with the promise of further aid to MacNeale, once he was released by his captors.

Other patrons made their demands upon Cowan’s resources. Edward Harrison asked Cowan to promote the interests by direct patronage of a Mr. Chapman whom Cowan described as being ‘related to one so near you’. Chapman was probably an in-law of Harrison’s, and this connection meant that Cowan was prepared to offer ‘all the good offices I can do him.’<sup>27</sup> Three years later, it was Cowan’s turn to remind Harrison of the obligations he owed to Chapman as the latter had specifically asked to be recommended to his relative’s ‘favour’. Perhaps the connection was sufficiently remote

<sup>25</sup> Cowan to John Gould Jr., 20 January 1732, PRONI RCP D654/B1/2C.

<sup>26</sup> *ibid*; MacNeale’s involvement with Cowan is covered more fully in Chapter 9, pp.319-322.

<sup>27</sup> Cowan to Edward Harrison, 20 March 1728, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1C.

for Harrison to have considered that he had fulfilled his obligations by his initial advocacy, but Cowan reminded Harrison of his ongoing responsibilities, adding that Chapman deserved assistance, as he was ‘a good natural gentleman & well esteemed in this place.’<sup>28</sup> There was always the possibility that if Chapman was provided with a little more aid, his efforts could have enriched both Cowan and Harrison into the bargain.

Another friend and patron enlisted Cowan’s aid for a Nathaniel Whitwell in 1728, and Cowan dutifully recommended him to Hezekiah King, Chief at Anjenjo. In the letter to King, Cowan merely stated that his client was recommended from Dublin ‘by a particular friend’, but in correspondence with Whitwell, Cowan named the patron as ‘Mr Henry of Dublin’.<sup>29</sup> Cowan told Whitwell that while he offered his services to him:

it behoves you to apply your self with a dilligence in order to quallifye your self for the company’s business by being master of Bookkeeping and Accounts which is easily acquired when prosecuted with care ...<sup>30</sup>

Whitwell must have complied with Cowan’s request as he was commended on his work nearly a year later, and Cowan renewed his offer of assistance.<sup>31</sup>

John Drummond also asked for aid for some of his protégés in their establishment in the East India Company service, and was amply rewarded by the extent of co-operation granted by Cowan. Apart from the obvious patron/client nexus

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<sup>28</sup> Cowan to Edward Harrison, 20 January 1731, PRONI RCP D654/B1/2B.

<sup>29</sup> Cowan to Hezekiah King, 18 April 1728, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1C. This was the Ulsterman Hugh Henry who was a Dublin Banker and Member of Parliament for Antrim; Cowan to Hugh Henry, 6 January 1729, PRONI RCP D654/B1/2A.

<sup>30</sup> Cowan to Nathaniel Whitwell, 16 April 1728, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1C.

<sup>31</sup> Cowan to Nathaniel Whitwell, 8 January 1729, *ibid.*

it is likely that Cowan was also motivated by his Scottish ties. It has been posited that Drummond, by placing so many of his family and friends into the Company's service, was acting to consolidate Robert Walpole's political power-base, and that this also assisted the aspirations of the Duke of Argyll.<sup>32</sup> Whatever his motives, the number of Drummond's clients mentioned in Cowan's papers was certainly large. One who arrived in Bombay carrying Drummond's recommendation was 'Mr. Britton', with obvious expectations of a helping hand from Cowan.<sup>33</sup> Drummond also made 'favourable mention' of William Forbess, and Cowan again dutifully offered his 'services'.<sup>34</sup>

One of Drummond's earliest protégés was Captain, and later Governor, James Macrae, and he remained thus for the best part of a decade. Another important client was to become Cowan's trading partner and staunch ally, Henry Lowther. Drummond's support of this man was not surprising as he was the brother of his 'city friend', Sir William Lowther.<sup>35</sup> Cowan told Henry that Drummond 'interests him self verry much in your wellfare' As Cowan offered his services to Lowther, he simultaneously offered his help to another protégé of Drummond's, James (Jemmy) Ramsden. In yet another kinship tie, Jemmy was a nephew of Henry Lowther.<sup>36</sup> James was employed as a Factor at an annual salary of £15 in 1728, and he then accompanied Lowther to Surat. Lowther had been made Chief of Surat earlier in the

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<sup>32</sup> McGilvary, *op.cit.*, pp.55-56.

<sup>33</sup> Cowan to John Drummond, 12 January 1727, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1C.

<sup>34</sup> Cowan to William Forbess, 8 January 1729, *ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> McGilvary, *op.cit.*, p. 133.

<sup>36</sup> Cowan to Henry Lowther, 29 August 1729, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1D.

year and Ramsden was sent with him 'to his assistance.'<sup>37</sup> Ramsden was still in India seven years later, and was one of the witnesses to Cowan's will in January 1735.<sup>38</sup>

In another instance Cowan sent a young man to Lowther in order to:

... assist you in your privat affaires he came out a Soldier but is recommended by Mr Drummond he is a sober young fellow writes a fair hand and understands book keeping.<sup>39</sup>

From this message it is obvious that Cowan was unable at that time to help the 'young soldier' in Bombay, and so he passed him on to someone else who owed favours not only to Drummond, but also to himself.<sup>40</sup> In 1731 Cowan pledged his assistance to Messrs Carmichael and Hamilton. He said they were 'very deserving youths' and added that he hoped his efforts on behalf of Lowther and Hamilton had been duly reported back to Drummond.<sup>41</sup> Whereas Cowan was always diligent in acknowledging any reciprocal patronage he received, or notifying patrons of any that he granted, he was not so sure of the actions of others. It was better therefore to be safe, and risk repetition, rather than offend a benefactor by apparently neglecting to comply with his request. As Cowan's personal patronage debt to Drummond was extensive, the latter had few qualms about assigning a vast number of his clients to his care.

One protégé of John Drummond's who was assigned to Cowan's care appears to have gone to India without the sanction of the Company. Cowan wrote that he had placed Mr. Ramsey 'in the Accountant's office where he will have an opportunity of improving himself in writing and accounts of which he has a slender knowledge as yet'.

<sup>37</sup> OIOC, E/4/450, *Bombay General Letter*, para. 98. 8 January 1729.

<sup>38</sup> TNA, DEL 10/113, *The Will of Robert Cowan*, 4 January 1735.

<sup>39</sup> Cowan to Henry Lowther, 30 September 1730, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1F.

<sup>40</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> Cowan to John Drummond, 20 January 1731, PRONI RCP D654/B1/2B.

Not only was Ramsey there illegally, but he was also inadequately experienced to undertake the work assigned to him. Cowan was obviously worried about the situation, and urged that Drummond endeavour to get Ramsey placed in the Service as soon as practicable as he thought that trade was ‘verry precarious & discouraging’ on that side of India.<sup>42</sup> Cowan told Drummond that he was giving Ramsey an allowance of ‘20 R<sup>s</sup>’ per month (approximately £30 per annum), as presumably at that stage he was working on Cowan’s own private trade matters. This was fairly generous salary in 1732 especially for an unqualified person, as it was equivalent to the 1729 remuneration rate for Junior Merchants, the third rank in the Company’s service.<sup>43</sup> This man was most likely a cousin, as Ramsey was Drummond’s mother’s maiden name, and John Drummond had already provided for at least one other cousin at Fort St. George some five years earlier.<sup>44</sup> Such a relationship explained the gamble Drummond had taken in sending someone to India without the sanction of the Directorate.

Cowan’s qualms over his employment of Ramsey stemmed from the stern admonishment received less than two years earlier from the East India Company. The Directors had been absolutely explicit in their orders about staff recruitment in 1727:

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>45</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Cowan to John Drummond, c. January 1732, PRONI RCP D654/B1/2C.

<sup>43</sup> Forrest, *op.cit.*, p.47; L.S.S. O’Malley, *The Indian Civil Service 1601-1930*, 2nd edn, Frank Cass & Co. Ltd., London, 1965 (1931), p.9.

<sup>44</sup> R. Sedgwick, *The History of Parliament: The House of Commons 1715-1754*, Vol.I, H.M.S.O., London, 1970, p. 623; NAS, *Abercairny*, GD 464/N/ 1, Lauder to John Drummond, 26 January 1727. He advised Drummond of the death of his ‘Couzin’.

<sup>45</sup> OIOC, E/3/115, *Original Drafts of Despatches to Bengal, Madras and Bombay, 1725-1751*, Our President and Council of Bombay, London, 5th Apr 1727, para.58.



Did such an edict have any effect on Drummond? He may have considered that his position in the Company was of sufficient standing to make him inviolate. Alternatively, he could have felt that such a risk was worth taking in order to add yet another loyal member to the Scottish faction to the Company's service. He counted on the long-term political benefits outweighing any short-term awkwardness. His almost unassailable position in the Company must have deterred any attack from fellow Directors. As he was acknowledged to be amongst the four most powerful men in the Company at that time, that must surely have given him more scope than most to promote those whose interests also served his and those of his political allies.

Cowan was not concerned for very long over this clandestine employment as there is no further mention of Mr. Ramsey. Illness often abruptly terminated even the most promising careers in the East, especially in Bombay where the 'average life ... was two monsoons'.<sup>46</sup> Alexander Hamilton wrote of one particular year when the mortality rate reached the staggering figure of almost thirty nine per cent.<sup>47</sup> Cowan personally informed Drummond of the death of a William Robinson in Bandar Abbas on 15 November 1728.<sup>48</sup> Such a notification indicated that Drummond was the patron of this man who had been in the Gulf for less than a year. Cowan, only a month earlier, had pledged his support to Robinson as long as he continued to work hard for the Company.<sup>49</sup>

Even Cowan's best efforts sometimes were to little avail as external events often interceded to thwart his plans. Such was the case in his attempt, in September

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<sup>46</sup> O'Malley, *op.cit.*, p. 6.

<sup>47</sup> A. Hamilton, *A New Account of the East Indies, being the Observations and Remarks Of Capt. Alexander Hamilton*, Vol. I, Edinburgh, John Mosman, MDCCXXVII, pp.185,237.

<sup>48</sup> Cowan to John Drummond, 3 January 1729, PRONI RCP D654/B1/2A.

<sup>49</sup> Cowan to William Robinson, 18 October 1728, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1C.

1728, to assist Captain Benjamin Braund a client of one of the most prominent of the East India Company Directors, Sir Matthew Decker.<sup>50</sup> Cowan felt he had been unable to give him the aid he merited. He classified him as a ‘verry deserving man.’<sup>51</sup> Benjamin Braund had two brothers who were heavily involved in shipping in the Far East. The first was Samuel who was East India Company ships husband, and part owner of at least three ships.<sup>52</sup> The other was the East India Company commander, Portugal merchant, shipowner, insurer, and later East India Company Director, William Braund.<sup>53</sup> Cowan may already have known William as he specifically asked to be remembered to him in 1730. This was either an exercise in good manners designed to bring him to the attention of yet another prospective patron, or a genuine remembrance of an old acquaintance.<sup>54</sup> Benjamin’s venture at Mocha had been upset by a revolution that had occurred there, and the timing of his failure must have been particularly vexing for Cowan, as he had just received official notification that he was to succeed Phipps as the Governor of Bombay.<sup>55</sup> He was now under an even greater debt to his patrons, and he was always especially careful not to offend Decker. Occurring at this juncture, the failed trading venture must have seemed like a bad omen for Cowan’s future presidency.

This episode did not adversely affect Cowan, however, because after receiving a letter from Decker in late 1730, Cowan told Henry Lowther that their joint patron

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<sup>50</sup> L.S. Sutherland, *A London Merchant 1695-1774*, Frank Cass, London, 1962, p.14. Benjamin Braund was not exactly a model seaman, because he was fined £100 in 1730 for smuggling whilst Commander of the *Cumberland*.

<sup>51</sup> Cowan to Sir Matthew Decker, 25 September 1728, PRONI RCP D654/B1/2A.

<sup>52</sup> Sutherland, *op.cit.*, pp.114-115.

<sup>53</sup> *ibid.* pp. 2-3; L.S. Sutherland, 'The Accounts of an Eighteenth-Century Merchant: The Portuguese Ventures of William Braund', *Economic History Review*, Vol. III, 1931-32, pp.368-369.

<sup>54</sup> *ibid.*, p.367; Cowan to Captain Benjamin Braund, 10 January 1730, PRONI RCP D654/B1/2B; Sutherland, *A London Merchant 1695-1774*, p.117. William Braund became a director of the East India Company in 1745.

<sup>55</sup> Cowan to Sir Mathew Decker, 25 September 1728, PRONI RCP D654/B1/2A.

was ‘much pleased with our late transactions,’ and that Decker had recommended Lowther to Cowan.<sup>56</sup> A healthy profit for either a private trade consortium, or the Company, would certainly have made amends for events over which Cowan had no control. Decker, like Drummond, expected his pound of flesh in return for the patronage he conferred, because in two letters Cowan referred to at least eight separate instances where he was required to provide reciprocal patronage for Decker’s clients.<sup>57</sup> Cowan was not the only Company servant indebted to Decker, as the tentacles of the network thoroughly enmeshed the more successful members of the East India Company service.

There were four ‘young’ men Decker recommended directly to Cowan in 1729-1730. The first was a ‘Purser of a Ship from Madras to China’ and Cowan promised to help him if he ever visited Bombay. The second was an easier task as ‘Mr Marsh’ was already positioned as a writer ‘under our Secretary’, and Cowan said that the ‘sober youth’ would continue to receive his ‘countenance & best advice & suitable preferment when he is fitt for it’. Marsh continued in favour as he still held the writer’s job fifteen months later.<sup>58</sup> Cowan advised Decker of his assistance to the third of the protégés in January 1731, but added the comment that ‘Mr Stewart has come somewhat too late to India where a fortune is not soon acquired as in former times . . .’ He wryly noted that Stewart was ‘verry frugal which is a verry necessary quality in persons of slender fortunes.’<sup>59</sup> The fourth client, Mr Ferguson, received only a fleeting mention when

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<sup>56</sup> Cowan to Henry Lowther, c. 23 September 1730, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1F.

<sup>57</sup> Cowan to Mathew Decker, c.1 September 1729, PRONI RCP D654/B1/2A. The men included Henry Lowther, Mr Percival, Mr Marsh and the Indian broker Nowroji; Cowan to Mathew Decker, 20 January 1731, PRONI RCP D654/B1/2B. The men named in this letter were Mr Marsh, Mr Ferguson, Mr Stewart and John Arthur.

<sup>58</sup> Cowan to Matthew Decker, c. September 1729 & 20 January 1731, PRONI RCP D654/B1/2A.

<sup>59</sup> Cowan to Matthew Decker, 20 January 1731, PRONI RCP D654/B1/2B.

Cowan advised Decker that he had been transferred from Tellicherry to Bombay ‘as desired’.<sup>60</sup>

One who was in debt to Decker was John Braddyll, and in order to oblige his patron, Braddyll as Chief of Tellicherry, informed Cowan that to ‘gratifye’ Decker’s wishes, Mr Joyman was to leave Bombay and proceed to his factory. To recompense Cowan he said ‘we shall send you another young gentleman in his stead who in a little time will I hope prove a good assistant.’<sup>61</sup> Presumably he meant someone who did not have such a powerful patron, and who could be shifted from one side of India to the other without offending anyone of note. This particular debt of Braddyll’s needed to be dealt with immediately, and regardless of any inconvenience it caused the Bombay factory. Doubtless there were many others that Decker promoted to both Cowan and other employees of the East India Company, but these few examples illustrate just how commonplace such recommendations were, and how important it was for men like Cowan and Braddyll to respond appropriately.

The letters of another East India Company Governor show that the granting of reciprocal patronage was systematic in the Company service. James Macrae also had influential friends at the East India House, and he, too, was expected to provide patronage to those involved in the network, apart from those of his own choosing. Amongst Macrae’s East India Company’s patrons were John Gould, Snr, John Drummond, and William Dawsonne. Cowan wrote to John Gould, Jr, of these connections, and expressed his opinion that as they were ‘such powerful patrons’, that

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<sup>60</sup> Cowan to Matthew Decker, 20 January 1731, PRONI RCP D654/B1/2B. Ferguson may well have been the replacement for Mr Joyman (see above) as this transaction occurred only four months after Joyman’s transfer.

<sup>61</sup> Braddyll to Robert Cowan, 7 September 1730, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1F.

they ‘& their friends can do anything and he [Macrae] is verry deserving.’<sup>62</sup> Major John Roach was one such beneficiary through the auspices of Sir Matthew Decker. Decker wrote to Roach in 1727 advising him of Macrae’s efforts on his behalf:

The Trade of India was upon a better foot as you mention, I doubt not but Governor Macrae’s good and faithful management has mended this much to ye advantage of you ... he has wrote to me, and others of his friends, verry much in your favour . . .<sup>63</sup>

Such recommendations also brought added advantages for the person bestowing assistance, especially when they were far from home, and might require an honest person to take care of their often-complicated financial affairs. Apart from acting as his sponsor, Macrae had obviously grown to respect Roach’s integrity over the years, as he granted him Power of Attorney over his affairs in India after he returned to England.<sup>64</sup> He also supplicated Roach to expedite his affairs after his retirement:

... in the main I desire you to get in my Effects as soon as possible and make me Remittances in Bills of Exchange by the first opportunity for Diamonds are not to be thought of.<sup>65</sup>

Diamonds were not to be contemplated because by February 1732 Macrae had been ‘charged with bringing home quantitys of diamonds unregistred’ and was then ‘required to purge himself by oath’ or risk forfeiture of his ‘Pagodas’.<sup>66</sup> A year later and Macrae was still having ‘difficulty getting my effects’.<sup>67</sup> Even the services rendered by a good friend or a clever administrator did not always mean that they were able to facilitate matters, especially when it came to the recovery of debts.

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<sup>62</sup> Cowan to John Gould, Jr., 20 October 1723, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1B.

<sup>63</sup> TNA, C 108/94 - 95, *Chancery Master Farrer’s Exhibits Accounts and Correspondence*, Major John Roach, Fort St. George, 1727-1738. Sir Mathew Decker to John Roach, 17 February 1727.

<sup>64</sup> TNA, C 108/96, *ibid.*, 15 January 1731.

<sup>65</sup> *ibid.*, Macrae to John Roach, 7 February 1733.

<sup>66</sup> *ibid.*, Harrison to John Roach, 10 February 1732.

<sup>67</sup> *ibid.*, Macrae to John Roach, 20 January 1734.

The complexity of the patronage network meant that it did not pay to ever make rash or off the cuff comments about anyone, as there was always the chance that the person named was related, or affiliated, to someone with influence in the East India Company. There was such an instance in 1723 when Cowan had been asked to assist a relative of a friend but was unable to do so because of remarks made by his prospective client during his voyage to India. Instead, he advised that David Welch should gain admittance to the Company's service in Madras and then seek a position at Bencoolen, under the patronage of James Macrae, who was, at that time, based in Sumatra. Cowan detailed to John Welch his son's somewhat unwise remarks and their consequences.

Youll have heard that your son David in coming hither quarreled with Capt Price with whom he was passenger from the Cape and reviled General Phipps of Affrica which coming to the knowledge of his brother our Governor put it out of my power to do any thing for him here as otherwise I might ...<sup>68</sup>

Cowan did not mention David Welch again, and his wisest course was to remain distant from that young man in order to safeguard his own position with Phipps. Discretion being the better part of valour, it was decidedly foolhardy to lend countenance to someone who had so maligned Phipps's brother, especially when Cowan's own position was still extremely tenuous.

Another candidate for Macrae's patronage was his brother-in-law David Hunter. Lamenting Hunter's inability to reach Mocha in 1724, and therefore having had to forego his own assistance, Cowan suggested that David avail himself of Governor Macrae's help. He assured Hunter that Macrae would 'have it in his power

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<sup>68</sup> Cowan to John Welch, 30 October 1723, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1B.

to provide for you.’<sup>69</sup> David Hunter was also well regarded and supported by William Phipps, as Cowan reported to Macrae: ‘Davey is much in Govr Phipps favour and he has a clever new ship in which I hope he will get money.’<sup>70</sup> With Phipps and Macrae providing assistance it is likely that Hunter did not notice the loss of Cowan’s patronage on this occasion.

Macrae was not averse to asking Cowan to provide aid by reciprocal patronage for his other protégés, and supercargo Charles Benyon was one such person. He was the brother of Richard Benyon, a former Governor of Madras, a ship-owner, MP and East India Company Director.<sup>71</sup> By the time Cowan received this request, he had already been offering his services to Benyon for at least a year.<sup>72</sup> It must have been gratifying to Cowan to state that Benyon had been included in the network long before Macrae’s request. Cowan bestowed patronage on numerous men recommended to him by those who had assisted him in his own career. Richard Benyon had given Cowan his patronage and in return asked for his aid to his brother, whom Cowan dealt with as a ‘supracargo’ from early 1724 until the middle of 1725.<sup>73</sup> At this time Cowan was in Mocha, and on at least one occasion he bought Benyon’s cargo and sold it on to local dealers. He also advised Benyon on what goods not to bring to Mocha the following season, in particular ‘silk, rice and oyl’ as they were deemed to be in ample supply at that market.<sup>74</sup> This type of forward planning helped all who were concerned in private trade to maximise profits by carrying goods that were in short supply, and

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<sup>69</sup> Cowan to David Hunter, 28 June 1724, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1B.

<sup>70</sup> Cowan to Mrs Macrae, 15 July 1725, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1C.

<sup>71</sup> D.K. Bassett, ‘British ‘Country’ Trade and Local Trade Networks in the Thai and Malay States, c.1680-1770’, *Modern Asian Studies*, 23, 1, 1989, p.637; Sutherland, *ibid.*

<sup>72</sup> Macrae to Robert Cowan, c. April 1725, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1C; Cowan to William Phipps, 10 February 1724, & to Richard Benyon, 11 April 1724, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1B.

<sup>73</sup> Cowan to William Phipps, 10 February 1724, *ibid.*; Cowan to Charles Benyon, 22 July 1725, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1C. In a letter dated 2 June 1726 Cowan wrote to Richard Benyon of his ‘services’ to Charles ‘last season’.

<sup>74</sup> Cowan to Charles Benyon & David Wilky, 22 July 1725, *ibid.*

ignoring those that were plentiful. It is no wonder that Cowan received two acknowledgments of his 'good service' towards Charles from Richard.<sup>75</sup> This is a good example of the way in which reciprocal patronage worked by providing benefits for all who participated

Macrae received a very grateful letter from Edward Carteret in Calcutta in which he was thanked for his 'Favour,' and his client acknowledged that he was under 'so great an obligation'.<sup>76</sup> In 1729 Macrae asked Cowan to help Robert Nesbitt. Cowan replied that he had known Nesbitt in Dublin and would 'readily do him any service in my power as well for his sake as the powerful recommendation he brings'.<sup>77</sup> He qualified this enthusiastic response with the proviso that 'your Hon<sup>r</sup> is sensible that the trade of this place is verry inconsiderable & that of Persia is yet in its infancy', although he optimistically added that he hoped for better things in the future.<sup>78</sup> Before Macrae left India, Cowan assured him that he would continue to look after Nesbitt unless Macrae had been unable to find him a good position.<sup>79</sup> Patronage was bestowed on friends and acquaintances who were deemed to be deserving. It was not the sole prerogative of relatives, or those who were 'recommended' for favouritism from afar.

Another brief response to a request for patronage from John Courtney, then in charge of Surat, was for a Mr Radshaw. Cowan, recently returned to Bombay, promised that he would 'on your account do ... all the good offices in my power'.<sup>80</sup> A longer-term association was with Charles Whitehill who was based at Cambay and then at

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<sup>75</sup> Cowan to Richard Benyon, 15 April 1725 & 2 June 1726, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1C.

<sup>76</sup> TNA, 108/96, *op. cit.*, Carteret to James Macrae, 21 December 1730.

<sup>77</sup> Cowan to Hugh Henry, 6 January 1729, PRONI RCP D654/B1/2A.

<sup>78</sup> Cowan to James Macrae, 1 February 1729, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1C.

<sup>79</sup> Cowan to James Macrae, 20 December 1729, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1E.

<sup>80</sup> Cowan to John Courtney, 20 July 1728, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1C.



Anjenjo. Cowan recommended Whitehill to Alexander Orme in 1726. The latter was Chief at Anjenjo, but more important was the fact that by obtaining recommendation to Orme, Whitehill then had access to the patronage of two other Chiefs. One of Orme's brothers-in-law, Robert Adams, was the Chief at Tellicherry until 1728. A second brother-in-law, Hezekiah King, replaced Orme in Anjenjo in 1728.<sup>81</sup> In one recommendation, therefore, Whitehill had gained the opportunity over the next couple of years to use four powerful people in the chain of command in Western India – Cowan, Adams, Orme and King. The tie with Cowan was further cemented in early 1728 when he became godfather to Whitehill's son.<sup>82</sup>

Cowan had a lengthy association with one man, John Fotheringham, and the relationship was subjected to several trials, but Cowan was loyal and stood by his client, as far as possible, without damaging his own prospects. Fotheringham was the son of the free merchant, George, who was referred to as 'a Broker of Bardines' in John Drummond's correspondence.<sup>83</sup> Initially Fotheringham was a seafaring man, and the first mention of him is when Cowan said that he was 'inclined to purchase my Goa cargo' in November 1723, and if that was the case then he instructed Captain Lawson to offer him a discount for the whole load.<sup>84</sup> A regular correspondence was established between Cowan and Fotheringham, and included details of trading deals of which he approved, and others that Cowan thought the supercargo was lucky to have avoided. He

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<sup>81</sup> N. Rajendran, *Establishment of British Power in Malabar, (1664 to 1799)*, Chugh Publications, Allahabad, 1979, pp.74-75; Cowan to James Macrae, 18 January 1728, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1C; Cowan to Charles Whitehill, 17 September 1726, *ibid*.

<sup>82</sup> Cowan to Charles Whitehill, 31 January 1728, *ibid*. See also Chapter 9, p.311.

<sup>83</sup> McGilvary, *op.cit.*, p.322. McGilvary lists George Fotheringham as a Free Merchant 1720-1742; NAS, *Abercairny*, GD464C/f.75, 28 June 1725. There is just a passing mention of Fotheringham, but this indicates that he was known to Drummond.

<sup>84</sup> Cowan to Captain Lawson, 5 November 1723, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1B.

was also pleased that John had gained the patronage of William Phipps.<sup>85</sup> When Cowan introduced himself to John Drummond in July 1725 he not only asked him for patronage for himself, but also rather audaciously requested that Drummond appoint Fotheringham as a factor in preference to him being a supercargo on a country ship.<sup>86</sup> In his thesis, G.K. McGilvary states that John Drummond was responsible for Fotheringham gaining his post in the Civil Service in the '1730s'.<sup>87</sup> Fotheringham actually took up a position at Bandar Abbas, in the Persian Gulf, in 1726, and it was this particular placement that caused the Directorate in Leadenhall Street to thunder at Cowan over illicit appointments.<sup>88</sup>

Prior to this castigation, Cowan had congratulated Fotheringham in a letter dated 17 March 1726, but he added the following warning:

... and as the generality of people believe me to have been chiefly instrumental in bringing you into the Hon<sup>ble</sup> Company's Service, should you behave other ways then will it greatly reflect on my Judgement. I know you have a capacity of doing the Company good service nor can I doubt your application & dilligence overcomes the greatest difficulty & that with experience makes a man master of his business.<sup>89</sup>

Cowan cautioned him again a few months later. This time it was on the subject of his wife being permitted to join him at the Factory. Apart from the fact that the Fotheringhams designed to live in 'a house apart from the Factory', and Cowan felt that this might 'raise jealousys betwixt the Chief and you both', he also wished that Mrs

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<sup>85</sup> Cowan to John Fotheringham, 28 June 1724, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1B; Cowan to William Phipps c. 1 May 1725, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1C; Cowan to John Fotheringham, 20 May 1725, *ibid*.

<sup>86</sup> Cowan to John Drummond, 15 July 1725, *ibid*.

<sup>87</sup> McGilvary, *loc.cit*.

<sup>88</sup> See above p.291; OIOC, E/3/115, *op.cit.*, Our President and Council of Bombay, London, 5 April 1727, para.58. Fotheringham was confirmed in his appointment but there followed this blistering reproach: 'nor are we pleased with the clandestine methods of late practices 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'.

<sup>89</sup> Cowan to John Fotheringham, 17 March 1726, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1C.

Fotheringham would not be 'free giving characters of her Neighbours' in Bandar Abbas as she had in Bombay. He unequivocally stated that if complaints reached Bombay, then she would be immediately recalled.<sup>90</sup> He added that he issued these warnings because the Fotheringhams were his friends. Cowan was still concerned about this matter in the New Year as he said that permission for a 'Woman going to Persia' was 'unprecedented', and that it was possibly 'contrary to some of the Company's old Standing Orders'. He again warned of her recall if any complaints were received, and added that it could also 'indanger you in your imploy'.<sup>91</sup> In the end, Cowan's concern was misdirected because it was John who brought about his own downfall by combining with William Cordeaux to oust Henry Draper, the Chief at Bandar Abbas. Cowan wrote scathingly to John in the aftermath of the attempted rebellion:

... had you not so madly & in so unprecedented a manner joined with that brute Cordeaux attempting to displace the Chief for that purpose endeavoured to raise a mutiny among the soldiers this was so barefaced rebellion that there was no room to say any thing in defence of your conduct.<sup>92</sup>

Cowan said that he had known of Cordeaux's true 'character many years ago', which was an exaggeration, as the only recorded incidents against his name occurred in 1726 when actions were taken against him to recover a small debt, and over an allegation that he had maligned Henry Lowther.<sup>93</sup> Cowan described Cordeaux as a 'most vile & profligate wretch'. He was dismissed the Service, and sent to Bombay in disgrace as a prisoner. Cowan wrote of his treatment: 'he has in some respects met with his deserts, being pritty

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<sup>90</sup> Cowan to John Fotheringham, 20 October 1726, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1C.

<sup>91</sup> Cowan to John Fotheringham, 4 January 1727, *ibid.*

<sup>92</sup> Cowan to John Fotheringham, 23 October 1727, *ibid.*

<sup>93</sup> P.H.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.480-481.

roughly handled here & is as despicable a wretch as you would desire any of your enemys.<sup>94</sup>

Cowan somehow managed to obtain permission from Phipps for Fotheringham to remain in Bandar Abbas ostensibly in order to dispose of his effects.<sup>95</sup> This was no mean feat on Cowan's part, as he went on to detail a further offence committed by the hapless Fotheringham against Draper:

[he] has properly complained to me of your disrespectful behaviour to him but more particularly your boasting in company that you had orders from a certain gentleman to watch his conduct, in disposing of the Balls cargo, now granting you had such instructions, twas verry simple & vaine to discover it thereby betraying the trust placed in you by that Certain gentleman which he has taken notice of to me with some resentment.<sup>96</sup>

If the 'Certain gentleman' referred to was William Phipps, Fotheringham was lucky to have escaped so lightly. Cowan still felt he was under some obligation to John, and in March the following year he wrote of his plans to Martin French:

Poor Fotheringham I am oblinded to take some notice of, tis impossible he can ever get into the Company's service here, so I bought the *Fame* & now send him in her to the Gulf to dispose of ship & cargo<sup>97</sup>

From then on Cowan employed Fotheringham in his own private trade, but even there he continued to cause difficulties. In early 1729 he took the *Fame* to Basra against strict instructions. He was actually forbidden to do so because such a venture was deemed to have a 'perncious' effect on the price of goods brought in by another of Cowan's ships, the *William*. Cowan was remarkably generous towards Fotheringham in this instance,

<sup>94</sup> Cowan to Martin French, 27 March 1728, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1C.

<sup>95</sup> Cowan to Martin French, 18 October 1727 & Cowan to John Fotheringham, 23 October 1727, *ibid.*

<sup>96</sup> Cowan to John Fotheringham, 23 October 1727, *ibid.*

<sup>97</sup> Cowan to Martin French, 27 March 1728, *ibid.*

adding that he believed ‘he did it for the best’, and ‘we must forgive his transgressing in that Respect’. This generosity was due to the fact that the voyage made a profit of 12½ per cent, but his reactions would doubtless have been very different if the voyage had made a loss.<sup>98</sup> Although John was given this second chance, it is clear in a letter to John Drummond some three years later that the affair still haunted him and that he was aware of his precarious position. Not only did he endeavour to vindicate his own ‘conduct’ to Drummond, but he also asked for ongoing recommendations to both Cowan and Phipps. Furthermore, he begged for mentions to Drummond’s ‘friends’ in Madras and Bengall, as he said he made ‘voiages to several places in India and may one time or another goe and reside in one of these places although at present I have no such intentions.’ He must have redeemed himself to a certain extent because in the same letter he thanked Drummond for getting his ‘sone sent out in one of the Companys ships’, and then went on to request that Drummond do the same for his brother.<sup>99</sup> It is no wonder that Drummond felt besieged by demands for assistance when requests arrived from so many different directions, and with such frequency.<sup>100</sup>

At times, the requests for assistance seem pitiful, as was the case when in 1735 Captain Thomas Cooke asked John Roach for his patronage. He said he was ‘still left out of business’ and that he had run out of money. If his ‘Freinds in England’, assisted by Roach’s support, could get him ‘into the Company’s service again’, it would be the ‘only thing that can keep me from Starving’.<sup>101</sup> In 1737 Cooke reported back to Roach that ‘Governor Benyon’ whilst unable to provide him with a voyage because of the decline of trade, had made him Sherriff, and he hoped that the salary he received would

<sup>98</sup> Cowan to Martin French, 2 April 1729, PRONI RCP D654/B1/1C.

<sup>99</sup> NAS, *Abercairny*, GD 24/1/464/N/45, Fotheringham to John Drummond, 30 January 1732.

<sup>100</sup> See Chapter 3, p.150.

<sup>101</sup> TNA, C 108/94 – 95, *Chancery Masters Farrers Exhibits Accounts and Correspondence*, Cooke to John Roach, 22 September 1735.

help him out until he heard whether any thing could be done for him in England. He added 'I am much obliged to you for reminding my Freinds of me, which may be a means to make them bestir themselves...'<sup>102</sup> As his patrons included Governor Pitt, 'Cossen' Cooke and Governor Deane it seems that even such notable men did not always bestir themselves, even if, in this instance, the request came from a relative.<sup>103</sup> Some of these associations were brief but, nevertheless, they serve to illustrate the extent and the difficulties involved for all patrons in the complicated network of administering both forms of patronage.

The reciprocal advantage that Cowan referred to was most likely designed originally to serve the interests of his peers in the East. Working together across the sub-continent meant that they were able to take advantage of favourable markets, and pooled resources could lead to greater profits combined with a reduction in losses. Those who worked within this scheme certainly gained a great advantage over those who by ill luck or ill temperament were excluded from the system. This was horizontal patronage, which benefited the primary participants, for example Cowan and Macrae, but it had a flow-on effect to those on higher and lower rungs of the patronage ladder. As Cowan's private business interests developed, he must have seen that this was a method of repayment to his patrons that also further increased his ability to make money. He could decrease his obligations to men like Drummond and Decker, offer them further opportunities to participate in joint trading ventures, selectively involve some of their other clients, and reduce risks by spreading their investments widely. Cowan was not alone in practising this arrangement, and the enrichment opportunities

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<sup>102</sup> TNA, C 108/94 – 95, *ibid.*, Cooke to John Roach, 14 February 1737.

<sup>103</sup> *ibid.*, Cooke to John Roach, 22 September 1735.

seem almost limitless. For example, if Cowan as President at Bombay involved himself with one private trade venture with just the Governors of Madras and Bengal, that investment may well have also included some of his patrons, their clients, his own protégés, as well as those of the other Governors. This grouping does not involve heads of the minor factories, like Bandar Abbas or Tellicherry, who would have had their own favourites to promote. The circle would have grown wider with every patron and client that Cowan and his peers obtained. The East India Company Director patrons must have found it very difficult to impose limits on Company servants' private trade, when they were offered so many opportunities, by their grateful clients, to participate in these money making ventures.

Cowan's papers show that his dealings were part of an accepted and widely practised network, which involved men from all ranks of the East India Company service as well as the Directors of the Company. The supply of patronage brought both benefits and costs for all who participated. Cowan was certainly not alone in granting reciprocal patronage which gave members of his network advantages in the private trade in the East. His affairs are so very well documented that they provide a detailed illustration of what occurred on a wide scale in the early eighteenth century. The next chapter will investigate some of Cowan's own clients who came to be recipients of his patronage through various channels, and who featured prominently during his career in India and the Persian Gulf.

