

**The East India Company Career of Sir Robert Cowan in Bombay and the  
Western Indian Ocean, c. 1719-35**

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A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of  
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## **Declaration**

I declare that this thesis has not been submitted as an exercise for a degree at this or any other university and it is entirely my own work. I agree to deposit this thesis in the University's open access institutional repository or allow the Library to do so on my behalf, subject to Irish Copyright Legislation and Trinity College Library conditions of use and acknowledgement.

## Summary

This thesis has undertaken the first in-depth study of Sir Robert Cowan, something which has until now been missing from the wider scholarship of the East India Company. The evaluation has focused on Company affairs in the western Indian Ocean throughout the years 1719-35, although discussion has also been given to the wider intra-Asian sphere during 1680-1750 as well.

It has been shown, by using Cowan's Indian career as a case study, how the devolved power structure incorporating Company servants gave great opportunity for defining policy and actions. This was particularly evident in Cowan's career during his postings at Goa, Surat, Mocha and Bombay. Further, it has been shown how this devolution of power represented the dual aspect of the Company in the early modern period. In England it was seen to act as a commercial trading company, whereas in India it had far greater scope to act as a sovereign power. Cowan, as a Company representative, played a key role in this system during his negotiation of the Anglo-Portuguese treaty of 1721, managing Surat broking relationships, the withdrawal of the Mocha factory in 1727, and his redefining of Company security policy in the western presidency during the years 1728-35.

The same devolution of power to Company servants in official matters has also been shown to have benefitted them in personal affairs. Private trade in particular was an area in which it has been demonstrated that Cowan excelled. This study has highlighted that Cowan's motivation for travelling to India was to make a great personal fortune for himself, and also to pay back his large debts. It has likewise been shown that he

succeeded in gaining this fortune through private trade, diamond and cash remittance, and the utilisation of a series of account transactions. The bulk of this then became the basis of the marquesses of Londonderry's wealth.

In the discussion of Cowan's private trade, it was shown how this created tension between himself and his employers, particularly over his handling of the Portuguese ship *Europa* at Bombay. However, this was not the only aspect of Company politics which Cowan encountered. The collapse of his patronage network as a result of the Waters and Lambton affair caused Cowan great political damage, and displayed the fundamental importance of political connections through private networks within the Company. Whilst the disintegration of his network signalled the end of his career, the construction of it had enabled his progression across the years. Through Cowan's use of patronage networks, it has been shown how multifaceted and vital such connections were within the Company apparatus.

In terms of Cowan's legacy, it is important to highlight that he is a figure that has not been widely studied within Company scholarship at large. This thesis has demonstrated how the study of Cowan, through his personal archive held at PRONI, can be used as a tool for further evaluation of eighteenth-century Company activity in the western Indian Ocean. This thesis has acknowledged the many fascinating opportunities for further study arising out of the Cowan archive, and it is hoped that this will lead to further studies of Cowan, the western Indian Ocean, and indeed the wider intra-Asian sphere in the early eighteenth century.

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Finally, I could not have completed this project without the love and support of my family. They have been a constant source of stability, love and kindness, and this thesis is dedicated to them with all my love.

## **Note on Conventions used**

For the purposes of this study, the conversion rate of rupees to sterling has been set at 8:1, whilst rupees to Spanish dollars has been taken at 2:1. These rates are based on calculations made by Cowan in his letter and account books. With regard to identifying individuals mentioned in the text who do not appear in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, or similar sources, where possible these have been described in footnotes using the format outlined in appendix one.<sup>1</sup> This illustrates the role they fulfilled or their relationship to Cowan. Finally, dates shown in the text and footnotes have been displayed, where possible, with the year beginning 1 January, as opposed 25 March which was widespread in Britain until c. 1750.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For Example, 1721 – EIC Captain.

<sup>2</sup> For example, a date written as 11 January 1730/31 has been displayed as 11 January 1731.

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## Introduction

This thesis explores the life and career of Sir Robert Cowan, governor of Bombay 1729-34. Despite the long-standing interest in the East India Company and its role in shaping the intra-Asian world, there is no adequate evaluation of Cowan's career, though the existence of Cowan's archive at PRONI has been referred to by scholars such as Ashin Das Gupta and Om Prakash. Ian Bruce Watson has authored an informative short entry on Cowan in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.<sup>1</sup> Whilst offering an account and analysis of Cowan's life and career in India, this dissertation also investigates several aspects of Company history in early eighteenth-century India, notably trade, security, politics, diplomacy and patronage networks.

Due to the nature of Cowan's archive, there is a great deal more material for his Company career than for his personal life before and after his Indian service. As such, this thesis primarily discusses Cowan's career, c. 1719-35, which reflects the nature of his surviving archive. This study will also use Cowan's career as a case study for evaluating Company activity in the western Indian Ocean. In terms of Cowan himself, the survival of such an extensive personal archive allows for an investigation of his motivations as well as his actions, and in this regard the question of his accumulation of wealth will become a central question for examination. This will contribute to the structure of the thesis and provide an interesting lens of investigation for Cowan's motivations and actions. The fact that the accumulation of wealth was a primary

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<sup>1</sup> Biography of Sir Robert Cowan (d. 1737), ([www-oxforddnb-com](http://www-oxforddnb-com)), (12 Aug. 2017).

consideration in the mercantilist age makes the financial aspect of Cowan's career crucial. This ties into debates surrounding Cain and Hopkin's arguments on gentlemanly capitalism in empire,<sup>2</sup> and Margot Finn's discussions on the familial proto-state,<sup>3</sup> both of which shall be addressed in chapter five.

This thesis covers the period between 1680 and 1750, but the main years for investigation are 1719 to 1735, the period of his activity in India and the Indian Ocean region, and the principal years of surviving correspondence. Whilst research has been undertaken into European activity, particularly private trade, in the western Indian Ocean during this period, Cowan's archive has provided a fascinating opportunity to undertake a wider investigation into the region and the nature of English private trade. Soren Mentz has argued how the latter element has previously been underdeveloped in the wider scholarship due to the relative lack of archival material for private traders.<sup>4</sup> This thesis then serves to fill in many of the gaps in private mercantile trading networks which have been suggested by Mentz.

It is acknowledged that native commercial pursuits were well established prior to the advent of European supremacy.<sup>5</sup> The western Indian Ocean was interspersed with many trading routes, largely orchestrated from the commercial hub of Surat. Gujarati merchants operating out of Surat largely controlled the maritime trade of the region,

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<sup>2</sup> P.J. Cain. & A.G. Hopkins, *British Imperialism: Innovation and Expansion, 1688-1914*, (New York, 1994), pp. 85-6.

<sup>3</sup> Margot C. Finn, 'Family Formations: Anglo India and the Familial Proto-State', in David Feldman & Jon Lawrence (eds), *Structures and Transformations in Modern British History*, (Cambridge, 2011), pp. 101-3.

<sup>4</sup> Soren Mentz, *The English Gentleman Merchant at work: Madras and the City of London, 1660-1740*, (Copenhagen, 2005), p. 72.

<sup>5</sup> Meera Kosambi, 'Commerce, Conquest and the Colonial City: Role of Locational Factors in Rise of Bombay', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 20, No. 1 (Jan. 5, 1985), 32.



with the Surat to Mocha paradigm advocated by Prakash an excellent example of this.<sup>6</sup> The chronology of this thesis has also been proposed with the knowledge of the great upheaval which was underway in the early eighteenth century in India. This was represented by commercial problems at Surat and the entire west coast of India, the regionalization of the Mughal power base and rise of the Maratha Empire, and the redistribution of trading interests based on problems at the local level. These are factors which will be discussed in chapters two and four.

This transformation of commercial ties was a key factor for the chronology of this study as Cowan's interests evolved throughout his time in India. This was an element which incorporated geo-political locations from the Red Sea to China. As a result of this, the global perspective of the early modern world was of great importance. It is hoped that the chronological evaluation provided by the current study will assist the wider study of the surrounding factors in the early eighteenth century intra-Asian sphere. The work of Sanjay Subrahmanyam and C.A. Bayly is crucial in this regard as they have argued how the changing political and economic structures in Islamic empires, particularly the Mughal empire, were subject to an increasing commercial fluidity with regard to capital markets and the growth of regional power bases which diverged from the central Mughal authority.<sup>7</sup> Cowan frequently wrote of the changing economic and political structures of the Mughal empire during his time in India, and so Cowan's career with relation to this increased regionalisation will be discussed in chapters four and five.

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<sup>6</sup> Om Prakash, 'English Private Trade in the Western Indian Ocean, 1720-1740', *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, 50, No. 2/3, Spatial and Temporal Continuities of Merchant Networks in South Asia and the Indian Ocean (2007), 219.

<sup>7</sup> Sanjay Subrahmanyam & C.A. Bayly, 'Portfolio Capitalists and the Political Economy of Early Modern India', *The Indian Economic and Social Review*, 25, Vol. 4, (Dec. 1988), 412.

This study fits into the category of early modern English activity within the intra-Asian sphere, with a special reference to the western Indian Ocean. With this in mind, the historiographical element will incorporate topics including the East India Company, interpersonal networks, intra-Asian trade, private trade, Bombay, politics and diplomacy. The primary focus of many studies has been on the activity of Europeans through chartered trading companies, such as the English East India Company. Throughout the eighteenth century, the English company gradually became the strongest European body commercially and politically within the intra-Asian sphere. Philip Stern has produced definitive research on the identity and operation of the Company. Stern has described how the Company fulfilled an entirely separate role in India than it did in London.<sup>8</sup> This saw the Company act as a mercantile body in London, and a sovereign power in India. This is a key point as it demonstrates both the great geographical disconnect between the Company and its site of trade, as well as the global nature of business in the early modern period. Whilst commented upon throughout, this element will be particularly dealt with in chapters four and five.

The originality of Stern's work is that it focuses on the activity of the Company and how it interacted with the early modern intra-Asian world, giving greater depth to it. The opportunity afforded by Cowan's archive has thus been useful in providing a fresh outlook on Company activity. Due to the great volume and detail contained in the Cowan archives, further discussion on specific Company settlements and activities is possible. The personal nature of Cowan's archive has also allowed an alternate

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<sup>8</sup> Philip Stern, *The Company State: Corporate Sovereignty & the Early Modern Foundations of the British Empire in India*, (Oxford, 2011), pp. 7-8.

perspective on Company history in the early eighteenth century by using contrasting sources in conjunction with those held at the British Library.

The disconnect between the Company and its site of trade, allowing opportunities to behave in two distinct manners of thought, applies to Cowan, and indeed Company servants in general, as they encountered the possibilities and temptation to act in their own interests ahead of the Company's. This ties into the rational actor theory which posits that in the absence of supervision, an individual will likely act in their own interests.<sup>9</sup> This notion of the potential conflict between public and private interests is a key point of discussion throughout the thesis, and one which will largely use the work of Stern and Emily Erikson to examine the alignment between the Company's vertical hierarchical power structure and the horizontal nature of patronage networks outlined by Erikson.<sup>10</sup> It will be argued that Cowan exemplified the autonomy of the Company, yet also enabled private interest networks to thrive.

Of particular interest to this study has been the manner in which interpersonal networks were constructed within the Company framework. These networks, comprising patronage, finance, information and politics, were the foundation of successful operations for both the Company and individual servants. Santhi Hejeebu, through discussion of the various bonds and agreements which held together patronage relationships, has contributed to the understanding of contract enforcement within Company circles as a means of tying together Company servants to their patrons.<sup>11</sup> The

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<sup>9</sup> Emily Erikson, *Between Monopoly and Free Trade: The English East India Company 1600-1757*, (Princeton, 2014), pp. 108-9.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 19-20.

<sup>11</sup> Santhi Hejeebu, 'Contract Enforcement in the English East India Company', *Journal of Economic History*, 65, No. 2 (Jun., 2005), 500.

patronage aspect also ties in to the discussion of nabobs and nabobery conducted by Phillip Lawson and Jim Phillips. Their work suggests a common interest of financially linked network members in the creation of personal wealth in India.<sup>12</sup> This is also related to the gentlemanly capitalist discussion begun by Cain and Hopkins. These ties of loyalty enabled the creation of patronage networks as a means for personal advancement. This is a notion which has been well articulated by Barry Crosbie<sup>13</sup> and David Hancock.<sup>14</sup> Chapters one, five and six more fully unpack these ideas of networks in relation to Cowan.

Cowan's archive has provided an interesting opportunity to use his career as a case study for this idea of patronage networks, and as such contributes to the foundations laid by the likes of Crosbie, Hancock and Craig Bailey.<sup>15</sup> The question surrounding Cowan's identity as an Irishman operating within the Company framework also draws from Crosbie's arguments regarding the numerous ethnicities of the British Isles which interacted with the colonies and the imperial project in different ways.<sup>16</sup> Although Londonderry was geographically removed from London, Cowan's service with the Company clearly showed that barriers to admission had come down by 1719. Indeed, this is in line with Crosbie's assertion that the early eighteenth-century empire already provided ample opportunity for the Irish.<sup>17</sup> The example of Cowan has, as such, been

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<sup>12</sup> P. Lawson & J. Phillips, ' "Our Execrable Banditti": Perceptions of Nabobs in Mid-Eighteenth Century Britain,' *Albion*, 16, No. 3, (Autumn, 1984), 226-9.

<sup>13</sup> Barry Crosbie, 'Ireland, Colonial Science, and the Geographical Construction of British Rule in India, c. 1820-1870', *Historical Journal*, 52, No. 4 (Dec. 2009); *Irish Imperial Networks*, (Cambridge, 2011).

<sup>14</sup> David Hancock 'Combining Success and Failure: Scottish Networks in the Atlantic Wine Trade' in David Dickson, Jan Parmentier & Jane Ohlmeyer (eds), *Irish and Scottish Mercantile Networks in Europe and Overseas in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, (Gent, 2007), pp. 9-10.

<sup>15</sup> Craig Bailey, 'Metropole and Colony: Irish Networks and Patronage in the Eighteenth-Century Empire', *Immigrants & Minorities*, 23, Nos. 2-3, (Jul. – Nov. 2005), 161-3.

<sup>16</sup> Crosbie, *Irish Imperial Networks*, pp. 5-7.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 24-5.

used as a case study for understanding the variations in Irish experiences of empire in the early eighteenth century. This is a key point which shall be largely dealt with in chapter one.

The thesis argues that Cowan was connected to a complicated apparatus of networks which enabled him to access opportunities and employment. The first aspect of this is the idea of an ethnically-driven network originating in Ulster and incorporating the wider dissenting interests following the test act of 1704.<sup>18</sup> In chapter one it is argued that Cowan made use of dissenting Irish contacts, such as the Cairnes family and the case of William Conolly examined by Patrick Walsh,<sup>19</sup> to engage in commercial activities. This first led to participation in the Atlantic wine trade, in line with Hancock's research into Scottish ethnic participation in the trade to Madeira.<sup>20</sup> For Cowan's part, it can be seen that he was specifically tied to Henry Cairnes in his trade there.<sup>21</sup> Following his entry to the wider network, it is argued that his participation in this network enabled him to join more powerful London networks linked to empire. The Cairnes-Gould nexus is the example which will be described for Cowan in chapter one. Cowan's links to the Gould family, which was prominent in East India Company circles, highlighted his membership of a private interested imperial network. This returns to the arguments of Cain and Hopkins regarding gentlemanly capitalism,<sup>22</sup> and those of Finn relating to the familial proto-state.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Toby Barnard, *A New Anatomy of Ireland: The Irish Protestant, 1649-1770*, (New Haven, 2004), p. 18.

<sup>19</sup> Patrick Walsh, *The Making of the Irish Protestant Ascendancy: The Life of William Conolly, 1662-1729*, (Woodbridge, 2010), pp. 110-1.

<sup>20</sup> Hancock, 'Combining Success and Failure', pp. 9-10.

<sup>21</sup> Fitter vs. Cairnes, Bill and Answer, National Archives, Kew, (C/11/2614/26).

<sup>22</sup> Cain and Hopkins, *British Imperialism*, pp. 71-3.

<sup>23</sup> Finn, 'Anglo-India and the Familial Proto-State', pp. 100-3.

Whilst Company servants were employed to fulfil an official role, they also had the opportunity to act on their own behalf through intra-Asian trade. This was particularly true of Cowan, who made a vast amount of money during his career in India. Scholarship into European private trade in the early modern world, along with the developments in intra-Asian commercial traffic, has been a fascinating area of discussion. This is due to the many layers of information which can be examined through private trade. Whilst the link between European commercial power and trade was clear, it has only been recently that the study of private trading networks has come to the fore. The work of Ashin Das Gupta<sup>24</sup> and Prakash<sup>25</sup> are foremost of these studies. Prakash in particular has highlighted the intra-Asian trading sphere in the western Indian Ocean in the early eighteenth century, with some mention of Cowan's private trading.<sup>26</sup> Private trade in relation to Cowan will be touched upon in chapter three and greatly expanded upon in chapter five.

Das Gupta has also been influential in discussing the relationship between Europeans and native mercantile elites in the eighteenth century, and has given depth to the connection between Indian merchants and the western Indian Ocean trade, explaining how commercial activity was well-established prior to European domination.<sup>27</sup> As such, there was already an elite mercantile cadre in operation, particularly at Surat. Prakash's work reinforces this notion with his description of the pre-existing Surat-Mocha trading

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<sup>24</sup> Ashin Das Gupta, 'Indian Merchants and the trade in the Indian Ocean, c. 1500-1750' in T. Raychaudhuri & I. Habib (Eds), *The Cambridge Economic History of India, Vol.1: c. 1200 - c. 1750*, (Cambridge, 1982); 'India and the Indian Ocean in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century' in A. Das Gupta and M.N. Pearson (eds), *India and the Indian Ocean, 1500-1800*, (Oxford, 1987).

<sup>25</sup> Prakash, 'English Private Trade'.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 215.

<sup>27</sup> Das Gupta, 'India and the Indian Ocean', pp. 407-8.

paradigm used by native merchants in the western Indian Ocean.<sup>28</sup> Further, Das Gupta's work has given valuable insight into the European dependence on native brokers. Again, Surat has been the core example. Das Gupta has described the multifaceted role of native brokers and their relationship with their European employers. As Das Gupta has suggested, however, the true relationship was not as simple as a modern employee-employer dynamic. In this way, he has further argued that difficulties have emerged in the history of India's west coast due to the prevalence of European source material.<sup>29</sup> Whilst Cowan's archive can certainly be described as European, the great number of letters which refer to his relationship with native elites has allowed for a fresh approach, owing to the great amount of detail which Cowan goes into surrounding both his and the Company's interactions. However, this is still evidence from an anglocentric perspective and so a degree of caution must be used.

The focal point of this relationship was often commercial interests based at Surat. Surat, as the commercial hub of western India, was a natural place for native and European interests to overlap. However, throughout the eighteenth century, Surat experienced a slow and gradual change in fortune to that of Bombay. Through Cowan's archive, it has been possible to construct a narrative of events at Surat and some of the surrounding details. The particular history of Surat as a commercial hub has been well covered in the surrounding scholarship, with Hasan Farhat,<sup>30</sup> Ruby Maloni,<sup>31</sup> K.N. Chaudhuri<sup>32</sup> and

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<sup>28</sup> Prakash, 'English Private Trade', 219.

<sup>29</sup> Das Gupta, 'Some Problems of Reconstructing the History of India's West Coast from European Sources' in J. Correia-Afonso (ed), *Indo-Portuguese History*, (Oxford, 1981), pp. 175-7.

<sup>30</sup> Farhat Hasan, 'The Mughal Fiscal System in Surat and the English East India Company', *Modern Asian Studies*, 27, No. 4 (Oct., 1993), 711-8.

<sup>31</sup> Ruby Maloni, 'Europeans in Seventeenth Century Gujarat: Presence and Response', *Social Scientist*, 36, No. 3/4 (Mar. - Apr., 2008), 64-99.

<sup>32</sup> K.N. Chaudhuri, *Trade and Civilisation in the Indian Ocean: An Economic History from the rise of Islam to 1750*, (Cambridge, 1985).

Michelguglielmo Torri<sup>33</sup> all having made significant contributions. In particular, Ghulam Nadri has discussed the diversification of Surat mercantile interests to the Gulf of Kachh following commercial disruption at Surat.<sup>34</sup> Whilst it has generally been accepted that Surat underwent commercial change sometime in the eighteenth century, a lack of primary evidence has made it difficult to adequately determine the period. The Cowan archive has allowed for a greater discussion of this area, and has thus once again built upon the existing foundations laid by Das Gupta.<sup>35</sup> The discussion of the revolution in political and commercial fortunes of eighteenth-century Mughal India by Bayly, particularly with regard to an increase in regional power structures, will be incorporated into the discussion of Surat and trade in the western Indian Ocean.<sup>36</sup> These discussion will be focused on chapters two, four and five.

As Bombay was the primary zone of Cowan's career development, particularly during his years as governor,<sup>37</sup> an investigation into the settlement itself has been necessary. In particular, the work of Tim Riding<sup>38</sup> and Vaibhav Sharma<sup>39</sup> have been very useful. Riding's article discusses the topographical elements of Bombay and the process of land reclamation which led to the creation of the modern vision of Bombay out of a series of islands. Sharma, whilst also discussing the reclamation works, has focused on building a

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<sup>33</sup> Michelguglielmo Torri, 'The British Monopoly on the Surat Trade to the Middle East and the Indian Ship-Owning Merchants' Struggle Against It: 1759-1800', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 28, Issue 1 (Jan. 2018), 101-134; 'Trapped inside the Colonial Order: The Hindu Bankers of Surat and Their Business World during the Second Half of the Eighteenth Century', *Modern Asian Studies*, 25, No. 2 (May, 1991), 367-401.

<sup>34</sup> Ghulam A. Nadri, 'Exploring the Gulf of Kachh: Regional Economy and Trade in the Eighteenth Century', *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, 51, No. 3 (2008), 460-486.

<sup>35</sup> Das Gupta, 'The Crisis at Surat, 1730-32,' *Bengal: Past and Present*, 80, (1967).

<sup>36</sup> Bayly, *Imperial Meridian: The British Empire and the World, 1780-1830*, (New York, 1990), p. 32.

<sup>37</sup> Governor of Bombay, 1729-34.

<sup>38</sup> Tim Riding, 'Making Bombay Island: Land Reclamation and Geographical Conceptions of Bombay, 1661-1728,' *Journal of Historical Geography*, 59, (2018), 27-39.

<sup>39</sup> Vaibhav Sharma, 'Bombay and the English Company: The Making of a Town (1661-1755)', PhD Thesis, Jawaharlal Nehru University, (2008).



narrative of the town of Bombay. Cowan's archive has proven very useful in reimagining the experience of Bombay town during his tenure as there are several gaps in Sharma's work which coincide with Cowan's governorship. Cowan's key role in topics such as defence and diplomacy have not been referenced in Sharma's work, and this thesis therefore revises the evaluation of Bombay for the period 1719-35 to reflect Cowan's influence. Further, it is hoped that the discussion of Bombay will build on the work of Partha Mitter,<sup>40</sup> Meera Kosambi, John Brush<sup>41</sup> and Howard Spodek<sup>42</sup> with regard to the physical changes made to Bombay during Cowan's tenure, with particular reference to defensive structures. This is also a particular area in which the potential for clashes between public and private interests will be discussed in chapter four.

An important element to note with regard to the current study is the extent to which the various geo-political spheres were connected, especially with regard to the western Indian Ocean. This feeds into what Stern has written about the need to view history in a global sense and not merely with a regionalised narrative.<sup>43</sup> Throughout Cowan's career it can be seen that both he and the Company's actions linked up the Atlantic, European and Asian spheres through commerce and diplomacy. Whilst Stern has written assertively on the need to view the traditional British Asia and Atlantic worlds in a more coherent pattern, it is also important to recognise that further work into the interdependency of commercial regions has been conducted. Das Gupta in particular

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<sup>40</sup> Partha Mitter, 'The Early British Port Cities of India: Their Planning and Architecture Circa 1640-1757', *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, 45, No. 2 (Jun., 1986).

<sup>41</sup> Meera Kosambi & John E. Brush, 'Three Colonial Port Cities of India', *Geographical Review*, 78, No. 1 (Jan., 1988).

<sup>42</sup> Howard Spodek, 'City Planning in India under British Rule', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 48, No. 4 (Jan., 26, 2013).

<sup>43</sup> Stern, 'British Asia and British Atlantic: Comparisons and Connections', *William and Mary Quarterly*, Third Series, 63, No. 4 (Oct., 2006), 693-5.

has written of the need to view the early modern western Indian Ocean world as a complex political theatre.<sup>44</sup> This was an area which saw many rival native powers at work. Mughal-Maratha tensions in India were complimented by Persian-Afghan conflict in the Middle East, whilst smaller powers such as Yemen and Mombasa also provided distinct identities with the ability to connect to global networks. Whilst these regions were connected by political rivalry and diplomacy, there was also the above-mentioned western Indian Ocean trading paradigm put forward by Prakash to consider. As Meera Kosambi has noted, the presence of existing trade routes was of great benefit to European trading companies commercially, and enabled them to incorporate them into their global trading systems.<sup>45</sup>

For the western presidency, the Mughal and Maratha powers were the main source of danger to Bombay's security. The eighteenth century saw a slow and gradual weakening of the central Mughal state, combined with an aggressive Maratha foreign policy. Whilst the threat of Mughal invasion had been a concern for Bombay in the late seventeenth century particularly, it was the Marathas who caused more problems for Bombay in the early eighteenth century. This overlapped with Cowan's time in India, and as such his archive has allowed for a discussion of Anglo-Maratha relations during the period due to the diplomatic and military connections which Cowan had with the Marathas whilst he was at Goa and Bombay. In this thesis it is argued that Cowan played a key role in shaping the Company's response to Maratha aggression. Whilst the scholarship surrounding Anglo-Maratha relations in the early eighteenth century has by no means been neglected, there has been a lack of consideration given to the role played by

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<sup>44</sup> Das Gupta, 'Some Problems of Reconstructing', pp. 175-7.

<sup>45</sup> Kosambi, 'Commerce, Conquest and the Colonial City', 32.

Cowan. Of particular interest in this regard has been the Anglo-Portuguese expedition of 1721. The noted historian of the Marathas and their relationship with the English of Bombay, W.S. Desai, has acknowledged the expedition briefly.<sup>46</sup> However, he has not gone into detail regarding the alliance expedition or the prominent role played by Cowan. Anirudh Deshpande has discussed the expedition, though the evidence put forward conflicts with that of Cowan.<sup>47</sup> As such, this thesis will elaborate on the Anglo-Portuguese alliance and build on the narrative begun by Desai and Deshpande regarding Company security in the western Indian Ocean. Chapters two and four deal with the subjects of Maratha aggression and Anglo-Portuguese relations.

Following on from this, it is important to acknowledge the important role which security itself played during Cowan's career in India. In real terms, security meant the ability to prevent hostile actions. In the early modern world, security primarily came from superior military force in the face of danger. As Bombay was an island this posed a significant challenge due to the inability of maintaining a large standing army. In place of conventional forces, static fortifications were the main source of security. By displaying strong static defences Bombay was able to portray strength through what Watson has described as power projection.<sup>48</sup> The portrayal of Company power is a central theme in this thesis, particularly its alignment with private interests, and is one in which Cowan had a great impact. What Watson refers to as the 'symbiosis of offence and defence' will be discussed at length with regard to Cowan and the development of

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<sup>46</sup> W.S. Desai, *Bombay and the Marathas up to 1774*, (New Delhi, 1970), p. 69.

<sup>47</sup> Anirudh Deshpande, 'Limitations of Military Technology: Naval Warfare on the West Coast, 1650-1800', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 27, No. 17 (Apr. 25, 1992), 900-904.

<sup>48</sup> I.B. Watson, 'Fortifications and the "Idea" of Force in Early East India Company Relations with India', *Past and Present*, No. 88 (Aug., 1980), 76.

Company security policy on the west coast of India.<sup>49</sup> As Bombay was an island settlement it was dependent on sea trade and the inviolability of its shipping to ensure survival. Once again, the work of Das Gupta has been highly beneficial in shaping this thesis's arguments in this regard.<sup>50</sup> Security in the western Indian Ocean is a topic largely dealt with in chapter four.

Whilst this thesis addresses several subjects which have been touched upon in existing scholarship, the unique opportunity allowed by Cowan's archive has allowed for a fresh perspective on many of these topics. This is concurrent with Mentz's desire for a greater depth of private trading archives for use in wider study.<sup>51</sup> As such, this thesis will contribute to the wider scholarship of the East India Company and European activity in the western Indian Ocean, and will provide the first extended study of Cowan's career. At present, the *ODNB* article by Watson is the most comprehensive evaluation available.<sup>52</sup> It is hoped that this thesis will promote further research into Cowan, and the Company at large, by highlighting the exciting potential of the Cowan archive.

Due to the nature of the source material available, particularly from PRONI, the focus will primarily be on Cowan's time in India. Although other sources have been brought together from the British Library and the National Archives, the periods before and after Cowan's time in India lack primary source material when compared to his Indian career. In order to address this, the thesis recognises that it is not currently possible to provide

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<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.

<sup>50</sup> Das Gupta, 'The Maritime City' in I. Banga (ed), *Ports and their Hinterlands in India, 1700-1950*, (New Delhi, 1992), pp. 359-62.

<sup>51</sup> Mentz, *The English Gentleman Merchant*, p. 72.

<sup>52</sup> Biography of Sir Robert Cowan (d. 1737), ([www-oxforddnb-com](http://www-oxforddnb-com)), (12 Aug. 2017).

a comprehensive biography of Cowan. As such, the method undertaken has been to create an evaluation based primarily on his career.

It has been necessary to isolate several key areas of interest for Cowan and the Company, which will feed into Cowan's own aims and achievements for his Indian career.<sup>53</sup> It will be demonstrated that Cowan's motivation for travelling to India was his hope of making a vast fortune, a theme followed in his correspondence throughout his tenure in India, and an ambition against which many of his actions have been judged. Though areas such as governance, patronage, diplomacy and security were fields in which Cowan was actively involved, the financial element will be key to the discussion which follows. Cowan's successful construction and operation of patronage-based networks will also be prominently discussed in this thesis. This is an aspect of the current research which will feed into the wider scholarship of private trade and commercial links, thus contributing to the general trend towards the study of global-centric networks. The influence of private trading networks and interests will be particularly emphasized.

Moreover, this thesis argues that the successful operation of commercial interests in the early modern period, particularly in the western Indian Ocean sphere, were driven by effective networking. This again returns to the work of Cain and Hopkins,<sup>54</sup> and Finn.<sup>55</sup> This study has used the vast Cowan archive as a lens of investigation into the wider patterns of Company commerce. The multitude of correspondence which was sent to and from India was a factor which underpinned the successful operation of

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<sup>53</sup> As noted above, these include interpersonal networks, intra-Asian trade, private trade, Bombay, and native politics.

<sup>54</sup> Cain and Hopkins, *British Imperialism*, pp. 85-6.

<sup>55</sup> Finn, 'Anglo-India and the Familial Proto-State', pp. 100-3.

commerce. However, this material had the potential to be connected to both public and private interests. Whilst the British Library holds a great number of letter and consultation books as part of its India Office Records collection, these documents are specifically framed within the Company's view. By making use of Cowan's archive, in tandem with the much-used India Office Records material, it enables a fresh perspective on many aspects of Company operations. In particular, it has been highlighted how there are many gaps in the Indian Office Records for the period 1719-35, reflecting Cowan's career. This is particularly well demonstrated by Sharma's thesis on the history of Bombay, which strongly uses the India Office Records material, and presents many gaps for Cowan's period which this thesis has aimed to fill.<sup>56</sup> This approach has been conducted through the lens of Cowan's career, although many aspects of the connected wider Company activity in the western Indian Ocean will be explored within this thesis.

Cowan's large archive of correspondence held at PRONI, within the Londonderry Papers, has been the focal point of this study.<sup>57</sup> This thesis has examined 24 of Cowan's letter books for the years 1719-1735, along with a number of other smaller bundles of letters. In addition to this, 13 account books for the years 1719-35 have also been utilised to assist in the development of the narrative. This amounts to approximately 3,000 individual documents. The existence of such a large and varied archive partially contradicts Soren Mentz's assertion regarding the amount of source material left by private merchants involved in the East India trade. The new understanding of the complexity of Cowan's archive has enabled this thesis to tackle questions regarding

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<sup>56</sup> Sharma, 'Bombay and the English Company'.

<sup>57</sup> PRONI, D/654.

private commercial networks which, Mentz has correctly highlighted, have been unanswered until now.<sup>58</sup>

It is also acknowledged that it has not been possible to make use of all of the archive, since damage to several letter books has made them largely illegible. The great strength of Cowan's personal archive, however, is that a large body of source material has survived, whereas comparative archives for the early eighteenth century have largely not survived in as good a condition or indeed in terms of sheer volume. One suggested solution for the remarkable preservation of this archive was that following Cowan's return from India in 1735-6, and in particular his death in 1737, his estate was the subject of a lengthy court battle between his creditors, the East India Company and Alexander and Mary Stewart.<sup>59</sup> The fact that Cowan, and indeed his Indian wealth, was the subject of so public a court case, it may have been that his letters and accounts were treated as evidence, and were therefore taken into secure custody before they had time to be destroyed or dispersed. The public interest and awareness of nabobery, outlined by Lawson and Phillips, was also tied to this.<sup>60</sup>

The Londonderry corporation minute books for the years 1673-1736, also held at PRONI, were examined in order to build a profile of Cowan's father, John, who was an alderman in the city of Londonderry in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries.<sup>61</sup> The minute books were then used in tandem with financial and land administration documents held in the Londonderry papers at PRONI to elaborate on the Cowan family's

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<sup>58</sup> Mentz, *The English Gentleman Merchant*, p. 72.

<sup>59</sup> Phipps vs. Stewart, London, 1735, (National Archives, Kew, C11/837/7); Lort vs. Lowther, London, 1739, (C11/1059/12); Lort vs. Lowther, London, 1739, (C11/1059/13); Stewart vs. East India Company, London, 1739, (C11/1555/25); Stewart vs. East India Company, 1739, (C11/1557/20).

<sup>60</sup> Lawson & Phillips, ' "Our Execrable Banditti" ', 233-6.

<sup>61</sup> PRONI, MIC440/1, Londonderry Corporation Minute Books, Vols. 1-4.

wealth and social standing during the period. These were also helpful in measuring the degree to which the Test Act of 1704 curtailed John Cowan's career with the Londonderry corporation, thus also providing a further insight into Cowan's motivations for venturing east.

As mentioned above, the other main archive which has been consulted in this thesis has been the India Office Records held at the British Library. These contain a multitude of sources related to Company activity, both at home and in India. For the purposes of studying the early modern Company, the India Office Records have for some time been the primary source of information. This thesis too has used this body of sources as a means of underpinning the examination into Cowan. In particular, the Company letter books between the years 1719 and 1735 have been invaluable.<sup>62</sup> The opinions and instructions of the Company directors in these letters have been contrasted with the content of Cowan's letters in order to build a more rounded evaluation of the key events highlighted in this thesis. These have been complemented by various factory record books, ledgers and miscellaneous letters. Again, however, there are many gaps in the records which Cowan's archive has proven very useful in filling.

Whilst the British Library and PRONI have supplied a large corpus of sources to this thesis, the National Archives at Kew have also contributed to the current study. Chancery rolls related to the disbursement of Cowan's will following his death in February 1737 have been consulted to complete the evaluation of Cowan's legacy. The five cases which have been examined took in the years 1737-1750, and consisted of a

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<sup>62</sup> BL, IOR/E/3/100-106.



number of pleadings and answers from various associated parties.<sup>63</sup> These were key to the understanding of Cowan's financial footprint and greatly contributed to the completion of this thesis. The discussion of these is largely confined to chapter six.

It must be acknowledged that this thesis relies entirely on English language sources which have largely come from Cowan and East India Company sources. It is particularly highlighted that Cowan's archive does contain two small letter books in Portuguese which have not been studied by this thesis. A paid translation of this material found that these primarily contained information regarding the trade of arak and duplicate material. Contained within the Cowan archive are also fragments of letters and notes which are written in a native script. Colleagues have advised that this is likely one of the northern Indian languages, probably Gujarati, although it could not be translated. The suggestion of Gujarati appears sound given the predominance of Surat-based brokers working in conjunction with the East India Company. Catherine Manning has also carried out extensive research into Cowan's small body of letters in French. Manning has recorded that these are concerned with Cowan's sourcing of credit at Mocha in 1727.<sup>64</sup> Manning's findings have been incorporated into chapter 3 which deals with Cowan's stint at Mocha.

In respect of the above, it must be acknowledged that the study has been largely constructed from the anglocentric point of view of both Cowan and the Company in the western Indian Ocean. As such, the source material was likely written with an inherent

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<sup>63</sup> Phipps vs. Stewart, London, 1735, (National Archives, Kew, C11/837/7); Lort vs. Lowther, London, 1739, (C11/1059/12); Lort vs. Lowther, London, 1739, (C11/1059/13); Stewart vs. East India Company, London, 1739, (C11/1555/25); Stewart vs. East India Company, 1739, (C11/1557/20).

<sup>64</sup> Catherine Manning, *Fortunes À Faire: The French in Asian Trade, 1719-48*, (Abingdon, 2017), pp. 114-5.

bias towards English, in particular Company, interests. Similarly, the Cowan archive, being a collection of his own letter books, also presents a challenge with regard to bias. This is a challenge and a possible weakness to the Cowan archive. Additionally, the complicated issue of balancing of public and private interests ties into this. Whilst the scale of this thesis, caused by the under-usage of the Cowan archive for many years, has not provided the time or opportunity for a comparative study of the wider European sources for other trading companies held in Lisbon or the Hague, for example, it is argued that future research may use this thesis and the Cowan archive as a base for comparative studies into this material.

Each chapter of this thesis examines a separate aspect of Cowan's life and career development. This has been done in two ways. First, each chapter centres around a separate geographical location in order to discuss the significance of the place in regard to Cowan's development. Second, in tandem with the geographical approach, each chapter follows the chronological progression of Cowan's career. This approach has been chosen to reflect the nature of Cowan's archive and as the best method to construct an effective evaluation. Chapter one lays out Cowan's background in the city of Londonderry. It does this through the reconstruction of his family's estates, influence and connections. The years covered in this chapter are between 1680 and 1719. This then feeds into the opportunities which Cowan had as a result of his Presbyterian international network, and demonstrates his commercial experience at Lisbon and the construction of his patronage network in Ulster, Dublin and London. The opportunities afforded to Cowan in his early life were key to his later success, and so chapter one seeks

to reinforce the value of his various network connections. The work of Hancock,<sup>65</sup> Bailey<sup>66</sup> and Walsh<sup>67</sup> is key here.

Chapter two discusses Cowan's arrival in India and his first official postings within the Company framework. Cowan's involvement at the Company factories of Goa and Surat have been investigated, and it is discussed how these placements contributed to his successful career progression. Chapter two takes in the years 1721-3. Cowan's role in conducting Anglo-Portuguese relations and his role in the Anglo-Portuguese alliance of 1721 are at the centre of this chapter, and they represent the key factors in his career progression for this period. The second half of chapter two discusses his deployment to Surat in 1722, whereby he was tasked with investigating alleged broker fraud there. Through the examination of his duties at Surat it has also been possible to discuss the nature of the Company relationship with native elites during the period, in particular the personal aspect of patronage-based commercial networks incorporating natives which ties in to Bayly's work.<sup>68</sup>

Chapter three examines Cowan's appointment as chief of Mocha during the years 1724-7. As Mocha was Cowan's first major placement, this chapter has been able to expand its remit to discuss aspects of the wider Company trading sphere in the western Indian Ocean. This was due to Cowan's increased involvement in the conducting of Company trade in the western Indian Ocean during this period. Due to the number of difficulties which Cowan faced during his time at Mocha, this chapter also discusses his efforts to effectively manage Company interests in the Red Sea. However, whilst at Mocha, Cowan

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<sup>65</sup> Hancock, 'Combining Success and Failure', pp. 9-10.

<sup>66</sup> Bailey, 'Metropole and Colony', 161-3.

<sup>67</sup> Walsh, *The Making of the Irish Protestant Ascendancy*, pp. 110-1.

<sup>68</sup> C.A. Bayly, *Indian Society and the Making of the British Empire*, (Cambridge, 1988), p. 10.

was also given the opportunity to trade privately to a far greater extent than had previously been possible. This inevitably led to a conflict of interests between him and the Company, and so a discussion surrounding his private trade has been made possible. This will also link to the horizontal versus vertical debate relating to Stern<sup>69</sup> and Erikson's<sup>70</sup> work, as well as aspects of the gentlemanly capitalist debate.<sup>71</sup>

Following his placement at Mocha, Cowan was appointed as governor of Bombay. Due to the large amount of information available and the great importance of the posting, Cowan's time at Bombay has been divided into two chapters. Chapter four covers the years 1728-35 and deals with the macro elements of his governorship in order to construct a narrative of how he governed. In particular, in line with the central research question, his impact on the western Indian Ocean theatre as a whole has been specifically followed. Aspects of Company trade, defence and diplomacy have been particularly highlighted in this chapter. Meanwhile, chapter five addresses the micro elements of Cowan's time at Bombay. This chapter has been primarily focused on aspects of Cowan's private trade and the political world of the East India Company which impacted him. Again, this chapter covers the years 1728-35. The role played by Cowan in the accumulation of wealth, and by extension the difficulties which arose between him and the Company, have been key to this chapter. Once again, the alignment of Cowan's public and private interests, in terms of the horizontal versus vertical and privately interested networks,<sup>72</sup> has been key to both chapters.

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<sup>69</sup> Stern, *The Company State*, 7-8.

<sup>70</sup> Erikson, *Between Monopoly and Free Trade*, pp. 19-20.

<sup>71</sup> Cain and Hopkins, *British Imperialism*, pp. 85-6.

<sup>72</sup> Finn, 'Anglo-India and the Familial Proto-State', pp. 100-3.

Chapter six deals with the fallout from Cowan's numerous difficulties with the Company authorities and documents his return to England. This chapter, whilst incorporating elements of his time in India, is geographically focused on Britain and Ireland, and covers the period 1734-1750. This chapter more fully unpacks the nature of Cowan's personal wealth following his return to England, and discusses the disbursement of this following his death. The legal struggles over the Cowan inheritance have played an important role in this chapter as there was a considerable legacy left behind. Ultimately, it will be demonstrated that the fortune Cowan made in India went on to be the foundation of the Stewart family's wealth.

## Chapter One: Robert Cowan

Robert Cowan was born c. 1680-1690 in Londonderry.<sup>1</sup> Cowan was of Scots-Presbyterian stock, and his family had been based in Londonderry since the early seventeenth century.<sup>2</sup> This made it likely that Cowan's family travelled to Ulster after 1609 as part of the plantation of Ulster. This took place under King James VI & I.<sup>3</sup> As such, 1609-10 has been taken as the earliest likely year. Robert Cowan's letter to William Cowan<sup>4</sup> on 8 January 1734 provided much information about Cowan and his family in Ireland.<sup>5</sup> In this letter he outlined that his family had originally come from Stirling in Scotland, and had been at Londonderry for 'above a century.'<sup>6</sup> This would have made 1634 the latest possible year for their move to Ireland. The Cowan family's arrival in Londonderry therefore coincided with the development of the city and its growth following the planting. The Cowan family were active commercially in Londonderry throughout Robert's life as his father, John, was a merchant and landholder in the area until his death in 1733.

Cowan's father John married twice, and Robert was born of John Cowan's first marriage to Elizabeth. John Cowan's second marriage was to Anne Stewart, daughter of

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<sup>1</sup> There is no surviving birth record or supplementary evidence for his true birth-date, and so the period 1680-90 is an estimate. This is based on the age of his father, John Cowan, and the progress of his career across a number of years.

<sup>2</sup> Cowan to William Cowan, Bombay, 8 Jan. 1734, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2D, f. 80v).

<sup>3</sup> T.W. Moody, *The Londonderry Plantation 1609-41, The City of London and the Plantation of Ulster*, (Belfast, 1939), pp. 274-80.

<sup>4</sup> No relation. A businessman based in London.

<sup>5</sup> Cowan to William Cowan, Bombay, 8 Jan. 1734, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2D, f. 80v).

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

Alexander Stewart of Ballylawn Castle, Donegal.<sup>7</sup> Of this marriage there were two known children who were mentioned several times in Robert's correspondence. These were Mary, who later married Alexander Stewart,<sup>8</sup> and William. Robert's correspondence with his family was limited to John, Mary and William across his time in India, and so it was possible that they were the only other living family members. The type and frequency of correspondence Robert held with his family was very distinct. In total, Robert wrote only two letters to his sister. These were early on in his Indian career, and were short and informal.<sup>9</sup> Cowan's letters to his father, whilst still informal, provided updates of Cowan's career progress and expectations. There were six of these letters between 1721 and 1727. Cowan wrote regular letters to his brother William, and in a much more formal fashion. This was because William joined the East India Company in 1725,<sup>10</sup> at Robert's suggestion,<sup>11</sup> and as such was a colleague and subordinate of Robert's.

It has not been possible to find out a great deal about Robert's life prior to his joining the Company in 1719. Therefore, most of the background information which shall be discussed in this chapter has been drawn from his Indian letter books. Whilst these have provided much interesting information regarding his path to the Company and his progress within it, it has been necessary to look elsewhere for supporting evidence. In

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<sup>7</sup> William Courthope (ed), *Debrett's Complete Peerage of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland*, (London, 1839), p. 518.

<sup>8</sup> Alexander Stewart (b. 1700, d. 22 Apr. 1781). Irish landowner born at Ballylawn Castle, Co. Donegal. Bought the Mount Stewart in 1744 with Mary's inheritance from Robert Cowan. Father of Robert Stewart (b. 27 Sept. 1739 – d. 6 Apr. 1821), First Marquess of Londonderry.

<sup>9</sup> Cowan to Mrs. Davis, Goa, 27 Jan. 1721, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1AA, f. 118); Cowan to Mrs. Davis, Goa, 25 Jan. 1721, (f. 118v).

<sup>10</sup> Cowan to Martin French, Mocha, 12 Apr. 1725, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1C, f. 68.); Cowan to John Gould Jr., Mocha, 15 Jul. 1725, (f. 91).

<sup>11</sup> Cowan to William Cowan, Mocha, 8 Jul. 1724, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1C, f. 5v).

such a vein, the construction of a study around Robert's father, John Cowan, has been undertaken in order to discuss Robert's background. In particular, the use of the Londonderry corporation's minute books for the period 1690-1737 have helped to elaborate on John Cowan's career as a burgess, and later alderman, in the city of Londonderry.<sup>12</sup> The examination of a number of documents in the Londonderry Papers held at PRONI, aside from Cowan's papers, has also produced a great deal of information regarding John Cowan's various holdings in the city and surrounds of Londonderry.<sup>13</sup>

Events in Cowan's early career were key in understanding his motivation for joining the East India Company, with his petition read to the court of directors on 17 February 1719.<sup>14</sup> Cowan's involvement in a failed Lisbon trading partnership with Griffith Lort preceded his petition to the Company.<sup>15</sup> This failure resulted in a number of debts which Cowan and Lort were jointly liable for. Cowan's petition, begging for him to be allowed to travel to India as a free merchant, was rooted in his desire to make good his outstanding debts.

### **I - John Cowan, (? – 1733), and Ulster Background**

Although Cowan did not reference his father's age or other personal details, he described him as 'ancient' when discussing him.<sup>16</sup> This was supplemented by the

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<sup>12</sup> PRONI, MIC440/1, Londonderry Corporation Minute Books, Volumes 1-4.

<sup>13</sup> PRONI, Londonderry Papers, D654.

<sup>14</sup> Petition of Robert Cowan to the East India Company, London, 17 Feb. 1719, (BL, India Office Records, IOR/E/1/11, f. 126).

<sup>15</sup> Griffith Lort (? – 24 Mar. 1742). Formerly a merchant of Lisbon, latterly a resident of the parish of St. Martin in the Fields, Middlesex.

<sup>16</sup> Cowan to William Cowan, Bombay, 8 Jan. 1734, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2D, f. 80v).



knowledge that he was an alderman in Londonderry and that he had an annual income of between £300 and £400 a year.<sup>17</sup> The first reference to John Cowan was in December 1682 for a bond payment between him and the Londonderry landowner and alderman, Henry Thomson.<sup>18</sup>

First, it is important to give an idea of the geographical spread of John Cowan's holdings throughout his career. There have, however, been difficulties in identifying all of the relevant areas due to the distortion of a number of place-names.<sup>19</sup> It is interesting to note that John Cowan was a tenant of estates in both Donegal and Londonderry, suggesting a relatively wide range of his investments. In Donegal, John Cowan was granted lands by the earl of Donegal<sup>20</sup> in the barony of Inishowen on 1 November 1710.<sup>21</sup> The terms were for 58-year lease, with annual rent set at £16. There were also instructions for the building of an English style house and the planting of trees.<sup>22</sup> Although instructions for the establishment of a household were given, it was unlikely that John Cowan ever resided there. It was more likely that he sub-let various pieces of land and collected the rents. This was common absentee-landlord practice. However, Cowan was recorded as having lived in Londonderry, and so he was not that far removed from his lands. It should also be noted that the earl of Donegal's lands extended from the Inishowen peninsula to the parish of Templemore in the liberties of Londonderry. As such, the naming of Bonymain in the agreement suggested that the estates leased to

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Bond between Henry Thomson and John Cowan, Londonderry, 2 Dec. 1682, (PRONI, Londonderry Papers, D654/D/2/A/9); Bond between Henry Thomson, Londonderry, 20 Jan. 1683, (PRONI, Londonderry Papers, D654/D/2/A/10).

<sup>19</sup> The use of [www.townlands.ie](http://www.townlands.ie) has been made to identify as many of these distortions as possible.

<sup>20</sup> Arthur Chichester, 3<sup>rd</sup> Earl of Donegal (1666 – 10 Apr. 1706).

<sup>21</sup> Grant from the Rt. Hon. Arthur, Earl of Donegal to John Cowan, Londonderry, 1 Nov. 1710, (PRONI, Hamilton Deeds, D75/1).

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

Cowan were on the border of Donegal and Londonderry, and likely spanned both territories.<sup>23</sup> However, this was not the extent of Cowan's holdings, as there were many more to the east of Londonderry in the Campsie and Faughanvale areas.

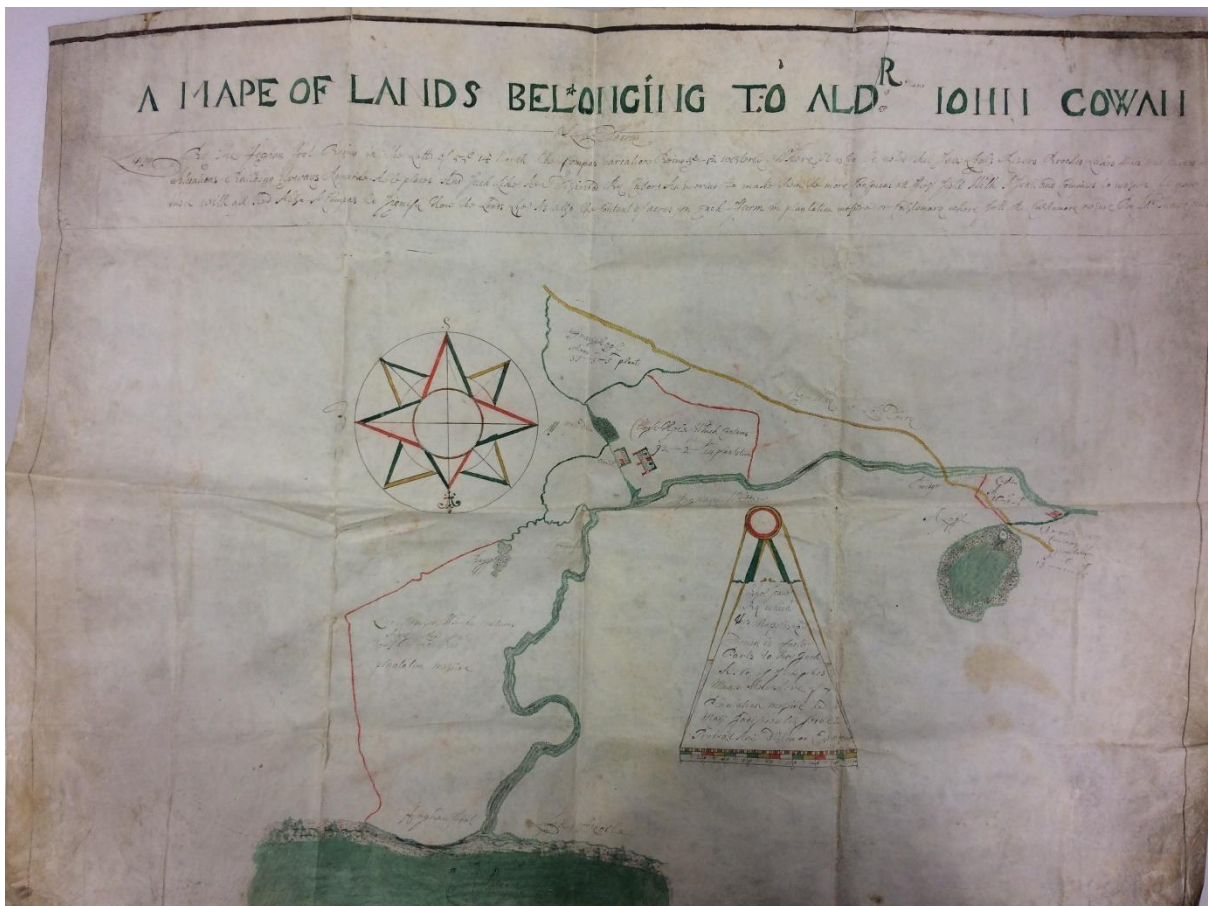


Fig. 1.1 A map of lands belonging to Alderman John Cowan.<sup>24</sup>

John Cowan's lands at Faughanvale were granted to him in April 1690 by Hugh Thomson.<sup>25</sup> The parish of Faughanvale is located to the east of the city of Londonderry,

<sup>23</sup> If the modern spelling of Bonimane is used, this can be identified as having been a part of the earl's extensive holdings in the parish of Templemore.

<sup>24</sup> A Map of Lands Belonging to Alderman John Cowan, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/MR2/1).

<sup>25</sup> Grant between Hugh Thomson and John Cowan, Londonderry, 17 Apr. 1690, (PRONI, Londonderry Papers, D654/D/2/A/11).

near to the current-day airport. The above map, figure 1.1, shows the lands granted to John Cowan at Faughanvale. Since lands were held by John Cowan at Faughanvale,<sup>26</sup> Upper Campsie<sup>27</sup> and Lower Campsie,<sup>28</sup> there was a clear area where his holdings were concentrated. This suggested a consolidation of his holdings to make management simpler. It must be noted, however, that he sub-let these estates to a number of individuals rather than working the lands himself. Figure 1.1 shows that John Cowan's lands were located on a river at Faughanvale which had its estuary pointing north. This suggests that the river in question was the River Faughan which empties into the River Foyle on the eastern bank. This meant that Cowan's land interests were likely focused around the city of Londonderry, as Faughanvale, Campsie and Templemore were all surrounding the city of Londonderry.

There were also a number of other land grants made to John Cowan further away from the city of Londonderry. In particular, attention has been drawn to lands he held at Carricks,<sup>29</sup> which in turn is near to the parish of Balteagh.<sup>30</sup> This was significant for two reasons. First, that there was a Presbyterian community at Balteagh and the surrounding area. As John Cowan was a Presbyterian, it might be argued that this was a local area to him.<sup>31</sup> Second, he held a number of estates in the area surrounding

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Lease between John Cowan and Tristram Joanes, Londonderry, 1 Nov. 1706, (PRONI, Londonderry Papers, D654/L/E/69/1).

<sup>28</sup> Lease between John Cowan and William Quinn, Londonderry, 23 Apr. 1730, (PRONI, Londonderry Papers, D654/L/E/69/2).

<sup>29</sup> Conveyance between John Cowan and William Ross, Londonderry, 4 Nov. 1715, (PRONI, Londonderry Papers, D654/D/2/A/14).

<sup>30</sup> A Map of Balteagh ([www.towanlands.ie/londonderry/balteagh](http://www.towanlands.ie/londonderry/balteagh)), (29 May 2019).

<sup>31</sup> No evidence for his place of worship has been found, however.

Balteagh. These were, Tully,<sup>32</sup> Gortagerty,<sup>33</sup> Muldare,<sup>34</sup> Cloghan<sup>35</sup> and Carricks.<sup>36</sup> These were likely areas called Cloghan and Carrick near Limavady in the parish of Balteagh.<sup>37</sup> There was likewise a Mulderg and Muldanagh between Londonderry and Dungiven. It is argued that Muldare was likely a different form of one of these names since Dungiven is in the area immediately to the south of Balteagh and Limavady. Further, there is a townland called Gortnahey between Dungiven and Limavady, and it is suggested that this was likely the Gortagerty mentioned in the Londonderry Papers.<sup>38</sup> Again, this suggested a large portion of John Cowan's holdings were in the area to the east of the city of Londonderry.

In addition to lands in the liberties, Faughanvale and the Limavady-Balteagh area, John Cowan held a number of other properties at lease. These outstanding properties have not been fully identified. These were in Carnmoney,<sup>39</sup> Drumavara,<sup>40</sup> and Greenan.<sup>41</sup> Further, John Cowan was also noted to have held the lease on two tenements within the city of Londonderry from March 1696 onwards.<sup>42</sup> This was for tenement numbers 203 and 204 on Gracechurch Street, lying on the south side of Sheriff's mountain. This

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<sup>32</sup> Fine between Samuel Davy and John Cowan, Londonderry, 1715, (PRONI, Londonderry Papers, D654/D/2/A/13).

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Conveyance between John Cowan and William Ross, Londonderry, 4 Nov. 1715, (PRONI, Londonderry Papers, D654/D/2/A/14).

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> A Map of Limavady ([www.townlands.ie/londonderry/keenaght/drumachose/newtownlimavady](http://www.townlands.ie/londonderry/keenaght/drumachose/newtownlimavady)), (29 May 2019).

<sup>38</sup> A Map of Dungiven ([www.townlands.ie/londonderry/dungiven](http://www.townlands.ie/londonderry/dungiven)), (29 May 2019).

<sup>39</sup> Fine between Samuel Davy and John Cowan, Londonderry, 1715, (PRONI, Londonderry Papers, D654/D/2/A/13).

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Lease between John Cowan and William Cowan, Londonderry, 13 Feb. 1720, (PRONI, Londonderry Papers, D654/L/E/75/1); Lease between John Cowan and John Joanes, Londonderry, 15 Dec. 1731, (PRONI, Londonderry Papers, (PRONI, Londonderry Papers, D654/L/E/75/2).

<sup>42</sup> Lease between the Society of the Govr. And Assts., London, of the Plantation in Ulster and John Cowan, Londonderry, 25 Mar. 1696, (PRONI, Lenox-Conyngham Papers, D1449/1/23).

would have placed these buildings to the west of the River Foyle, roughly in the Creggan area. The lease was for 41 years from the feast of the annunciation of 1692.<sup>43</sup> This suggested that John Cowan held the property before the official leasehold in 1696. The annual rent for this, and a parcel of land in the island of Derry, was 30 shillings per annum plus taxes.<sup>44</sup> The portion of land mentioned suggested that John Cowan held land in the area of the city walls. This was likely because the walled city was previously encircled by the River Foyle, though over time this area dried-up to create the bogside district. The location of this parcel of land makes it likely that there was a joint land and tenement plot in the area to the west of the city. The above estimation of the Creggan area is therefore increasingly plausible.

The other key area of John Cowan's career was his service with the Londonderry corporation. This represented his standing as a person of importance in the city, and to a lesser extent his success in business. John Cowan was first elected to the Londonderry corporation as a burgess on 10 October 1693.<sup>45</sup> He then sat on the council until his election as sheriff on 2 November 1694,<sup>46</sup> a position which he held until 3 February 1696.<sup>47</sup> He once again served as burgess from 3 February 1696 until 23 November 1703, when he was elected as an alderman.<sup>48</sup> It was likely he served in this role for life, and

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<sup>43</sup> Celebrated on 25 March. The festival day commemorates the visit of the archangel Gabriel to the virgin Mary.

<sup>44</sup> Lease between the Society of the Govr. And Assts., London, of the Plantation in Ulster and John Cowan, Londonderry, 25 Mar. 1696, (PRONI, Lenox-Conyngham Papers, D1449/1/23).

<sup>45</sup> Londonderry Corporation Council Meeting, Londonderry, 10 Oct. 1693, (PRONI, MIC440/1, Londonderry Corporation Minute Book, Vol. 2, f. 99).

<sup>46</sup> Londonderry Corporation Council Meeting, Londonderry, 2 Nov. 1694, (PRONI, MIC440/1, Londonderry Corporation Minute Book, Vol. 2, f. 114).

<sup>47</sup> Londonderry Corporation Council Meeting, Londonderry, 18 Jan. 1696, (PRONI, MIC440/1, Londonderry Corporation Minute Book, Vol. 2, f. 127); Londonderry Corporation Council Meeting, Londonderry, 3 Feb. 1696, (PRONI, MIC440/1, Londonderry Corporation Minute Book, Vol. 2, f. 128).

<sup>48</sup> Londonderry Corporation Council Meeting, Londonderry, 3 Feb. 1696, (PRONI, MIC440/1, Londonderry Corporation Minute Book, Vol. 2, f. 128); Londonderry Corporation Council Meeting, Londonderry, 13 Sept. 1703, (PRONI, MIC440/1, Londonderry Corporation Minute Book, Vol. 2, f. 235).

Robert certainly described him as such,<sup>49</sup> though the last council meeting he attended was that of 20 July 1704.<sup>50</sup> This meant a period of 29 years whereby he did not attend council meetings. The absence might have been due to disinterest, as his attendance record for previous meetings was not perfect. Of the 150 meetings he was eligible to attend between his first appearance in the minutes and his last,<sup>51</sup> he attended 102. This amounted to 68 per-cent attendance.

His absence after July 1704, however, occurred not long after his contestation of the mayoral elections in November and December 1703. On 7 December 1703, John Cowan was elected mayor for the following year.<sup>52</sup> However, at the next council meeting of 21 December 1703, he was removed from office by the government in Dublin as he was thought to have been an unsuitable candidate.<sup>53</sup> This was likely due to his having been a Presbyterian, with the Presbyterian and Catholic communities having come under increased suspicion from the government in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. The extension of the Irish parliament's penal laws to limit the freedoms of Presbyterians between 1704 and 1707 made this particularly likely. The Test Act, introduced in January 1704, required all those serving in civil or military office under the crown to receive communion in the established church once a year.<sup>54</sup> John Cowan had

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<sup>49</sup> Cowan to William Cowan, Bombay, 8 Jan. 1734, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2D, f. 80v).

<sup>50</sup> Londonderry Corporation Council Meeting, Londonderry, 20 Jul. 1704, (PRONI, MIC440/1, Londonderry Corporation Minute Book, Vol. 2, f. 257).

<sup>51</sup> Londonderry Corporation Council Meeting, Londonderry, 10 Oct. 1693, (PRONI, MIC440/1, Londonderry Corporation Minute Book, Vol. 2, f. 99); Londonderry Corporation Council Meeting, Londonderry, 20 Jul. 1704, (PRONI, MIC440/1, Londonderry Corporation Minute Book, Vol. 2, f. 257).

<sup>52</sup> Londonderry Corporation Council Meeting, Londonderry, 7 Dec. 1703, (PRONI, MIC440/1, Londonderry Corporation Minute Book, Vol. 2, f. 240).

<sup>53</sup> Londonderry Corporation Council Meeting, Londonderry, 21 Dec. 1703, (PRONI, MIC440/1, Londonderry Corporation Minute Book, Vol. 2, f. 241).

<sup>54</sup> D. W. Hayton, *Ruling Ireland, 1685-1742: Politics, Politicians and Parties*, (Woodbridge, 2004), p. 186.

taken the parliament required oath in October 1693,<sup>55</sup> and had been granted liberties and rights by Queen Mary in April 1696.<sup>56</sup> However, this was clearly not sufficient to make him an acceptable candidate in the eyes of the establishment and Church of Ireland, both of whom had been hostile towards dissenters since the restoration. This fear of political dissenters in Ulster derived from the precedent of Scots Presbyterians seizing power in Scotland in 1691.<sup>57</sup>

Although there was general confusion in Londonderry as to which office holders were required to resign,<sup>58</sup> the issue of the sacramental test forced Cowan to withdraw from corporation service in 1704. However, the political side-lining of prominent Ulster dissenters such as Cowan had the knock-on effect of more fully drawing together dissenting interests in Ulster to focus their commercial, and at times political, aspirations internationally. There were of course existing Ulster interests in the wider commercial and political spheres, with the Cairnes family who were prominent merchants and bankers in Belfast, Dublin and London,<sup>59</sup> and the Conollys, most prominently William Conolly, who were large landowners and political influencers in County Londonderry.<sup>60</sup> Both of these families held political connections to London, with Conolly's Whig interests working alongside the Walpole lobby in Parliament,<sup>61</sup> and the Cairnes family being linked to the powerful Gould family of London who had Bank of

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<sup>55</sup> Londonderry Corporation Council Meeting, Londonderry, 10 Oct. 1693, (PRONI, MIC440/1, Londonderry Corporation Minute Book, Vol. 2, f. 99).

<sup>56</sup> Londonderry Corporation Council Meeting, Londonderry, 216 Apr. 1696, (PRONI, MIC440/1, Londonderry Corporation Minute Book, Vol. 2, f. 131).

<sup>57</sup> Hayton, *Ruling Ireland*, p. 187.

<sup>58</sup> Jean Agnew, *Belfast Merchant Families in the Seventeenth Century*, (Dublin, 1996), pp. 94-5.

<sup>59</sup> Patrick Walsh, *The South Sea Bubble and Ireland: Money, Banking and Investment, 1690-1721*, (Woodbridge, 2014), pp. 47-8.

<sup>60</sup> Walsh, *The Making of the Irish Protestant Ascendancy: The Life of William Conolly, 1662-1729*, (Woodbridge, 2010), pp. 110-1.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 116-8.

England and East India Company connections.<sup>62</sup> The enforced divergence of political office and commercial activity for dissenters, at least partially until 1719 when a limited measure of statutory tolerance was introduced,<sup>63</sup> encouraged the formation and strengthening of dissenting-based commercial networks into what might be described as a Presbyterian International. This is something which shall be expanded upon in the following section.

The relationship between John and Robert Cowan has proven difficult to determine due to the limited number of letters which Robert wrote to his father. It is clear, however, that Robert treated his father with a degree of deference, as was expected of him. His description of his father to William Cowan in January 1734 suggested that he valued his father's respectability. In particular, his standing as an alderman and his annual income of between £300 and £400 were emphasised.<sup>64</sup> Robert also submitted to his father for advice and a decision when William<sup>65</sup> wished to travel east in the service of the Company. William consulted Robert about the possibility of venturing east, but Robert reported that he had insisted William should consult his father about a decision.<sup>66</sup> William was then based at Lisbon, like Robert before him, and had grown despondent with his fortunes there.<sup>67</sup> This deference suggested an adherence to family hierarchy, or at least the desire not to be responsible for a decision. In Robert's other letters to his

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<sup>62</sup> Walsh, *The South Sea Bubble and Ireland*, p. 57.

<sup>63</sup> Hayton, *Ruling Ireland*, p. 187.

<sup>64</sup> Cowan to William Cowan, Bombay, 8 Jan. 1734, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2D, f. 80v).

<sup>65</sup> Cowan's half-brother, William Cowan. Not to be confused with the William Cowan mentioned immediately above.

<sup>66</sup> Cowan to John Cowan, Mocha, 8 Jul. 1724, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1C, ff. 15v-16).

<sup>67</sup> Cowan to John Cowan, Mocha, 8 Jul. 1724, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1C, ff. 15v).



father he routinely reported his career progress and developments in India.<sup>68</sup> Robert did not, however, give an indication as to how many letters he received from his father during his time in India.

It is clear that John Cowan held a reasonable degree of respect and business holdings in the city and county of Londonderry. Whilst it was suggested that he did not farm lands himself, there is evidence that he sub-let these lands and made a profit that way.<sup>69</sup> His tenancy agreement for tenements 203 and 204 likely worked in the same manner.<sup>70</sup> It has been mentioned above that he had an annual income of between £300 and £400 a year.<sup>71</sup> Whilst he was likely a merchant in his lifetime, no evidence for his activities bar the above mentioned land holdings has been found. It must also be pointed out that the annual income of £300 to £400 was suggested in January 1734, and as such cannot give a true account of his income bracket for his earlier life. This makes it difficult to estimate his income during Robert's younger years, and thus to gauge wealth during his upbringing.

Whilst it is difficult to bring conclusions on the Cowan family's fortunes in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, it can be assumed that they were an educated burgher family. They clearly held sufficient connections and credit to have the means of leasing estate lands for sub-letting. There was seemingly also sufficient means

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<sup>68</sup> Cowan to John Cowan, Goa, 19 Nov. 1721, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1AA, f. 100); Cowan to John Cowan, Bombay, 6 Jan. 1722, (f. 113v); Cowan to John Cowan, Bombay, 20 Oct. 1723, (D654/B/1/1B, f. 13v).

<sup>69</sup> Lease between John Cowan and Tristram Joanes, Londonderry, 1 Nov. 1706, (PRONI, Londonderry Papers, D654/L/E/69/1); Lease between John Cowan and William Quinn, Londonderry, 23 Apr. 1730, (PRONI, Londonderry Papers, D654/L/E/69/2; Conveyance between John Cowan and William Ross, Londonderry, 4 Nov. 1715, (PRONI, Londonderry Papers, D654/D/2/A/14).

<sup>70</sup> Lease between the Society of the Govr. And Assts., London, of the Plantation in Ulster and John Cowan, Londonderry, 25 Mar. 1696, (PRONI, Lenox-Conyngham Papers, D1449/1/23).

<sup>71</sup> Cowan to William Cowan, Bombay, 8 Jan. 1734, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2D, f. 80v).

to allow Robert, and latterly William, to travel to Lisbon for trading purposes. Again, following the idea of a Presbyterian International, this also suggested that there were connections beyond Londonderry which came into play. These are aspects which shall be examined in the following sections.

## **II - Robert Cowan and Lisbon, c. 1710-19**

In the years preceding his removal to India, Cowan was involved in a business partnership with Griffith Lort c. 1710-1719. This saw their interests operating out of Lisbon. Crosbie has suggested that Irish merchants sought to relocate to foreign trading enclaves in order to bypass trading restrictions on Ireland.<sup>72</sup> This serves to partially explain why Cowan may have chosen Lisbon. The partnership was recorded by Cowan as having run into financial trouble, though he did not elaborate, with the result that he was obliged to make a fresh start and seek his fortune in India.<sup>73</sup> Cowan left Lisbon c. 1717-8,<sup>74</sup> and petitioned the Company for permission to travel east in February 1719.<sup>75</sup> The Methuen Treaty of 1703<sup>76</sup> which served to draw English trade towards Portuguese wine over the French competition gave a viable explanation for the desire of British-based merchants, specifically Cowan and Lort in this instance, to have operated at Lisbon.

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<sup>72</sup> Barry Crosbie, *Irish Imperial Networks*, (Cambridge, 2011), p. 38.

<sup>73</sup> Cowan to William Cowan, Mocha, 8 Jul. 1724, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1C, f. 6).

<sup>74</sup> Lort vs. Lowther, London, 1739, (National Archives, Kew, C11/1059/12).

<sup>75</sup> Petition of Robert Cowan to the East India Company, London, 17 Feb. 1719, (BL, India Office Records, IOR/E/1/11, f. 126).

<sup>76</sup> A bilateral treaty between England and Portugal, signed 27 Dec., 1703 as part of the War of the Spanish Succession.

The Methuen Treaty itself originated in the struggles of the English woollen trade abroad and Portugal's poor financial position as a result of the increased competition in the sugar market from their English and French rivals.<sup>77</sup> The crux of the Methuen Treaty served to guarantee that customs to be paid on wine imported from Portugal would be set at one third less than the customs which were to be levied on the import of French wines. In return, the Portuguese removed tariffs which inhibited the sale of English cloth in Portugal.<sup>78</sup> The opportunity for closer financial and diplomatic links cannot have been wasted on either party, and would also seem to have afforded opportunities for individuals such as Cowan and Lort to make their fortunes.

Whilst the Methuen Treaty was undoubtedly a catalyst for growth in the wine trade to Portugal, it would be wrong to assume that the trade did not exist prior to the signing of the treaty. Throughout the seventeenth century, merchants were also concerned with the import of quality goods such as wine and brandy from France and Spain to fulfil demand, much in the way that tobacco from America and sugar from the West Indies was demanded.<sup>79</sup> The crucial differences in the Cowan example was that there was an additional market stimulus post-1703, and that he had an existing contact within the trade with which to deal. Cowan can be seen to have been involved in the trade to Madeira for wine with Henry Cairnes prior to 1718.<sup>80</sup> Cairnes was an interesting connection to Cowan's network due to his family's heavy involvement in the Belfast corporation prior to the sacramental test, as well as their financial links to both Dublin

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<sup>77</sup> A.D. Francis, 'John Methuen and the Anglo-Portuguese Treaties of 1703', *Historical Journal*, 3, No. 2 (1960), 103.

<sup>78</sup> Charles Ludington, *The Politics of Wine in Britain*, (New York, 2013), p. 2.

<sup>79</sup> Agnew, *Belfast Merchant Families*, p. 108.

<sup>80</sup> Fitter vs. Cairnes, Bill and Answer, National Archives, Kew, (C/11/2614/26).

and London.<sup>81</sup> It would seem that Cowan had succeeded, prior to both his Lisbon trading and later petition to the East India Company, in being accepted into a powerful commercial network with a base in Ulster.

The question to be posed here is how did Cowan manage to enter this network, and indeed what the criteria for entry was that he met? The answer, in part, lay in the very concept of a network such as this; it was intended as method of regulating the interests of the actors within it. A fine example of this has been articulated by David Hancock in which he describes the case of Scots Madeira wine merchants in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.<sup>82</sup> Within the trade based on Madeira, Hancock notes both Irish and Scots acting in roles such as purchasers, packers and sellers throughout the eighteenth century.<sup>83</sup> With this in mind it is unsurprising that Cowan found an existing trade to join, with the Madeira trade having already been well established prior to his commercial venture.

Whilst the existence of a trading apparatus suggested the ability to purchase, ship and sell goods, it did not necessarily guarantee that Cowan would have been able to enter the trade. There would likely have been invisible barriers to trade such as a closed market dealing only with members of an established network, the difficulty in acquiring credit, as well as a lack of local knowledge. These factors could all be overcome by membership of an existing mercantile network operating within the Madeira trade. Since business networks were largely personal in nature, relationships had to be managed

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<sup>81</sup> Walsh, *The South Sea Bubble and Ireland*, pp. 47-8; 51-2.

<sup>82</sup> David Hancock 'Combining Success and Failure: Scottish Networks in the Atlantic Wine Trade' in David Dickson, Jan Parmentier & Jane Ohlmeyer (eds), *Irish and Scottish Mercantile Networks in Europe and Overseas in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, (Gent, 2007), pp. 9-10.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*

by specific named parties in order to thrive. Cowan was likely accepted into the Cairnes network based on his fulfilment of a number of criteria which Hancock has discussed. In particular, Hancock has cited the idea of shared common experiences between members of networks. Links to family, homeland and ethnicity were powerful motivators in this respect.<sup>84</sup> As such, Cowan's dissenting identity, his father's corporation service, and roots in Londonderry would likely have made him an acceptable candidate for a commercial network linked to the wider Presbyterian International suggested. In the wider context, Ireland could, according to Bailey, function as a place that initiated networks through ethnic patronage to connect to the British imperial world.<sup>85</sup> Crosbie's arguments on ethnicities from within the British Isles operating within the colonies are also relevant here.<sup>86</sup>

Whilst Cowan clearly succeeded in entering the Cairnes network at Lisbon and Madeira, it was also clear that difficulties emerged in the operation of Cowan's trade. Cowan made much of the alleged fraud by his business partner, Griffith Lort,<sup>87</sup> but the collapse of a network designed to insulate against such matters makes one question whether Cowan's relationship with Lort was sufficiently based, or if there was a precedent for such instances? These networks were of course personal in nature, and so each member had to trust the others to act fairly and reasonably. However, in line with the rational actor theory, which holds that in the absence of supervision each member will act for their own benefit above the collective,<sup>88</sup> it might be seen as unsurprising that a member

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid., pp. 14-15.

<sup>85</sup> Craig Bailey, 'Metropole and Colony: Irish Networks and Patronage in the Eighteenth-Century Empire', *Immigrants & Minorities*, 23, Nos. 2-3, (Jul. – Nov. 2005), 163.

<sup>86</sup> Crosbie, *Irish Imperial Networks*, pp. 6-7.

<sup>87</sup> Cowan to Nathaniel Gould, Bombay, 5 Jan. 1734, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2D, f. 63v).

<sup>88</sup> Emily Erikson, *Between Monopoly and Free Trade: The English East India Company 1600-1757*, (Princeton, 2014), pp. 108-9.

such as Lort allegedly went rogue. This is something which Hancock has also highlighted in his discussion as to why networks may have failed. As well as noting personal rivalries or fallings-out, Hancock has argued that actors within networks often acted due to personal preference or opinion. This then served to delay rational or acceptable decision making.<sup>89</sup> Based on Cowan's below arguments relating to his joint-debt, a personal difference arising from individual action was the likely reason for the breakdown of his relationship with Lort.

It is difficult to estimate Cowan's Lisbon debts due to the numerous renegotiations which took place regarding them.<sup>90</sup> However, a provision was made in Cowan's will which allocated 80,000 rupees for the payment of these debts.<sup>91</sup> It was unclear if Cowan had been servicing these debts over his years in India, or if the 80,000 rupees was intended as a final settlement. Cowan did, however, record how these large debts came into being. Cowan alleged that Lort had mismanaged the co-signatures in Lisbon whilst Cowan was away, and so the debts had allegedly come into being by fraud.<sup>92</sup> However, since the two men were viewed as having been in a commercial partnership, the liability stood.<sup>93</sup> The core issue was that following the collapse of their partnership in Lisbon, Lort kept all of the accounts and books. The concern for Cowan was that Lort may have doctored them in the interim.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Hancock, 'Combining Success and Failure', pp. 17-18.

<sup>90</sup> Cowan to Nathaniel Gould, Bombay, 18 Aug. 1733, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2D, f. 54v).

<sup>91</sup> Will of Robert Cowan, Bombay, 4 Jan. 1735, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/C/1/1A, f. 1).

<sup>92</sup> Cowan to Nathaniel Gould, Bombay, 5 Jan. 1734, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2D, f. 63v).

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Cowan to Richard Legrond, Bombay, 20 Dec. 1733, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2D, f. 59v); Cowan to Nathaniel Gould, Bombay, 5 Jan. 1734, (f. 63).

Cowan described Lort as ‘a weak and unreasonable man’ due to his secrecy and unhelpfulness in resolving the debts,<sup>95</sup> and expressed special disdain for the fact that Lort had demanded expenses of Cowan for having had to travel to adjustment meetings for his own joint debt.<sup>96</sup> The most troubling debt was the case of Mr. Garnier who claimed that Cowan and Lort owed him 24,000 rupees,<sup>97</sup> despite the fact that Cowan refuted ever having any dealings with him. Cowan did acknowledge, however, that the debt may have been accrued by Lort through his mismanagement of co-signatures. However, even with this argument, Cowan objected on the grounds that Garnier could not have afforded to lend such a large sum during the time of Cowan and Lort’s partnership.<sup>98</sup> Cowan agreed to pay half of the lawful debts of the partnership, despite his insistence that he and Lort were never ‘strictly’ in partnership.<sup>99</sup>

During his absence from Europe, Cowan appointed his friend and patron, Henry Cairnes, as his London attorney with responsibility for resolving Cowan’s debts as reasonably as possible. However, there was a degree of confusion with this commission as Cowan noted that Cairnes’ numerous concerns had caused a lapse in concentration which had allowed Lort to outmanoeuvre him with regard to Cowan’s liability with his creditors.<sup>100</sup> Cowan wrote to Cairnes in July 1724 to bemoan the fact that Lort had managed to free himself from their creditors through the courts via statute.<sup>101</sup> Cowan was astounded as to how this was possible without Cowan, as joint-debtor, being present and vowed to oppose the demands which were then solely directed to him. This development

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<sup>95</sup> Cowan to Nathaniel Gould, Bombay, 5 Jan. 1734, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2D, f. 63).

<sup>96</sup> Cowan to Nathaniel Sedgewick, Bombay, 5 Jan. 1734, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2D, f. 67v).

<sup>97</sup> Cowan did not give a reason for this debt.

<sup>98</sup> Cowan to Richard Legrond, Bombay, 20 Dec. 1733, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2D, f. 60).

<sup>99</sup> Cowan to Nathaniel Gould, Bombay, 5 Jan. 1734, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2D, f. 63v).

<sup>100</sup> Cowan to William Cowan, Mocha, 8 Jul. 1724, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1C, f. 6).

<sup>101</sup> Cowan to Henry Cairnes, Mocha., 8 Jul. 1724, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1C, f. 13).

understandably left Cowan with great financial and personal concerns, though it was unclear how Lort had managed to manipulate the legal system to suit his ends. Indeed, an investigation into private statutes covering the period 1718-29 produced no references to any private acts including either Robert Cowan or Griffith Lort.<sup>102</sup> As such, it must be assumed that either Cowan did not provide all of the facts to his correspondents, or that Lort had influenced the judge and / or creditors.

Cowan believed that it was the opportunity he had in venturing east which caused Lort to envy his position.<sup>103</sup> Having had the opportunity to make a fortune in India did not necessarily mean that such a fortune was to be made quickly, or that affairs in London would not have become more complicated in Cowan's absence. Cowan was seemingly aware of the potential for Lort to cause more trouble for him by proposing a form of back-room deal to their creditors. To pre-empt such an occasion, Cowan instructed Cairnes in his letter of 8 December 1724 that he was willing to pay double whatever incentive(s) Lort offered to him, or to their creditors, if a covert approach was made.<sup>104</sup> Additionally, Cowan went on the offensive and contacted creditors directly with the aim of resolving the tension. This was shown in his letter of 11 December 1724 to his London creditor John Sherman, in which Cowan advised Sherman that Lort had been plotting against him. Cowan then reaffirmed his promise to make good the outstanding debt when the opportunity arose.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> Danby Pickering, *The Statutes at Large, from Magna Charta to the End of the Eleventh Parliament of Great Britain*, Vols. XIV & XV, (Cambridge, 1765).

<sup>103</sup> Cowan to John Sherman, Carwar, 11 Dec. 1724, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1C, f. 46).

<sup>104</sup> Cowan to Henry Cairnes, Carwar, 8 Dec. 1724, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1C, f. 42).

<sup>105</sup> Cowan to John Sherman, Carwar, 11 Dec. 1724, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1C, f. 46).



Such a tactic might be said to have worked, at least in the short term. There were no further communications from Cowan on the subject until December 1725 when he wrote to Cairnes once more to discuss the Lort affair. In this letter, Cowan concluded that whilst he expected little good to ever come from Lort, it was most likely that he was now harmless as he was found to have retreated to his family home in Pembrokeshire, Wales.<sup>106</sup> Lort's prospects for ever making money, or anything of himself, were slim according to Cowan.<sup>107</sup>

Despite the temporary reprieve, the matter of Cowan's Lisbon debts loomed large during 1733-4, when it had become clear that he was to return to England. As such, a great deal of his correspondence during these years was given over to instructions for managing the debt.<sup>108</sup> Ideally, Cowan wanted his lawsuits settled before he returned to England as he had suffered from 'too much hardship and fatigue abroad' to face proceedings back in England.<sup>109</sup> This, however, was not to be the case and the matter was only partially resolved with Cowan's death in 1737, and the allocation of a portion of his estate to his Lisbon creditors.<sup>110</sup> Cowan referred to an agreement with his creditors based in Bristol which would have seen terms for the repayment of debt discounted and paid off, though this agreement was abandoned by his creditors in 1733.<sup>111</sup> The cause for the breach was that someone had informed Cowan's creditors that he had come into a fortune during his time in India, and that he now had greater

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<sup>106</sup> Cowan to Henry Cairnes, Bombay, 20 Dec. 1725, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1C, f. 127).

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>108</sup> Cowan to Nathaniel Gould, Bombay, 18 Aug. 1733, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2D, f. 32v); Cowan to William Phipps, Bombay, 18 Aug. 1733, (f. 38); Cowan to John Sherman, Bombay, 14 Dec. 1733, (f. 57).

<sup>109</sup> Cowan to Nathaniel Gould, Bombay, 18 Aug. 1733, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2D, f. 32v).

<sup>110</sup> Will of Robert Cowan, Bombay, 4 Jan. 1735, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/C/1/1A, f. 1).

<sup>111</sup> Cowan to Nathaniel Gould, Bombay, 18 Aug. 1733, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2D, f. 54v).

means with which to discharge his debts. Cowan confided in Nathaniel Gould<sup>112</sup> that he was unaware who had informed his creditors of his fortune.<sup>113</sup>

It was unclear if Lort had interfered with the Bristol credit arrangement, though he certainly stood to benefit from its collapse. Lort was from, and had returned to, Pembrokeshire sometime between 1723 and 1727, and his family had lived in the region for generations.<sup>114</sup> In addition to this, Lort was a member of the Society of Merchant Venturers of the City of Bristol in the early eighteenth century.<sup>115</sup> The suggestion that Lort may have informed Cowan's Bristol creditors of his new wealth may not have been too far from the mark. However, there was no correspondence to suggest this and so it must remain as supposition.

Despite the drawback of the failed credit agreement, Cowan suggested his position remained that he wanted to pay back as much of the debt as he possibly could. Cowan expressed this sentiment to John Sherman on 14 December 1733.<sup>116</sup> Following the failure of the Bristol agreement, Sherman negotiated a settlement whereby Cowan's patron in London, John Gould, was to provide finance for a partial write-down of the debts, followed by a larger provision to be made in Cowan's will.<sup>117</sup> This agreement was subsequently accepted, and Cowan regularly wrote to both John and Nathaniel Gould in London to instruct that funds be transferred for servicing his debt.<sup>118</sup> These were,

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<sup>112</sup> Cousin to John Gould Jr. A patron and friend of Cowan's in London. MP for New Shoreham (1701-7; 1707-28). Governor of the Bank of England (1711-3).

<sup>113</sup> Cowan to Nathaniel Gould, Bombay, 18 Aug. 1733, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2D, f. 54v).

<sup>114</sup> Cowan to Henry Cairnes, Bombay, 20 Dec. 1725, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1C, f. 127).

<sup>115</sup> W.E. Minchinton (ed), *Politics and the Port of Bristol in the Eighteenth-Century*, (Bristol, 1963), p. xiv.

<sup>116</sup> Cowan to John Sherman, Bombay, 14 Dec. 1734, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2D, ff. 57-57v).

<sup>117</sup> Cowan to John Sherman, Bombay, 14 Dec. 1734, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2D, ff. 57-57v); Will of Robert Cowan, Bombay, 4 Jan. 1735, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/C/1/1A, f. 1).

<sup>118</sup> Cowan to Nathaniel Gould, Bombay, 18 Aug. 1733, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2D, f. 32v); Cowan to John Gould Jr., Bombay, 31 Aug. 1734, (f. 144).

however, relatively small payments of between £39 and £339.<sup>119</sup> The Gould's support for Cowan in this manner was suggestive of an intimate relationship within a private network. This is in line with Finn's discussions on the role of family-based networks supporting their members.<sup>120</sup> Cowan, to clarify, became engaged to Elizabeth Gould sometime before he left for India.

As such, these payments were likely instalment payments to cover interest. This was in conjunction with the provision of 80,000 rupees in his will for the benefit of his Lisbon creditors.<sup>121</sup> Despite the successful negotiation of this agreement, however, it was not without its problems. Cowan complained that Sherman had been very 'slow and cool' in accommodating the Lisbon debts, despite the guarantee that John Gould was to provide the security.<sup>122</sup> In order to secure agreement from his Lisbon creditors, Cowan had to take the step of asking his Lisbon friend, Arthur Stert,<sup>123</sup> who was then commissioner for settling merchants' losses with Spain in Seville, to travel to Lisbon and intercede on his behalf.<sup>124</sup>

It was clear that the issue of Cowan's Lisbon debts was one which weighed heavily on him throughout his career in India. Indeed, it can be seen that the matter took up a great deal of his correspondence between 1724 and 1734. However, Cowan sought to distance himself from responsibility for the debts and Lort's position was not argued. As such, it was possible that Cowan was seeking to portray the situation to suit his own

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<sup>119</sup> Lort vs. Lowther, London, 1739, (National Archives, Kew, C11/1059/12).

<sup>120</sup> Margot C. Finn, 'Family Formations: Anglo India and the Familial Proto-State', in David Feldman & Jon Lawrence (eds), *Structures and Transformations in Modern British History*, (Cambridge, 2011), pp. 101-3.

<sup>121</sup> Will of Robert Cowan, Bombay, 4 Jan. 1735, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/C/1/1A, f. 1).

<sup>122</sup> Cowan to Richard Legrond, Bombay, 20 Dec. 1733, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2D, f. 59v).

<sup>123</sup> Arthur Stert (d. 1755). Whig MP for Plymouth 1727-41; 1747-54. Appointed commissioner for settling merchant claims under the terms of the Treaty of Seville, 1730.

<sup>124</sup> Cowan to John Sherman, Bombay, 14 Dec. 1733, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2D, f. 57v).

ends. It has been asserted that Cowan's desire to travel to India in the first place was to make enough money to pay back his Lisbon debts. With this in mind, Cowan's entire career in India must be viewed through the lens of his desire to make a personal fortune. To reflect this, Cowan's private trading activities and building of patronage links will be closely examined.

### **III - Cowan's Early Patronage Circle**

Whilst Cowan clearly had previous commercial experience from his time in Lisbon, this did not necessarily guarantee that his application to the Company was sure to have been accepted. The effective use of networks of patronage and kinship very often came into play when an application was being considered by the court of directors. Patronage, according to Craig Bailey, amounts to a complex sequence of exchange between members of a group whose common bond is to remember the history of giving that connects them.<sup>125</sup> Sometime before his departure to India in 1719, Cowan appears to have lived in London for a number of years.<sup>126</sup> This would have given him the opportunity of socialising with city and Company figures, if he had the means of securing an introduction and keeping-up socially. Since Cowan was ultimately successful in gaining patronage, he clearly held some status and wealth during his London years. Whilst in London Cowan was familiar with the Turner's Hill and Middlesex areas, and so

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<sup>125</sup> Bailey, 'Metropole and Colony', 161.

<sup>126</sup> Cowan to Ms. Furness, Mocha, 8 Jul. 1724, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1C, ff. 1-1v); Cowan to William Cowan, Mocha, 8 Jul. 1724, (f. 6).

it may be assumed that he lived nearby, or frequented these areas at the very least. During his stay in London, Cowan was on very close terms with the Gould and Cairnes families.<sup>127</sup>

The Gould family were well-connected in London financial circles, and in particular with the East India Company. Both John<sup>128</sup> and John Jr.<sup>129</sup> served as Company directors in the early eighteenth century. The investigation into Cowan's networking in London has been an interesting aspect of this thesis, and has presented many interesting aspects related to the idea of a wider ethnic or Presbyterian international network. As noted above, Cowan became engaged to John Gould's daughter Elizabeth sometime before he left for India.<sup>130</sup> Although the engagement was later broken due to Cowan's extended stay in India, his relationship with the family appears to have been unharmed. Intriguingly, Elizabeth then married Albert Nesbitt, a successful Irish commercial trader based in London and business partner of Nathaniel Gould.<sup>131</sup> Although Nesbitt was already an established trader by the time he married Elizabeth, it is interesting that another Irish groom with mercantile connections after Cowan was chosen for her. This may have merely indicated a preference for a commercially-linked match, but the point must be reiterated that the Gould family were heavily involved in Irish financial circles, particularly Ulster-orientated, as well the trading firm Gould and Nesbitt operating out

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<sup>127</sup> Cowan to Mrs. Cairnes, Surat, 20 Apr. 1722, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1AA, f. 140); Cowan to Mrs. Gould, Surat, 20 Apr. 1722, (f. 141).

<sup>128</sup> John Gould (d. 1736). Of Woodford, Essex.

<sup>129</sup> John Gould Jr. (c. 1695-1740). Chairman of EIC, 1727. Deputy Chairman, 1726; 1733. MP for New Shoreham, 1729-34.

<sup>130</sup> Cowan to Betty Gould, Bombay, 20 Oct. 1723, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1B, f. 14v); Cowan to Betty Gould, Mocha, 8 Jul. 1724, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1C, ff. 14-14v).

<sup>131</sup> Bailey, 'The Nesbitts of London and their Networks' in David Dickson, Jan Parmentier & Jane Ohlmeyer (eds), *Irish and Scottish Mercantile Networks in Europe and Overseas in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, (Gent, 2007), pp. 243-5.

of Coleman Street in London. Coleman Street was, according to Bailey, the centre of an area where numerous Irish merchants lived, particularly those with Ulster connections.<sup>132</sup> This all suggested that the Cowan and Nesbitt connection to the Goulds was part of a wider attempt to consolidate Irish commercial links through marriage and patronage. This is concurrent with Margot Finn's arguments on the strengthening of commercial links through marriage.<sup>133</sup>

In line with Hancock's arguments on the intimate nature of networks,<sup>134</sup> Cowan's relationship with the Goulds showed a distinct personal quality to it throughout his career, even after his betrothal to Elizabeth was broken off. Further, Cowan's correspondence with the various Gould family members greatly increased in frequency as the years went by. Cowan particularly maintained his contact with John and John Jr. in providing them with a great amount of information regarding affairs in India, thus serving as a network conduit for sharing information.<sup>135</sup> This ties in with Soren Mentz's discussion of the role which privately interested merchant networks could play in the transfer of information.<sup>136</sup> This constant flow of reports was unsurprising given their extended patronage of Cowan throughout his years in India. As discussed above, it was also the Gould family in the form of John Jr. and Nathaniel who assisted Cowan with the

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<sup>132</sup> Ibid., pp. 235-6.

<sup>133</sup> Finn, 'Family Formations', p. 102.

<sup>134</sup> Hancock, 'Combining Success and Failure', pp. 16-18.

<sup>135</sup> Cowan to John Gould, Goa, 25 Nov. 1721, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1AA, f. 101v); Cowan to John Gould Jr., Mocha, 15 Jul. 1725, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1C, f. 91); Cowan to John Gould Jr. Bombay, 6 Jan. 1729, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2A, f. 60).

<sup>136</sup> Soren Mentz, *The English Gentleman Merchant at work: Madras and the City of London, 1660-1740*, (Copenhagen, 2005), p. 81.

resolution of his Lisbon debts.<sup>137</sup> This suggested a strong long-term relationship between the family and Cowan in line with Hancock's assertions.<sup>138</sup>

The Gould connection is even more significant in the context of an Ulster-centric network when it is considered that Nathaniel Gould was the father-in-law of Sir Alexander Cairnes. Gould was a director of the Bank of England and was prominent in London financial circles.<sup>139</sup> Cairnes, in turn, was involved in Dublin banking circles with the bank of Hugh Henry,<sup>140</sup> another prominent Presbyterian involved in Irish commercial networks whom Cowan would later use a means of remitting parts of his Indian wealth to his father in Londonderry.<sup>141</sup> However, whilst it is clear that the Gould family was crucial to Cowan gaining entry into Company patronage, they were not the initial sponsors of Cowan's entry into the wider Presbyterian International network. As noted in the previous section, Cowan's connection to Henry Cairnes was a key early link which enabled his commercial and network progression. The close business and personal links between the Gould and Cairnes families was likely the key factor that enabled Cowan to expand his personal network to incorporate London, and latterly Indian, based connections.

The Cairnes family appear to have been very supportive of Cowan throughout his time in India, both personally and professionally.<sup>142</sup> Further, as mentioned above, the Cairnes family played a role in resolving Cowan's Lisbon debts when Henry Cairnes acted as his

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<sup>137</sup> Cowan to Nathaniel Gould, Bombay, 18 Aug. 1733, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2D, f. 32v); Cowan to John Gould Jr., Bombay, 31 Aug. 1734, (f. 144).

<sup>138</sup> Hancock, 'Combining Success and Failure', pp. 16-8.

<sup>139</sup> Walsh, *The South Sea Bubble and Ireland*, p. 57.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.

<sup>141</sup> Cowan to Henry Cairnes, Bombay, 25 Dec. 1725, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1C, f. 127v); Cowan to Henry Cairnes, Surat, 11 Jan. 1726, (f. 143).

<sup>142</sup> Cowan to Mrs. Cairnes, Surat, 20 Apr. 1722, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1AA, f. 140).

attorney.<sup>143</sup> The question as to how Cowan initially came to be connected to the Cairnes family is an interesting one. Though there is no Cowan correspondence to suggest as much, a possible connection came through John Cowan's business and political dealings in Londonderry. When John Cowan was serving as a burgess on the Londonderry corporation, William Cairnes<sup>144</sup> was communicating with the Londonderry council from the Irish Parliament.<sup>145</sup> John Cowan was then involved in writing letters<sup>146</sup> and carrying government documents to Dublin for the Irish Parliament,<sup>147</sup> via William Cairnes. Whilst this was an initial connection, there was likely a far deeper reason for the Cairnes family to incorporate Cowan into their network.

It is important to highlight that the Cairnes brothers, who held an estate in Monaghan, were also well-connected bankers in Ireland.<sup>148</sup> Though Belfast was still a comparatively small town in the early eighteenth century, there were still prominent banking interests present. At the foremost of these was that of the Cairnes brothers who linked their business between Belfast, Dublin and London, maintaining strong business connections in all three. In their Dublin dealings, Patrick Walsh has commented that they were part of an identifiable Ulster interest in the Dublin financial sector. Of this, much business was drawn from Ulster Presbyterians who were involved in the linen trade.<sup>149</sup> This is important on two counts. First, that Hancock's arguments on the importance of

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<sup>143</sup> Cowan to Henry Cairnes, Carwar, 8 Dec. 1724, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1C, f. 42).

<sup>144</sup> William Cairnes (c. 1669 – August 1707), MP for Newtown, Limavady and Belfast. Brother to Sir Alexander Cairnes, 1<sup>st</sup> Baronet, (1665 – 30 Oct. 1732) and Sir Henry Cairnes, 2<sup>nd</sup> Baronet, (1673 – 16 Jun. 1743).

<sup>145</sup> Londonderry Corporation Council Meeting, Londonderry, 26 Sept. 1699, (PRONI, MIC440/1, Londonderry Corporation Minute Book, Vol. 2, f. 174).

<sup>146</sup> Londonderry Corporation Council Meeting, Londonderry, 2 Jan. 1700, (PRONI, MIC440/1, Londonderry Corporation Minute Book, Vol. 2, f. 178).

<sup>147</sup> Londonderry Corporation Council Meeting, Londonderry, 2 Apr. 1700, (PRONI, MIC440/1, Londonderry Corporation Minute Book, Vol. 2, f. 184).

<sup>148</sup> Robert Whan, *The Presbyterians of Ulster, 1680-1730*, (Woodbridge, 2013), p. 66.

<sup>149</sup> Walsh, *The South Sea Bubble and Ireland*, pp. 51-2.



ethnicity in the construction of early-modern commercial networks rings true.<sup>150</sup>

Second, that a clearly definable international network of Presbyterian interests can be seen to be emerging surrounding those linked to Cowan.

The Cairnes network was, however, far more varied and complex than their Belfast, Dublin and London nexus. There was also a strong Londonderry element to their network which can be seen through Walsh's work into William Conolly. Walsh has identified Conolly as having belonged to the Ulster Whig network which at times operated in tandem with the Irish Society interest. Conolly used his influence over Ulster seats to elect pro-government supporters to Parliament, particularly through his connection to Sir Robert Walpole's younger brother Horatio, then serving as Chief Secretary.<sup>151</sup> It is interesting to note that in the 1703 election, Conolly was returned to Parliament alongside William Cairnes in Limavady. However, both were also returned to County Londonderry and Belfast respectively.<sup>152</sup> The cooperation between these men implied a political network connection between the two families. With regard to a Cowan connection to these men, it was noted above that John Cowan held lands at lease close to Limavady.<sup>153</sup> Intriguingly, Conolly's interest was greatest in the Limavady area where he held absolute political control from 1703 onwards.<sup>154</sup> If one considers the Limavady connection in tandem with Conolly and Cowan's involvement in Londonderry politics, as well as the clear links between Cowan and the Cairnes family, a pattern of dissenting patronage emerges to the benefit of Cowan. Ultimately, this led to his

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<sup>150</sup> Hancock, 'Combining Success and Failure', pp. 14-5

<sup>151</sup> Walsh, *The Making of the Irish Protestant Ascendancy*, pp. 118-124.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 116.

<sup>153</sup> Conveyance between John Cowan and William Ross, Londonderry, 4 Nov. 1715, (PRONI, Londonderry Papers, D654/D/2/A/14).

<sup>154</sup> Walsh, *The Making of the Irish Protestant Ascendancy*, p. 116.

incorporation into the idea of a wider Presbyterian international network suggested above. After all, the safest course in conferring patronage was, according to Bailey, to give it to known elements such as family members and close friends or acquaintances.<sup>155</sup>

It was clear that the connections which were made in Ireland allowed Cowan to move in more powerful circles once he got to London. Clearly, having had an introduction to the Goulds from the Cairnes gave him a much greater standing in London. Without the Cairnes link it would have been difficult for Cowan to persuade the Gould family to entertain him, let alone to patronise him for Company service. As such, it must be argued that Cowan owed his Company patronage not just to the Gould family, but also to the Cairnes family. There was also the powerful connection with the Ulster Presbyterian community for Cowan, through contacts such as the Cairnes family and latterly Hugh Henry. This suggested an established connection between Cowan and the wider Presbyterian community in Ireland which he was able to utilise to his advantage. This also suggests a path to Company patronage apart from more traditional courtly processes of Company patronage followed by the likes of Gerald Aungier, who derived support from the textile industrialist Thomas Ashe.<sup>156</sup> A full discussion of the nature of Company patronage, and this divergence from more traditional avenues of Irish patronage shall be conducted in chapter five.

A fascinating element of Cowan's letter books for his time in India was the number of personal letters he sent with a gendered dimension. These letters were tied in to his intimate network of confidantes, primarily consisting of ladies from the Cairnes and

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<sup>155</sup> Bailey, 'Metropole and Colony', 161.

<sup>156</sup> Jane Ohlmeyer, 'Eastward Enterprises: Colonial Ireland, Colonial India', *Past & Present*, 240, No. 1, (Aug. 2018), 96.

Gould families. The frequency of personal letters he sent to this cohort of women was significant as a greater proportion of these were sent from Goa, and latterly Mocha, than Cowan's later postings at Surat, Carwar and Bombay. The episodes at Goa and Mocha were characterised with feelings of loneliness and anxiety as a result of unfamiliar surroundings and a lack of company. As a result of Cowan's upset and difficulties at Goa, there was a particular effort made on his part to correspond with his contemporaries back in London. These included friends, patrons and general acquaintances. However, as suggested above, the most notable element of this correspondence was that of his letters to women.<sup>157</sup>

From the investigation of Cowan's numerous letter books, one is struck by the fact that Cowan had spikes in his female correspondence during two distinct time periods. The first was his time at Goa, where there were 16 recorded letters of a reasonable length between 1721 and 1722.<sup>158</sup> This was out of a total of 287. The second was his time at Mocha, with 18 letters out of 558 over the period 1724-6. These spikes were evidently linked to Cowan's periods of personal difficulty when he was seeking comfort and reassurance from a familiar, and crucially a feminine, source. There is a precedent in the wider scholarship for this kind of correspondence to women from the colonial setting, with Sanjeev Jain and Alok Sarin's investigation into Arthur Cole<sup>159</sup> being a useful comparison to the Cowan scenario. In this article, Jain and Sarin articulate how Cole suffered as a result of familial dislocation and loneliness, much in the same way as

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<sup>157</sup> This aspect of a uniquely female colonial correspondence is the topic of an upcoming article by the author.

<sup>158</sup> This being a letter which does not merely act as a cover letter for a bill of exchange etc.

<sup>159</sup> Arthur Henry Cole (28 Jun. 1780 – 16 Jun. 1844). Company resident in Coorg and Mysore (1802 – 27), MP for Enniskillen (1828 – 44).

Cowan did at Goa and Mocha.<sup>160</sup> Although the Cole example is in the early nineteenth century, as opposed to the eighteenth for Cowan, the need for a more intimate network of correspondence, facilitated by women, was clearly visible in both situations. This suggested that Cowan's desire for gendered correspondence was not unique. The strength of the Cowan archive is that there is a large body of varied material available for consultation, often including fascinating material such as the above. Whereas many personal archives may not have retained documents such as these due to their delicacy, or simply erosion and damage over time, Cowan's archive has clearly survived very well. Evidently, these letters being sent to women were part of a support network which Cowan had with his friends and family back in London, particularly the Gould and Cairnes families. It was interesting that Cowan confided in these families in particular, and not his own family in Ireland. However, it must be acknowledged on this point that Cowan does not appear to have had a wide circle of personal correspondence in Ireland during his career. Even so, such emotional topics discussed in his letters to women were not included in his letters to male correspondents. This may have reflected a specific need of female contact and communication for Cowan at a given time. For example, Cowan's circle of correspondence at Goa contained 6 women and 64 men for the period. This was in line with what was expected due to the need for Company servants to have written many letters to their colleagues in India. The expression of personal information or difficulties was also far more likely to have been communicated to women given the social constraints regarding masculinity. For a long time, mental illness or weakness was

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<sup>160</sup> Sanjeev Jain & Alok Sarin, 'Madness and Rulers: Events in Coorg and London in 1810, as observed by the Hon. Arthur Cole, the resident at Mysore', *Indian Journal of Psychiatry*, 57, No. 2, (Jun. 2015), 214-216.

regarded as a distinctly female complaint, particularly with regard to habitation in the colonies.<sup>161</sup> Regardless, there must have been a strong relationship in place for Cowan to have been willing to share personal information like this.

This idea of a strong, and indeed resilient, relationship returns to Hancock's arguments about the nature of networks and their formation. On the one hand, deepening ties of network relationships helped to mitigate the risks of long-distance commerce. It was simply good business practice to be on familiar terms with those whom patronage and opportunities were offered to. Crucially, however, Hancock has highlighted that the personal nature of network relationships had the ability to be flexible and incorporate a multitude of roles. This included the potential for network members to expand into each other's' personal and non-commercial lives, all the way up to marrying family members.<sup>162</sup> This is an argument which might readily be used when examining Cowan. It was clear that Cowan progressed from an exterior commercial role in the Cairnes-Gould network to one which was much more fluid and capable of change. This can be seen in his intimate correspondence with the ladies of both families, and most strikingly his engagement to Elizabeth Gould. This again returns to Finn's arguments on familial networks in empire.<sup>163</sup>

It was likely that the Gould and Cairnes families had become akin to a family for Cowan and that by extension he felt able to discuss personal matters with them, particularly with regard to Hancock's arguments on network functionality. These women, and by extension their families, were largely Cowan's support group for his time in India. He did

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<sup>161</sup> Indrani Sen, 'The Memsahib's "Madness": The European Woman's Mental Health in Late Nineteenth Century India', *Social Scientist*, 33, No. 5/6 (May - Jun., 2005), 26-30.

<sup>162</sup> Hancock, 'Combining Success and Failure,' pp. 14-5.

<sup>163</sup> Finn, 'Family Formations', p. 102.

not have a great number of occasions in which he felt the need to consult with family and friends, and instead his dependence on this group fell after 1729 when he became governor of Bombay. After this, he was seemingly sufficiently surrounded by familiar faces that he was more content with his lot. Indeed, once he became governor, Cowan did not send a single letter to another woman that appears to have survived. The question of the spikes in correspondence was an intriguing one, however. There must certainly have been a connection between his periods of needing extra family support, and the location in which he found himself. For example, at Bombay he had no trouble at all, whereas at places such as Goa and Mocha where there was a cultural and linguistic disconnect, it was understandable that he sought familiar company and support.<sup>164</sup>

In terms of where Cowan, as an Irishman seeking colonial service, fits into the existing narratives of empire, recent scholarship by Marc Caball into the Hedges brothers of Munster<sup>165</sup> may serve as a useful lens of comparison. After all, the Hedges were, according to Caball, 'avowedly global in the pursuit of profit and advancement.'<sup>166</sup> This is a sentiment which also rings true of Cowan and his pursuit of a fortune in India. Whilst it is conceded that the Hedges' initial outlook was different to Cowan's in that they came from a Munster landowning background and received government commissions in the early eighteenth century,<sup>167</sup> both the Hedges and Cowan engaged with trade in the Atlantic commercial sphere prior to their careers in the East India Company. We have seen how Cowan traded for wine to Madeira, whilst the Hedges tied themselves into the Company loop through agency serving the Indiamen ships that called at Kinsale.

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<sup>164</sup> Whilst this was clearly a fascinating topic, it has been decided to continue its discussion in a separate upcoming article.

<sup>165</sup> Richard and Robert.

<sup>166</sup> Marc Caball, *Kerry, 1600-1730: The Emergence of a British Atlantic County*, (Dublin, 2017), p. 36.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 36-7.

Through this, the Hedges succeeded in becoming local vendors of luxuries such as tea and textiles, and as agents for the Hollow Sword Blades Company in 1706.<sup>168</sup> They also had a stock of Company patronage through their uncle, Sir William Hedges, who served as Company agent at Bengal in the 1680s.<sup>169</sup>

The crucial elements for both Cowan and Robert Hedges<sup>170</sup> were that they both had patronage connections linking them to the Company network, and had both operated previous financial ventures which gave them experience in the trading world. These were factors which made them attractive potential clients in the type of networks outlined by Hancock.<sup>171</sup> Ethnicity, once again, was clearly a valuable commodity for Irish commercial networks, with each member of the network having what Hancock has described as a shared 'memory'.<sup>172</sup> What Caball has particularly noted about Hedges was that his experiences were shaped by the political and social upheaval of early-modern Britain and Ireland.<sup>173</sup> This is vital when considering Hancock's idea of shared memory, and is an interesting point when one compares Cowan to Hedges. Both men sought their fortunes in India due to the changing political landscape of Ireland, as well as the lure of making a vast fortune. This is concurrent with Crosbie's assertions on the potential for Irish merchants in the eighteenth-century British empire.<sup>174</sup> However, both had very different routes to Company service and supporting networks. Cowan, one recalls, managed to gain access to the prominent Presbyterian commercial network,

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<sup>168</sup> Ibid.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid.

<sup>170</sup> Sent on the ship *London* on 6 Jan. 1698 by the New Company to serve on the Coromandel Coast.

<sup>171</sup> Hancock, 'Combining Success and Failure', pp. 14-5

<sup>172</sup> Ibid.

<sup>173</sup> Caball, 'Munster and India: The Local and Global in Early Modern Ireland' in Sarah Covington, Vincent P. Carey & Valerie McGowan-Doyle (eds), *Early Modern Ireland: New Sources, Methods, and Perspectives*, (Abingdon, 2019), p. 130.

<sup>174</sup> Crosbie, *Irish Imperial Networks*, pp. 24-5.

whereas Hedges sourced patronage from more conventional London Company sources, like Gerald Aungier before him. Caball has noted Hedges' patrons as the New Company director, Sir James Bateman, and the London merchant Alderman John Edmonds.<sup>175</sup>

Caball has made the excellent observation that reconstruction of colonial experiences, such as that of Hedges, serves to validate the increased interest in comparative studies of Ireland and India on the basis that they operated as 'zones of hybridity for shifting identities.'<sup>176</sup> This is important as it feeds into what Jane Ohlmeyer has written of the need to view Ireland as a 'laboratory for empire.'<sup>177</sup> However, up until now the narrative of the Irish in empire has been missing an evaluation of Cowan and the particular role of his network. It has been mentioned above that Cowan's patronage experience was very different to that of Robert Hedges and Gerald Aungier. This is something which, along with a discussion of remittances, future plans and the desire for conspicuous material culture amongst nabobs, will be more fully unpacked in chapters four, five and six.

With the prominent Gould and Cairnes families supporting him, it was unsurprising that Cowan was allowed to travel east when he petitioned the Company directors in February 1719.<sup>178</sup> As Toby Barnard has also highlighted, there was also a distinct connection between men from Ulster and Company service in the early eighteenth century. The existence of the London chartered trading companies and political dynasties, such as the Cairnes and Nesbitts, also smoothed the entry routes to Company

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<sup>175</sup> Caball, 'Munster and India', pp. 137-8.

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 132.

<sup>177</sup> Ohlmeyer, 'Eastward Enterprises,' 86.

<sup>178</sup> Cowan to East India Company Directors, Read in Court 17 Feb. 1719, (BL, India Office Records, IOR/E/1/11, f. 126).



service for well-connected young men from Ulster.<sup>179</sup> Cowan was permitted to travel to India as a free merchant at Bombay; however, he would still have been under the Company's law and direction as a result of the Company's royal charter. Further, he was expected to report to the governor of Bombay upon arrival. This may have been a formality, but he was greeted with respect when he arrived. Following on from this, he was despatched to Goa on a mission for the Company almost immediately after his arrival.<sup>180</sup>

It is clear that to effectively build a study of Cowan's career, the greatest emphasis must be placed on the material which was produced during his time in India. Whilst it has been possible to give a very basic overview of Cowan's early life above due to snippets of information from various sources, the main body of the text, starting with his postings to Goa and Surat in the next chapter, will focus on his career in India. Fortunately, this is the aspect of his life with which has been endowed with the greatest number of sources. Cowan's identity, though not completely clear, evidently comprised an Irish element. Indeed, many of his actions such as his removal to Lisbon and his later desire to join the Company reflected a natural progression for an ambitious merchant in early eighteenth-century Ireland. Again, this feeds into Crosbie's arguments surrounding Irish mercantile migration.<sup>181</sup>

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<sup>179</sup> Toby Barnard, *A New Anatomy of Ireland: The Irish Protestants, 1649-1770*, (New Haven, 2004), p. 203.

<sup>180</sup> Cowan to Walter Brown, Goa, 22 Feb. 1721, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1AA, f. 6v); Cowan to General and Council at Bombay, Goa, 11 Mar. 1721, (f. 8v).

<sup>181</sup> Crosbie, *Irish Imperial Networks*, p. 38.

## Chapter Two: Goa and Surat, 1721-2

Anglo-Portuguese relations in India during the eighteenth century were cool due to the longstanding rivalry in the region, but also due to the difficulties which emerged during the handover of Bombay to the English in the 1660s. A major cause of argument between the powers was the dispute over river tolls at the Tannah-Carinjah<sup>1</sup> pass to the north of Bombay which divided the island of Salsette from the mainland.<sup>2</sup> This dispute necessitated the crewing of English merchant boats with soldiers, and was the basis for many clashes from the 1660s until the 1720s.<sup>3</sup> With such clear animosity between the two sides it was strange to think of them entering into an alliance, or even that negotiations should have taken place. This was, however, precisely what occurred during the year 1721.<sup>4</sup> Whilst there was tension in India, there was also a longstanding understanding between England and Portugal in terms of European politics going back as far as the 1373 Treaty of Windsor, and more recently the Anglo-Spanish war of 1585-1604.<sup>5</sup> Added to this, the willingness of two European powers to ally against the common Maratha threat made the situation far more plausible.

Cowan arrived at Goa as the Company representative in February 1721 with the object of cultivating good relations with the Portuguese, and pursuing an alliance against

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<sup>1</sup> Tannah is now referred to as Thane, whilst Carinjah has become Karanja.

<sup>2</sup> Philip Stern, *The Company State: Corporate Sovereignty & the Early Modern Foundations of the British Empire in India*, (Oxford, 2011), p. 122.

<sup>3</sup> W.S. Desai, *Bombay and the Marathas up to 1774*, (New Delhi, 1970), pp. 16; 37-8.

<sup>4</sup> Articles of an Alliance, Offensive and Defensive, made by the British and Portuguese Nations, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/3A1, ff. 36-38).

<sup>5</sup> Julian S. Corbett, *England in the Mediterranean*, (New York, 2007), pp. 299-300; 355.

Kanhoji Angré.<sup>6</sup> Angré,<sup>7</sup> a famous Maratha admiral, led many raids on English and Portuguese shipping during the early eighteenth century. As a result of this, he was labelled as a pirate.<sup>8</sup> However, Angré's power, resources and political standing placed him above a common pirate. He was appointed as deputy commander of the Maratha navy in 1690, and held numerous forts on the west coast of India. The imposing fortress of Alibaug on Kolaba island<sup>9</sup> was the most impressive, and was the focus of Cowan's military attention during his time at Goa.<sup>10</sup> The activities of Angré and the danger he posed to Bombay and Goa saw Cowan despatched to negotiate with the Portuguese viceroy.<sup>11</sup> Cowan, as a fluent Portuguese speaker,<sup>12</sup> was well suited to his role and reported that he effectively communicated with the Portuguese.<sup>13</sup>

Desai has given a brief outline of the Anglo-Portuguese alliance,<sup>14</sup> though has not offered much regarding the treaty negotiations and only gave slight acknowledgement to the significant role of Cowan.<sup>15</sup> Deshpande has provided further detail to the narrative of the Anglo-Portuguese expedition,<sup>16</sup> but again has not linked Cowan or the treaty negotiations into his discussion. This chapter builds on the discussion begun by Desai and Deshpande, and reappraises the alliance and expedition to represent Cowan's

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<sup>6</sup> Cowan to Walter Brown, Goa, 22 Feb. 1721, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1AA, f. 6v); Cowan to General and Council at Bombay, Goa, 11 Mar. 1721, (f. 8v).

<sup>7</sup> Often anglicised as Conajee or Conage Angria, the form of Kanhoji Angré shall be used throughout.

<sup>8</sup> Cowan to John Courtney, Goa, 8 Feb. 1721, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1AA, f. 4v).

<sup>9</sup> Sometimes anglicized as Culabo. The island is located off the coast of Alibaug, Maharashtra.

<sup>10</sup> Anirudh Deshpande, 'Limitations of Military Technology: Naval Warfare on the West Coast, 1650-1800', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 27, No. 17 (Apr. 25, 1992), 902.

<sup>11</sup> Cowan to Governor of Gombroon, Goa, 15 Feb. 1721, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1AA, f. 5); Cowan to Walter Brown, Goa, 22 Feb. 1721, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1AA, f. 6); Court of Directors to President and Council at Bombay, London, 24 Mar. 1722, (BL, India Office Records, IOR/E/3/101, f. 130v).

<sup>12</sup> Cowan to Henry Cairnes, Bombay, 25 Jan. 1722, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1AA, f. 122v).

<sup>13</sup> Cowan to John Courtney, Goa, 8 Feb. 1721, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1AA, f. 4); Cowan to Charles Boone, Goa, 11 Mar. 1721, (f. 9v).

<sup>14</sup> Desai, *Bombay and the Marathas*, p. 69.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 64-68.

<sup>16</sup> Deshpande, 'Limitations of Military Technology', 902.

vital role. This was made possible by the consultation of Cowan's letter books held at PRONI, Belfast. However, as these letters were Cowan's own, they likely portray a pro-Cowan and Company description of events.

The period 1721-2 also saw Cowan deployed to the Company factory at Surat to investigate alleged broker fraud there. Surat was, as Hein Streefkirk has argued, the most proto-capitalist region in India during the eighteenth century, and was a hub for commerce driven by native endogamous groups.<sup>17</sup> This is an important point as Cowan's time at Surat was dominated by his interactions with native elites. During this time, he came into contact with Loldas Parack, a banian merchant whom he developed a long-term relationship with. The official work undertaken by Cowan at Surat thus went hand in hand with the creation of a network of native commerce through his relationship with Loldas. This in turn provided an alternative avenue for the Company apparatus at Surat to access information and services. By examining Cowan's interactions with Loldas across his time in India this thesis expands on the existing scholarship of Company relations with native elites, particularly at Surat.

Cowan's early career, particularly his postings at Goa and Surat, is also an excellent case study for examining the dichotomy of two distinct, yet complementary, emphases on the early modern Company's trade and empire. These are the distinct arguments for corporate sovereignty by Philip Stern on the one hand, and the privately interested character within Company circles articulated by Emily Erikson. Stern has highlighted the identity of the Company as a form of community which bound men together for a

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<sup>17</sup> Hein Streefkirk, 'Gujarati Entrepreneurship: Historical Continuity against Changing Perspectives', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 32, No. 8 (Feb. 22-28, 1997), 3.

common purpose, i.e. the creation of wealth and fulfilment of the Company's aims and objectives. Of this, Stern has argued that corporations such as the Company possessed distinct identities which created loyalties, rites and expectations.<sup>18</sup> The expectation of the Company directors was that their servants would act in the Company's best interests above their own personal desires or aspirations, with severe penalties ranging from dismissal to fines and prosecution.<sup>19</sup> This ties in with what Hancock has written on the usage of networks to ensure loyalty and cooperation.<sup>20</sup>

However, vertical systems of association, such as the expected Company hierarchy, were not always compatible or closely followed by servants on the ground in India. This ties into the rational actor theory, suggesting that in the absence of direct vertical supervision the individual actor would behave in a self-interested manner.<sup>21</sup> According to Erikson, situations such as this came about due to the intricacies of patrimonialism and the existence of a horizontal network structure as opposed a vertical network hierarchy.<sup>22</sup> The multifaceted nature of client-patron relationships within Company circles saw individuals acting in diverse roles at different times to facilitate business. This may have seen the Company interest subverted by powerful patrons in London who had their clients in India performing trades which, whilst mutually beneficial to them, were harmful to the wider Company interest. Through Cowan, as a result of his large surviving

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<sup>18</sup> Stern, *The Company State*, p. 8.

<sup>19</sup> Santhi Hejeebu, 'Contract Enforcement in the English East India Company', *Journal of Economic History*, 65, No. 2 (Jun., 2005), 501-2.

<sup>20</sup> David Hancock 'Combining Success and Failure: Scottish Networks in the Atlantic Wine Trade' in David Dickson, Jan Parmentier & Jane Ohlmeyer (eds), *Irish and Scottish Mercantile Networks in Europe and Overseas in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, (Gent, 2007), pp. 8-10.

<sup>21</sup> Emily Erikson, *Between Monopoly and Free Trade: The English East India Company 1600-1757*, (Princeton, 2014), pp. 108-9.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 19-20.

archive, it can be seen how he straddled both sets of network structure to fulfil his patron obligations whilst also advancing in the Company hierarchy.

## **I - Cowan's Personal Experience at Goa**

Cowan was sent to Goa in January 1721 to bolster Anglo-Portuguese relations and negotiate a treaty between the two powers against the Maratha admiral Kanhoji Angré. The area known as Goa is part of the Konkan region of the west coast of India, bordering Maharashtra to the north and Karnataka to the south.<sup>23</sup> Goa was, according to Cottineau de Kloguen, built by the Muslim inhabitants of Onor in 1479.<sup>24</sup> Goa itself is an island off the Bardes peninsula, and is separated by a sea inlet from the mainland and the nearby islands of Chorao and Divar.<sup>25</sup> The Portuguese captured Goa in 1510 and colonised it as both a civic settlement and naval base, as opposed a mere factory establishment as in the case at many other European settled Indian ports.<sup>26</sup> Figures 2.1 and 2.2, below, show Goa's position in India in relation to surrounding regions and Bombay, as well as the gradual territorial conquests of the Portuguese in the Goan region. These maps have been taken from Irene Wherritt's 1989 article 'Portuguese Language Shift: About Town in Goa, India'.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Nils-Axel Mörner, 'Coastal Morphology and Sea-Level Changes in Goa, India during the Last 500 Years', *Journal of Coastal Research*, 33, No. 2 (Mar. 2017), p. 421.

<sup>24</sup> Dennis L. Cottineau De Kloguen, *An Historical Sketch of Goa*, (Delhi, 1910), p. 51.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., pp. 1-3; 8.

<sup>27</sup> Irene Wherritt, 'Portuguese Language Shift: About Town in Goa, India', *Hispania*, 72, No. 2 (May, 1989).

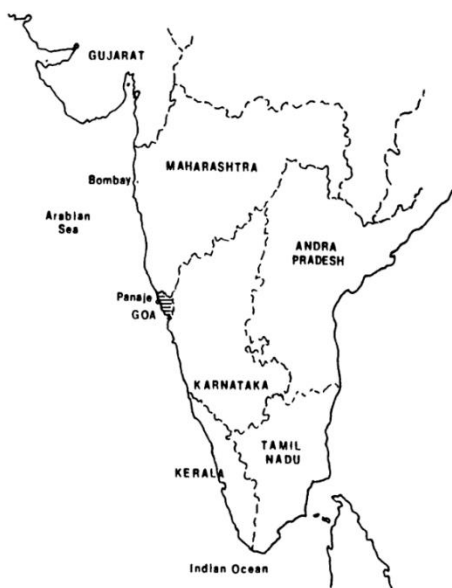


Fig. 2.1 Position of Goa in India<sup>28</sup>

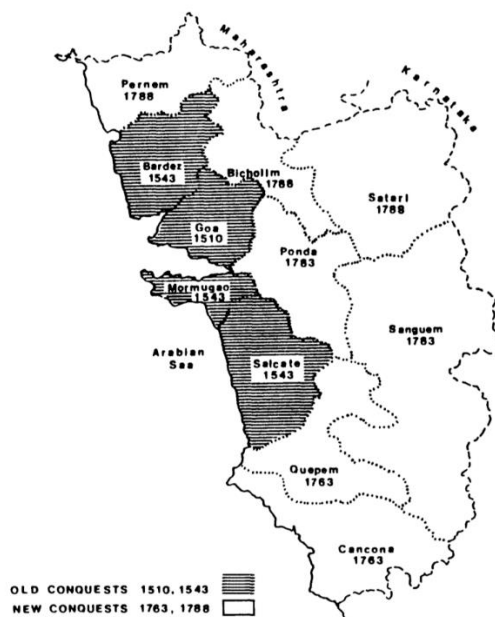


Fig. 2.2 The Goan territory.<sup>29</sup>

Whilst Cowan's efforts towards the Anglo-Portuguese alliance took up the bulk of his correspondence during his time at Goa, his writings also gave an insight into many diverse aspects of his personal experience there. These topics will be used in conjunction with his professional experience to create a more rounded evaluation. To do this, Cowan's letter books for the period 1721-2 have been extensively used.<sup>30</sup> In total there were 287 letters directed to 70 individuals for the period 8 February 1721 to 6 January 1722. These dates cover Cowan's time at Goa, as well as a short period when he had returned to Bombay in January 1722.<sup>31</sup> Of the 70 recipients, a large number were

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1AA.

<sup>31</sup> The short period in January 1722 has been included as the subject matter of the letters from this period related to Cowan's time at Goa.

directed to 3 men. These were John Milles,<sup>32</sup> John Courtney<sup>33</sup> and Charles Boone.<sup>34</sup> The remaining 67 recipients had a distribution spread of between 1 and 11 letters each across the period in question.

In terms of Cowan's relationships with his Company colleagues in India, Cowan actively worked to cultivate these links. During Cowan's time at Goa, there was a specific cadre of colleagues with whom Cowan was keen to build a relationship with. These men were Charles Boone, John Courtney, James Macrae<sup>35</sup> and John Milles. Cowan's correspondence in this regard had two distinct aspects. First, that maintaining communication with other Company servants and settlements was beneficial for Company operations. Second, that the maintenance of such a network was of personal benefit to Cowan and his career.<sup>36</sup> There was a model of Cowan having served as a conduit for news in sending items of interest such as ships' movements,<sup>37</sup> commodity prices and European news to his colleagues.<sup>38</sup> This ties in to Mentz's arguments on the usefulness of private merchants in remitting information.<sup>39</sup> Such a pattern was complimented by his use of these letters to both offer and provide assistance to his colleagues.<sup>40</sup> This assistance or service was, during 1721-2, primarily seen through his offers to represent individuals in Goan affairs, or in the recovery of debts owed. In the

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<sup>32</sup> 1721 – Factor.

<sup>33</sup> 1712 – Warehouse Keeper, 1713 – 5th In Council; 1718, 1719 – Senior Factor; 1721 - 4th in Council; 1723, 1724; 1730, 1731 - 2nd in Council/Accountant/Chief Justice.

<sup>34</sup> 1717, 1718, 1719, 1721, 1722 – President of the Western Presidency.

<sup>35</sup> 1723 – EIC Captain; 1724 – President of Fort St. David.

<sup>36</sup> Cowan to William Cowan, Mocha, 10 Mar. 1725, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1C, f. 62).

<sup>37</sup> Cowan to John Courtney, Goa, 8 Feb. 1721, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1AA, f. 4v); Cowan to John Milles, Goa, 22 Feb. 1721, (f. 6); Cowan to Governor and Council at Bombay, Goa, 4 Apr. 1721, (f. 18v).

<sup>38</sup> Cowan to Captain Upton, Goa, 18 Apr. 1721, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1AA, f. 29v).

<sup>39</sup> Soren Mentz, *The English Gentleman Merchant at work: Madras and the City of London, 1660-1740*, Copenhagen, 2005), p. 81.

<sup>40</sup> Cowan to James Macrae, Goa, 22 Feb. 1721, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1AA, f. 6v); Cowan to Captain Upton, Goa, 18 Apr. 1721, (f. 29v).



case of debt collection, Cowan acted to seek restitution from Portuguese merchants at Goa.<sup>41</sup>

It is interesting that Cowan's correspondence included many letters to Company factors on land, as well as ships' captains. Every Company ship had a supercargo who was responsible for the sale and purchase of goods on the company's account, whereas the captain also fulfilled a key trading function as both master of the ship and manager of the vessel as a mobile trading emporium.<sup>42</sup> This was, as argued by Emily Erikson, a site of extreme decentralization of control within the Company framework.<sup>43</sup> This meant that the level of control which was exerted by Company captains often had the potential to be more definitive than the directors in London in given circumstances. This was similar to Cowan's situation as the sole English negotiator for the Anglo-Portuguese alliance. As such, Cowan spent much effort cultivating relations with men such as James Macrae and David Hunter<sup>44</sup> who were employed as captains at the time.<sup>45</sup> This was sensible from a speculative point of view regarding their career prospects. James Macrae, for example, progressed from his post as a ships' captain to governor of Fort St. David on the Coromandel coast in 1724.<sup>46</sup> Here it was also possible to note Cowan's aspirations in constructing his own horizontal network in India to supplement his existing structures, in line with the expectations of Erikson on network usage.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Cowan to Mr. Adams, Goa, 2 Apr. 1721, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1AA, f. 18).

<sup>42</sup> Erikson, *Between Monopoly and Free Trade*, p. 83.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> 1721 – EIC Captain.

<sup>45</sup> Cowan to Captain James Macrae, Goa, 22 Feb. 1721, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1AA, f. 6v); Cowan to Captain James Macrae, Goa, 4 Apr. 1721, (f. 20v); Cowan to Captain James Macrae, Goa, 15 Apr. 1721, (f. 25); Cowan to Captain James Macrae, Goa, 20 Oct. 1721, (f. 94v); Cowan to Captain David Hunter, Goa, 11 Jan. 1722, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1AA, f. 117v); Cowan to Captain David Hunter, Surat, 28 Jun. 1722, (f. 160v).

<sup>46</sup> Cowan to Mrs. Macrae, Mocha, 8 Jul. 1724, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1C, f. 2).

<sup>47</sup> Erikson, *Between Monopoly and Free Trade*, pp. 19-20.

Cowan's involvement in the wine and arak trade in India was also fascinating as it allows not only an insight into Cowan's private trade, but also into the nature of the Anglo-Portuguese wine trade in the early eighteenth century. Due to Cowan's specific interest in the wine trade at large and his historic presence at Lisbon,<sup>48</sup> it is argued that he was likely involved in the trade for Portuguese wine in this period. His presence at Lisbon would have allowed him to take advantage of the Methuen Treaty and the surrounding economic conditions. This, combined with Cowan's frequent communication regarding matters related to the sale, supply and quality of wine in India, suggested a familiarity with the trade at least.<sup>49</sup> This would also have explained the frequency of Cowan's communications regarding both wine and arak. This notion is supported by the sheer weight of correspondence. Between 8 February 1721 and 6 January 1722, corresponding with Cowan's time at Goa, 34 letters were sent by Cowan which discussed matters relating to wine in detail.<sup>50</sup> This amounted to over one letter per week which contained a discussion of either wine or arak. Much of Cowan's discussion of the intra-Asian wine trade drew attention to regular shortages, with requests for further shipments and enquiries as to prices having been commonplace.<sup>51</sup> It is important to note that wine shortages were not isolated incidents, but instead lasted throughout Cowan's time at Goa.

The complexities of the wine trade in the western Indian Ocean, and indeed in the larger intra-Asian sphere, presented some interesting distinctions. The supply and demand of

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<sup>48</sup> Cowan to William Cowan, Mocha, 8 Jul. 1724, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1C, f. 5).

<sup>49</sup> Cowan, at Goa, 8 Feb. 1721, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1AA, f. 3); Cowan to John Braddyl, Goa, 11 Mar. 1721, (f. 9); Cowan to John Milles, Goa, 24 Mar. 1721, (f. 14); Cowan to John Courtney, Goa, 9 Apr. 1721, (f. 24).

<sup>50</sup> (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1AA).

<sup>51</sup> Cowan to John Braddyl, Goa, 11 Mar. 1721, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1AA, f. 9); Cowan to Henry Kellett, Goa, 4 Apr. 1721, (f. 21).

wine for consumption by Company servants was a situation which suggested personal consumption of wine by individual servants was reasonably high, or at least a common occurrence.<sup>52</sup> T.J.S. Patterson has highlighted this pattern of overeating and drinking as a common problem with new arrivals to India who behaved foolishly and drank heavy wines to excess.<sup>53</sup> The results of excessive alcohol consumption were often dehydration, gout and premature death. Cowan, whilst having suffered from gout throughout his time in India,<sup>54</sup> did not fall seriously ill as a result of his alcohol consumption, despite several references to his partiality.<sup>55</sup> This may have been partly explained by Patterson's assessment that a gradual change in the trends of alcohol consumption took place in Company circles over the eighteenth century. This change, he argued, saw a preference for claret, cider and perry take the place of heavy wines and spirits by the end of the eighteenth century.<sup>56</sup> This pattern tied into Cowan's desire to source French wine in India, and particularly claret.<sup>57</sup>

Cowan praised the quality of French wine, specifically claret, and considered it a special treat. According to Cowan, the consumption of claret was also very effective for the easing of gout.<sup>58</sup> The frequency with which Cowan noted his having such wines in his possession was, however, limited across the entire scope of his time in India.<sup>59</sup> By extension, one might comment that the restrictions placed on the sale and supply of

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<sup>52</sup> Cowan to Charles Boone, Goa, 11 Mar. 1721, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1AA, f. 10v); Cowan to Maj. George Vane, Goa, 9 Jun. 1721, (f. 44v).

<sup>53</sup> T.J.S. Patterson, *The East India Company and Medicine in India*, (Darlington, 2007), p. 64.

<sup>54</sup> Cowan to Henry Cairnes, Bombay, 26 Oct. 1723, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1B, f. 23v).

<sup>55</sup> Cowan to James Macrae, Bombay, 12 Jan. 1726, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1C, f. 209); Cowan to Sir Matthew Decker, Mocha, 8 Jun. 1726, (f. 161v); Cowan to Henry Cairnes, Mocha, 2 Jun. 1726, (f. 165v); Cowan to Edward Harrison, Mocha, 2 Jun. 1726, (f. 171v).

<sup>56</sup> Patterson, *The East India Company and Medicine in India*, p. 134.

<sup>57</sup> Cowan to Cpt. John Lilley, Goa, 5 Oct. 1721, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1AA, f. 95v).

<sup>58</sup> Cowan to Henry Cairnes, Bombay, 26 Oct. 1723, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1B, f. 23v).

<sup>59</sup> Cowan to William Phipps, Mocha, 18 Oct. 1724, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1C, f. 50v); Cowan to John Fotheringham, Bombay, 4 Jan. 1726, (f. 207).

French wines had clearly lessened by this time, though the difficulty in sourcing such quality products in the intra-Asian sphere evidently presented itself.<sup>60</sup> The question relating to the perceived superior quality of French, and in particular claret, wines can be viewed in the context of the politicisation of wine consumption prevalent for much of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries.<sup>61</sup>

Due to the ongoing challenges between Britain and France at the time, the choice of port over claret was seen as a patriotic gesture by the Whig establishment to differentiate themselves from the Francophile elements in the Tory lobby. As Charles Ludington has argued, however, the transference of legitimacy and moral authority from Tory to Whig could not have taken place without the seeming aesthetic and moral display of the consumption of quality goods, in this case claret, over those of an inferior quality.<sup>62</sup> If, following this line of thought, the consumption of quality wines was considered a mark of politeness and nobility, it was unsurprising that Cowan sought out claret in particular.

Cowan also took a great interest in the availability and quality of native produced arak. The quality of the arak produced at Goa in particular during the early 1720s was seemingly of a much superior quality to its competitors.<sup>63</sup> Arak itself was viewed as a spirit of low quality and low moral standing during the Company's early years in India, as Patterson has reported a description stating that it was 'a spirit as harsh and burning as that made from corn in Poland, and the use of it to the least excess occasions nervous

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<sup>60</sup> Cowan to Cpt. John Lilley, Goa, 5 Oct. 1721, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1AA, f. 95v).

<sup>61</sup> Charles Ludington, *The Politics of Wine in Britain*, (New York, 2013), pp. 82-84.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Cowan to John Courtney, Goa, 19 Sept. 1721, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1AA, f. 50v); Cowan to Sir Matthew Decker, Mocha, 8 Jun. 1726, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1C, f. 161v); Cowan to Henry Cairnes, Mocha, 2 Jun. 1726, (f. 165v).

and incurable disorders.<sup>64</sup> Cowan frequently commented on the quality of arak during this period and sent many cases back to England as gifts for his friends and acquaintances in London.<sup>65</sup> With this in mind, the quality of Goan arak was clearly sufficient for it to have been a suitable present for his correspondents in London, of which two powerful Company figures in Sir Matthew Decker<sup>66</sup> and Edward Harrison<sup>67</sup> were included.<sup>68</sup> The general belief held by many Company servants was that alcohol, of any quality, may have been useful medicinally when in India. This might also have served to remove much of the early stigma attached to arak.<sup>69</sup> However, as Patterson has noted, such a belief was often thought better of by senior servants in India who took to drinking water instead as a means of ensuring a diet more suited to the tropics.<sup>70</sup>

Cowan's initial Lisbon connection was also interesting given that Lisbon was a trading hub for the Portuguese Atlantic empire. The process of making specific port wine involves a great deal of sugar for the secondary fermentation phase. This sugar was likely sourced in Portuguese colonies such as Brazil and then shipped back to Portugal. This process served to link Cowan to the Atlantic trading network in his early career, which was then followed by the Indian Ocean networks in his later dealings. This

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<sup>64</sup> Patterson, *The East India Company and Medicine in India*, p. 51.

<sup>65</sup> Cowan to Sir Matthew Decker, Mocha, 8 Jun. 1726, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1C, f. 161v); Cowan to Henry Cairnes, Mocha, 2 Jun. 1726, (f. 165v); Cowan to Edward Harrison, Mocha, 2 Jun. 1726, (f. 171v).

<sup>66</sup> Sir Matthew Decker, first baronet (1679-1749). Political economist and merchant born in Amsterdam. EIC director 1713-47; deputy governor 1720-1; 1729-30; governor 1726-6; 1730-3.

<sup>67</sup> Edward Harrison (3 Dec. 1674 – 28 Nov. 1732). Naval officer and EIC official. President of Fort St. George (11 Jul. 1711 – 8 Jan. 1717). MP for Weymouth and Melcombe Regis (2 Mar. 1717 - 1722); MP for Hertford (1722 – 10 Aug. 1726). EIC director 1718 – 31. EIC deputy chairman 1723; 1731. EIC chairman 1729.

<sup>68</sup> Cowan to Sir Matthew Decker, Mocha, 8 Jun. 1726, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1C, f. 161v)

<sup>69</sup> Patterson, *The East India Company and Medicine in India*, pp. 49-50.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.* p. 64.

demonstrated the interconnectedness of the early modern trading world, in line with Stern's arguments.<sup>71</sup>

## **II - The Treaty Negotiations**

Whilst Cowan had many interests at Goa, he was there to negotiate the treaty between the English and Portuguese. Cowan was faced with the challenge of the strong Portuguese geo-political rivalry with England on the west coast of India. This had developed over a number of years following colonial rivalry and the argument over the transfer of Bombay in the 1660s. When Cowan arrived at Goa in January 1721 the Company position at Goa was not established on a formal setting as at other settlements. Cowan, being sent as resident to Goa during this period, was then largely responsible for setting up Company affairs there.

The Company directors realised as early as November 1719 that Angré was a dangerous prospect and that a solution had to be found.<sup>72</sup> In their letter to the President and Council of Bombay on 4 November 1719, the directors highlighted that an alliance with the Portuguese of Goa was their favoured approach for dealing with Angré.<sup>73</sup> The timing of this statement was interesting as it was in February 1719 that Cowan petitioned the directors for permission to travel to Bombay as a free merchant.<sup>74</sup> The directors having

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<sup>71</sup> Stern, 'British Asia and British Atlantic: Comparisons and Connections', *William and Mary Quarterly*, Third Series, 63, No. 4 (Oct., 2006), 693-695.

<sup>72</sup> Court of Directors to President and Council at Bombay, London, 4 Nov. 1719, (BL, India Office Records, IOR/E/3/100, ff. 3v-11).

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, (f. 11).

<sup>74</sup> Cowan to East India Company Directors, Read in Court 17 Feb. 1719, (BL, India Office Records, IOR/E/1/11, f. 126).

chosen to negotiate an alliance between the Company and the Portuguese of Goa in November of that year might have pointed to their awareness that Cowan was a fluent Portuguese speaker, and would thus have been a natural candidate for handling negotiations with the viceroy.<sup>75</sup> Whilst there was no correspondence which suggested this was an official strategy, the Company cannot have been ignorant of Cowan's linguistic skills. However, it was likely that Cowan's petition simply afforded a convenient opportunity, and that another servant would have been chosen had Cowan not applied.

Cowan received a cordial reception by Bombay governor Charles Boone upon his arrival there and was soon posted to Goa to negotiate with the Portuguese viceroy.<sup>76</sup> Cowan's deployment to Goa was also set against the backdrop of three failed Company assaults between 1718 and 1720. These attacks were carried out against the forts of Gheria and Khanderi.<sup>77</sup> This history of military failure, possibly in conjunction with a lack of experienced military leadership,<sup>79</sup> meant that a compromise with the Portuguese was an increasingly attractive option. Ultimately, the Company felt that they needed someone to negotiate an alliance with the Portuguese and, whether or not he was a chance appointment, Cowan fulfilled this role.

Key to the successful negotiations was the positive working relationship between Cowan and the Portuguese viceroy. Very early on in Cowan's placement at Goa he noted

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<sup>75</sup> Francis Joseph de Sampayo é Castro, Viceroy of Portuguese India (1720-1723).

<sup>76</sup> Cowan to Captain James Macrae, Goa, 22 Feb. 1721, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1AA, f. 6v) Cowan to Mr. Park, Goa, 28 Mar. 1721, (f. 14v).

<sup>77</sup> Gheria was an older name given to Vijaydurg Fort on the Konkan coast. Khanderi was a Maratha island fortress to the north of Alibaug, Maharashtra.

<sup>78</sup> Deshpande, 'Limitations of Military Technology', 902.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

the civility and 'favourable treatment' which was shown to him by the viceroy.<sup>80</sup> Cowan's interpretation of such cordial treatment was based in his view that he had maintained a good correspondence with the viceroy, as well as his belief that he was performing well.<sup>81</sup> The notion that this relationship was grounded merely in professional courtesy was challenged by Cowan's belief that there was a sufficient degree of respect between the two men for the viceroy to speak 'frankly' to Cowan on business matters.<sup>82</sup> There was clear respect shown to the viceroy in Cowan's report to Boone that the viceroy was unlike other 'haughty' Portuguese.<sup>83</sup> 'My reception here from the Viceroy and treatment since has been very favourable and I think I have the prospect of succeeding in the most material points of my commission.'<sup>84</sup> This reflected his progress at Goa and suggested that his mission was only measurable by a positive conclusion to negotiations. As such, Cowan regularly reported his dealings at Goa to his correspondents, and in doing so portrayed himself as having been hardworking and effective in his role.<sup>85</sup> This was reflective of Soren Mentz's suggestion that individual private traders could serve as conduits in the sharing of information.<sup>86</sup>

The proposed treaty was to have been a defensive alliance between the two powers, and that both were to provide soldiers and supplies for an expedition to defeat Angré at his fortress of Alibaug.<sup>87</sup> The European awareness of Maratha aggression was not a

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<sup>80</sup> Cowan to Charles Boone, Goa, 11 Mar. 1721, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1AA, f. 9v); Cowan to Mr. Park, Goa, 28 Mar. 1721, (f. 15); Cowan to Captain James Macrae, 4 Apr. 1721, (f. 20v).

<sup>81</sup> Cowan to Walter Brown, Goa, 22 Feb. 1721, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1AA, f. 6v).

<sup>82</sup> Cowan to Charles Boone, Goa, 11 Mar. 1721, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1AA, f. 9v).

<sup>83</sup> Cowan to Charles Boone, Goa, 4 Apr. 1721, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1AA, f. 18v).

<sup>84</sup> Cowan to Walter Brown, Goa, 22 Feb. 1721, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1AA, f. 6v).

<sup>85</sup> Cowan to Walter Brown, Goa, 22 Feb. 1721, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1AA, f. 6v); Cowan to Captain James Macrae, Goa, 4 Apr. 1721, (f. 21); Cowan to John Courtney, Goa, 4 Jul. 1721, (f. 50v).

<sup>86</sup> Mentz, *The English Gentleman Merchant*, p. 81.

<sup>87</sup> Cowan to Bombay Council, Goa, 20 Aug. 1721, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1AA, ff. 60v-61v); Articles of an Alliance, Offensive and Defensive, made by the British and Portuguese Nations, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/3A1, f. 36).



recent discovery. Niccolao Manucci, for example, wrote that Sambhaji<sup>88</sup> had planned to seize Goa from the Portuguese in 1678.<sup>89</sup> The promotion of Angré to admiral, seen below in figure 2.3, in 1690 also led to the increased frequency of attacks on European shipping off the west coast of India.<sup>90</sup> The first disagreement of the negotiations was that of the command structure. Neither side wished for their forces to be commanded by a foreign general, with suspicion on both sides having complicated matters.<sup>91</sup> The Portuguese felt that as they would be contributing royal forces to the expedition, as opposed the Company forces of the English, that they should have held the first command position out of respect for the Portuguese crown.<sup>92</sup> Such deference was likely expected due to the Company having been a trading body rather than a sovereign power in the early modern understanding of the term. However, as Stern has pointed out, the Company was a chartered body politic with the power to govern and exercise the law for its subjects in India.<sup>93</sup> Stern has argued that the Company must be approached from the point of view of it having been a form of political community which, whilst theoretically dependent on the English crown, was actually able to exert a great deal of autonomy.<sup>94</sup> The point must also be made that Cowan was entrusted with the task of negotiating this alliance through Company authority in what must be assumed good faith. Whilst this rings true for Stern's arguments, it also opened up the possibility of Cowan exercising his own interests through means such as the wine and arak trade examined above. This suggested that corporate sovereignty had enabled Cowan to

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<sup>88</sup> Sambhaji (14 May 1657 – 11Mar. 1689). Second ruler of the Maratha kingdom.

<sup>89</sup> William Irvine, *A Pepys of Mogul India 1653-1708, Being an Abridged Edition of the "Storia Do Mogor" of Niccolao Manucci*, (New Delhi, 2003), p. 166.

<sup>90</sup> Deshpande, 'Limitations of Military Technology', 902.

<sup>91</sup> Cowan to Charles Boone, Goa, 20 Aug. 1721, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1AA, f. 62).

<sup>92</sup> Cowan to Charles Boone, Goa, 16 Apr. 1721, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1AA, f. 28).

<sup>93</sup> Stern, *The Company State*, pp. 7-8.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 13-4.

personally benefit through his posting to Goa through trade and making the acquaintance of the viceroy. Once again, this returns to the complementary nature of the Stern-Erikson nexus on the nature of Company networks.



Fig. 2.3 Kanhoji Angré.<sup>95</sup>

Stern's argument rings true in this case as the Company, and not the English crown, declared war on the Maratha nation and engaged in treaty negotiations with the Portuguese. This was due to the delegation of power from the crown to the Company. Cowan, however, ultimately gave deference to the viceroy as an experienced soldier.<sup>96</sup> As such, it was unsurprising that the English so readily assented to the Portuguese having overall command given the viceroy's decision to lead the expedition personally. The final command structure saw the viceroy in command of the Portuguese forces, and

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<sup>95</sup> Kanhoji Angré, (1669 – 4 Jul., 1729). Image supplied by Angré Port, Chowgule Group, Goa, India.

<sup>96</sup> Cowan to Captain James Macrae, Goa, 4 Apr. 1721, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1AA, f. 21); Cowan to John Courtney, Goa, 4 Jul. 1721, (f. 50v).

overall, with Cowan commanding the English forces.<sup>97</sup> This was despite Cowan having no previous military experience. The appointment was likely one of convenience, with the draft treaty articles having suggested that overall command of the expedition would rotate between Cowan and the viceroy on alternate days.<sup>98</sup>

There was also much discussion regarding strategic assets during the treaty negotiations. The Portuguese, according to Cowan, held an interest in seizing the island of Kolaba for their own uses as a military installation in the proximity of Bombay.<sup>99</sup> Indeed, Cowan noted that much of the viceroy's attention was focused on the desire to assert control over the location and region.<sup>100</sup> Such an ambition, coupled with the Portuguese interest in gaining control over Butcher Island,<sup>101</sup> justifiably led to tensions.<sup>102</sup> The English response was one of defiance. Instead of merely refusing to cede the island, the English set about fortifying it.<sup>103</sup> Such a move provoked concern amongst the Portuguese of Goa, though ultimately the status quo remained and the incident did not inhibit the successful conclusion of the treaty. Cowan did, however, have to make efforts to reassure the Portuguese of the continued friendship and good intentions of the English.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> Articles of an Alliance, Offensive and Defensive, made by the British and Portuguese Nations, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/3A1, f. 36).

<sup>98</sup> Cowan to General and Council at Bombay, Goa, 15 Apr. 1721, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1AA, f. 26).

<sup>99</sup> Cowan to General and Council at Bombay, Goa, 15 Apr. 1721, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1AA, f. 26v).

<sup>100</sup> Cowan to Bombay Council, Goa, 15 Apr. 1721, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1AA, f. 26v); Cowan to Charles Boone, Goa, 16 Apr. 1721, (ff. 27-28v); Cowan to Bombay Council, Goa, 20 Aug. 1721, (ff. 60v-61v).

<sup>101</sup> An island in the Bay of Bombay.

<sup>102</sup> Cowan to John Courtney, Goa, 2 Mar. 1721, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1AA, f. 7v); Cowan to Boone, Goa, 1 May 1721, (f. 31).

<sup>103</sup> Cowan to John Courtney, Goa, 6 May 1721, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1AA, f. 32v).

<sup>104</sup> Cowan to Charles Boone, Goa, 1 May 1721, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1AA, f. 31).

Such a focus on the importance of strategic emplacements was intriguing given the transition of European security policy from the capital investment of building forts in the seventeenth century, to the practice of using European shipping as a form of power projection in the eighteenth century. Such a variation in usage reinforces Watson's assertion that the European use of force was not consistent, or even necessarily inevitable, depending on the specific issue which was being faced.<sup>105</sup> The use of such installations might also have been used as tools in negotiations and the projection of power between European nations. This was the case with the English and Portuguese, with the increased fortification of Butcher Island having been used as a bargaining chip. This was seen in the wider negotiations surrounding the disputed payment of customs at the Tannah-Carinjah river passage.<sup>106</sup>

The Tannah-Carinjah passage, dividing the island of Salsette from the mainland of India, was a difficult topic for the two sides to reconcile in the negotiations.<sup>107</sup> The issue was so contentious that by the time Cowan left India in 1734 the matter was still unresolved.<sup>108</sup> For the English, their desire to resolve the matter was represented by their outrage at being charged levies to use the passage by the Portuguese.<sup>109</sup> However, the Portuguese position was complicated. Cowan reported that the Portuguese councillors at Goa were in favour of maintaining the levy on English boats, though Cowan frequently asserted that the viceroy preferred coming to an understanding with

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<sup>105</sup> I.B. Watson, 'Fortifications and the "Idea" of Force in Early East India Company Relations with India', *Past and Present*, No. 88 (Aug., 1980), 76.

<sup>106</sup> Cowan to Charles Boone, Goa, 1 May 1721 (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1AA, f. 31v).

<sup>107</sup> Cowan to John Courtney, Goa, 6 May, 1721 (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1AA, f. 32v); Cowan to Mr. Brown, Goa, 13 May 1721, (f. 34).

<sup>108</sup> Cowan to William Phipps, Parel, 4 Sept. 1734, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2D, f. 133v).

<sup>109</sup> Cowan to John Courtney, Goa, 6 May 1721, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1AA, ff. 32v-33); Court of Directors to President and Council at Bombay, London, 24 Mar. 1722, (BL, India Office Records, IOR/E/3/101, f. 130v).

the English.<sup>110</sup> This may have been a political position on the part of the viceroy, though Cowan believed otherwise when he cast doubts over the viceroy's relationship with his councillors.

According to Cowan, the viceroy was unwilling to favour any individual councillor and attempted to balance favour with them.<sup>111</sup> Further, Cowan suggested that the viceroy did not depend on his councillors during his governance.<sup>112</sup> The viceroy's position was, however, complicated by the desire of the Portuguese king to maintain the levies as a royal privilege.<sup>113</sup> This frustrated initial negotiations, though Cowan later reported that the viceroy was disposed to argue in favour of the English position with both his councillors and king.<sup>114</sup> The possibility of the viceroy misleading Cowan must also be acknowledged. This was a moot point, however, as Cowan acknowledged to William Phipps<sup>115</sup> in 1734 that there was no point in negotiating with a Portuguese viceroy without leave from Lisbon.<sup>116</sup> This suggested a much more rigid hierarchical structure for the Portuguese than the English which had the potential to be flexible and act horizontally through privately interested servants.<sup>117</sup>

It was likely that the viceroy used the excuse of consulting with the king as a convenient ploy in his negotiations with Cowan. Letters to and from Portugal would have taken up to eighteen months, and would have dragged the negotiations out to a great extent.

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<sup>110</sup> Cowan to General and Council at Bombay, Goa, 15 Apr. 1721, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1AA, ff. 25v-26).

<sup>111</sup> Cowan to Charles Boone, Goa, 11 Mar. 1721, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1AA, f. 9v); Cowan to Walter Brown, Goa, 4 Apr. 1721, (f. 19).

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

<sup>113</sup> Cowan to Charles Boone, Goa, 13 Jul. 1721, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1AA, f. 52v).

<sup>114</sup> Cowan to Walter Brown, Goa, 13 May 1721, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1AA, ff. 35-35).

<sup>115</sup> 1712 – Warehouse Keeper; 1713 – Senior Merchant; 1722 – 2nd in Council; 1723, 1724, 1725, 1726, 1727, 1728, 1729 – President of the Western Presidency.

<sup>116</sup> Cowan to William Phipps, Parel, 4 Sept. 1734, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2D, f. 133v).

<sup>117</sup> Erikson, *Between Monopoly and Free Trade*, pp. 19-20; 108-9.

This delay may easily have been a gambit to force a speedy resolution on matters such as the Tannah-Carinjah pass, or to have crossed them off the negotiation schedule altogether. Cowan reported to the Bombay council that he felt the viceroy agreed that the granting of free passage and increased cooperation was necessary in repairing the damaged Anglo-Portuguese relationship.<sup>118</sup>

However, the question of Tannah-Carinjah was not resolved during the negotiations, and no reference to the issue was made in the drafted alliance articles. The only indication of increased cooperation between the English and Portuguese after the treaty was the case of a Jesuit priest at Bandora 'provoking the English over customs at Mahim.'<sup>119</sup> Exactly what this priest did was unclear, though Cowan informed Boone that the viceroy removed him from his position.<sup>120</sup> The order of Jesuits, as noted by Cottineau de Kloguen, were the richest, best informed and most powerful order in Portuguese India at this time.<sup>121</sup> As such, it was a bold move for the viceroy to have sided with the English over a Portuguese cleric. Since the matter was not discussed further, it must be assumed that the issue was smoothed over in order to preserve the delicate Anglo-Portuguese relationship in 1721-2.

The aim of the treaty was twofold. First, a defensive alliance was to be entered into against 'all the Asiatic Princes, that are enemies to the two crowns of Great Britain and Portugal, except the Mogul, Kings of Persia, Arabia and China.'<sup>122</sup> Second, that a joint

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<sup>118</sup> Cowan to General and Council at Bombay, Goa, 15 Apr. 1721, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1AA, ff. 25v-26).

<sup>119</sup> Cowan to Charles Boone, Bombay, 26 Jan. 1722, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1AA, f. 125).

<sup>120</sup> Cowan to Charles Boone, Surat, 20 Apr. 1722, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1AA, f. 138v).

<sup>121</sup> De Kloguen, *An Historical Sketch of Goa*, p. 75.

<sup>122</sup> Articles of an Alliance, Offensive and Defensive, made by the British and Portuguese Nations, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/3A1, f. 36).

offensive would immediately be launched against Angré, with terms of peace only to be signed through mutual acceptance of both European powers.<sup>123</sup> These clauses were important in terms of not only their intent, but also in light of the outcome of their alliance. The opening clause outlined that the alliance was to be one of mutual cooperation and consultation, and gave the impression that a lasting understanding was desired between the parties.<sup>124</sup> It was possible that the treaty negotiations were also framed with the intention of repairing the damaged relationship through successful dialogue. Indeed, the directors wrote to Bombay on 24 March 1722 that they were pleased with Cowan's negotiations and how he had managed to reconcile the English and Portuguese of India to an extent.<sup>125</sup> It seemed that progress had also been made on the Tannah-Carinjah issue as a result of Cowan's work as the directors noted that the viceroy had written to the Portuguese king regarding the matter, as he had promised Cowan he would.<sup>126</sup>

Article 2 set out that the alliance, beyond the coming war against Angré, was to be defensive in nature only.<sup>127</sup> However, the command of the expedition complicated the negotiations. In response to this, a definitive programme for military operations was laid out in the draft articles. Articles 3-5 dealt specifically with the issue of command and due deference was given to the viceroy as the ranking officer of the expedition.<sup>128</sup> This was likely a mark of respect to the viceroy, though it might also have pointed to a

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<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

<sup>125</sup> Court of Directors to President and Council at Bombay, London, 24 Mar. 1722, (BL, India Office Records, IOR/E/3/101, f. 130v).

<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

<sup>127</sup> Articles of an Alliance, Offensive and Defensive, made by the British and Portuguese Nations, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/3A1, f. 36).

<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

relative lack of enthusiasm on the English side. There was scepticism for the expedition in general due to the delays in receiving responses from Cowan's superiors to questions and draft articles. This was something which Cowan complained of frequently.<sup>129</sup> Whilst the communication times in the early eighteenth century had the potential to be long and uncertain, Goa was less than a week's passage from Bombay. With this in mind, the lack of contact and advice from Bombay pointed to a lack of confidence in the project.

Cowan, as commander of the English contingent, was given command of 2,500 men. This was a massive number to have been raised. The question of sovereignty was also important here. The company-state issue complicated matters from an academic point of view, though the opening clause of the treaty itself made it clear that the treaty was intended for use between the crowns of Great Britain and Portugal.<sup>130</sup> The Company was not referenced at all and so their role in the treaty must be reappraised. It was either the case that they were assumed to be acting on behalf of the crown, or that a sufficient delineation of where company and royal power overlapped was neither present nor acknowledged in India. Given that no correspondence was sent to royal or government agents, it must be assumed that the Company was acting in a sovereign manner with the concluding of the treaty.

Article 8 set out the expected military contributions of each power.<sup>131</sup> It was instructed that 2,000 foot soldiers, with a proportionate number of officers were to be supplied by both the English and Portuguese.<sup>132</sup> In addition to foot soldiers, each power was to

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<sup>129</sup> Cowan to John Courtney, Goa, 22 Feb. 1721, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1AA, f. 5v); Cowan to John Milles, 22 Feb. 1721, (f. 6); Cowan to Bombay Council, Goa, 11 Mar. 1721, (ff. 8-8v).

<sup>130</sup> Articles of an Alliance, Offensive and Defensive, made by the British and Portuguese Nations, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/3A1, f. 36).

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*



provide as much cavalry as was in a state of readiness,<sup>133</sup> though it is unclear as to the numbers expected. Deshpande's work partially comes into conflict with the treaty articles, with it having been suggested that the total allied force was comprised of 6,000 infantry, 200 cavalry, and 16 pieces of artillery.<sup>134</sup> This was not a large difference in the expected force, however, and may be explained by the provision in Article 8 that additional infantry may have been recruited if needed.<sup>135</sup> The Bombay garrison, which was never large, comprised mostly militia who served as sentries as part of their residency agreements.<sup>136</sup> Whilst there were not enough European soldiers at Bombay to furnish such a force, it was likely that the majority of the infantry was made up of native sepoys<sup>137</sup> or topasses.<sup>138</sup> Cowan also remarked that the total expedition force which set out had only 1,000 Europeans in total.<sup>139</sup>

Each power was also expected to fit out 5 grabs, together with their attendant vessels.<sup>140</sup> This total of 10 grabs would have been a significant squadron, concurrent with the accepted notion of European power projection through naval force. Indeed, if it is conceived that each grab would have an attendant gallivat, a suggested force of 20 vessels might have posed a significant threat to Angré. Deshpande's account differed from that in Cowan's papers, however. Deshpande asserted that 10 major ships shelled Kolaba with 300 guns.<sup>141</sup> However, article 8 highlighted that each nation was to fit-out

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<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

<sup>134</sup> Deshpande, 'Limitations of Military Technology', 902.

<sup>135</sup> Articles of an Alliance, Offensive and Defensive, made by the British and Portuguese Nations, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/3A1, f. 37).

<sup>136</sup> Stern, *The Company State*, pp. 27; 91.

<sup>137</sup> Indian soldiers serving under Europeans.

<sup>138</sup> A term applied to Luso-Asian soldiers, usually coming from Bombay or Goa.

<sup>139</sup> Cowan to Alexander Cairnes, Bombay, 6 Jan. 1722, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1AA, f. 108v).

<sup>140</sup> Articles of an Alliance, Offensive and Defensive, made by the British and Portuguese Nations, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/3A1, f. 37).

<sup>141</sup> Deshpande, 'Limitations of Military Technology', 902.

5 grabs. Even if Deshpande mistakenly took the grabs to count as Indiaman-style vessels, a total armament of 300 guns was unlikely to have been mounted on 10 grabs. If, through modification of the grabs' decks, it was possible to mount so many guns, it would have been impossible to shell the fort with all of them at once during the short time that the attack took place as Deshpande has suggested.<sup>142</sup> Additionally, Cowan gave no reference to major vessels or prolonged naval bombardment in his account.

Article 10 highlighted the anticipated European presence on the island of Kolaba following the expedition. It outlined that the Portuguese intended to take Kolaba and its neighbouring district for themselves.<sup>143</sup> A concession was, however, made to the English in the granting of permission for an English house to be maintained at Kolaba if they pleased.<sup>144</sup> Whilst this clause seemed to be weighted in favour of the Portuguese, there was also a counterbalance built into article 10. The English would have had the option of occupying the fort and territories of Greim, while the Portuguese would also have had the option of maintaining a house there.<sup>145</sup> Once again it would appear from the text of the treaty that there was at the very least some intention for this military alliance to be the germ for continued friendship and cooperation, with the planned acceptance of official residencies having been a positive step in this direction. That being said, the strategic occupation of key positions was perhaps also suggestive of an ongoing distrust and practical buffer zone should Anglo-Portuguese relations deteriorate once again. Many of the Maratha-held forts were, as G.V. Scammell has argued, shaped by the influence of Portuguese and other European renegades under the employ of the

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<sup>142</sup> Ibid.

<sup>143</sup> Articles of an Alliance, Offensive and Defensive, made by the British and Portuguese Nations, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/3A1, f. 37).

<sup>144</sup> Ibid.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid.

Maratha prince Shivaji<sup>146</sup> in the preceding years. This suggested a level of technological expertise and strategic importance which would have made the occupation of these forts worthwhile.<sup>147</sup>

Finally, Article 14 stated that upon the draft articles being 'duly ratified'<sup>148</sup> that 'execution of the project shall be presently entered upon.'<sup>149</sup> Though there was no date attached to the article document itself, an accompanying letter to Cowan from the Portuguese side suggestively placed the agreement as having been concluded at the end of August 1721.<sup>150</sup> This letter stated that whilst the full text of the treaty would have to be referred to the Portuguese crown, there was no reason not to proceed with expedition preparations.<sup>151</sup> It should be noted that there is some ambiguity as to the specific date of departure for the expedition, though there was a break in Cowan's correspondence between 28 November 1721, when he wrote to Captain James Macrae,<sup>152</sup> and 6 January 1722 when he first gave reference to the failure of the venture.<sup>153</sup> From these dates it was likely the expedition took place between the end of November and beginning of December 1721. This estimate concurs with Deshpande's timeframe.<sup>154</sup>

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<sup>146</sup> Shivaji Bhonsle (c. 1627/30 – 3 Apr. 1680), First Chhatrapati / Ruler of the Maratha Empire (1674 – 1680).

<sup>147</sup> G.V. Scammell, 'European Exiles, Renegades and Outlaws and the Maritime Economy of Asia c.1500-1750,' *Modern Asian Studies*, 26, No. 4 (Oct., 1992), 648.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>150</sup> Francisco Joseph de Sampayo e Castro to Cowan, 22 Aug. 1721, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/3A1, f. 39).

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>152</sup> Cowan to Captain James Macrae, Goa, 28 Nov. 1721, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1AA, f. 106).

<sup>153</sup> Cowan to William Dawson, Goa, 6 Jan. 1722, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1AA, f. 106v).

<sup>154</sup> Deshpande, 'Limitations of Military Technology', 902.

As discussed above, the Portuguese wished to have the treaty ratified by the Portuguese crown, and so presumably a copy of the draft articles would have been sent to Portugal for consideration. The time it would have taken the packet to get to Portugal, and then for a reply to have found its way back, would have likely taken up to eighteen months due to the significant time delay in east-west communications. If this were indeed the case then it could reasonably have been argued by the Portuguese that there was in fact no treaty in place during the expedition, and so they were not bound to Article 1 of the treaty in respect of making a joint peace.<sup>155</sup> This concept of not being bound to the treaty articles was crucial when considering the fallout from the failed campaign which Cowan made great effort to highlight in blaming the Portuguese. The expedition itself, and a discussion of its failure, shall be examined the following section.

### **III - The Anglo-Portuguese Expedition of 1721**

Cowan was very positive about the expedition during the period October to November 1721, and informed as many acquaintances as he could of his leading role in the expedition.<sup>156</sup> However, the expedition itself was a failure. None of the combined objectives were accomplished and Anglo-Portuguese relations in India were significantly damaged for several years afterwards.

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<sup>155</sup> Articles of an Alliance, Offensive and Defensive, made by the British and Portuguese Nations, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/3A1 f. 36).

<sup>156</sup> Cowan to Thomas Lawson, Goa, 21 Oct. 1721, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1AA, f. 98); Cowan to Alexander Orme, Goa, 16 Nov. 1721, (f. 98v); Cowan to Captain James Macrae, Goa, 19 Oct. 1721, (f. 99).

The fort of Alibaug was between Bombay and Goa, and so was relatively accessible for the allied forces on land. Even still, this meant a march of two to three days across territory that was controlled by both Angré and the Sou Raja.<sup>157</sup> According to Cowan, the Sou Raja was one of the most powerful rulers in the west of India, and that it was to him that Angré owed nominal fealty.<sup>158</sup> However, the nature of this fealty was unclear as Cowan suggested that Angré had recently rebelled against the Sou Raja.<sup>159</sup> There was a rumour, however, that Angré had returned to the Sou Raja's fealty, though there was no confirmation of this.<sup>160</sup> Cowan provided little information about the preparations for the expedition, save that they had been made.<sup>161</sup> Similarly, he gave only scant details about the march to Alibaug.<sup>162</sup> As such, the majority of what can be discerned of the expedition comes from Cowan's correspondence once he had returned to Bombay. However, Cowan recorded a good amount of detail on the assault of Alibaug and the subsequent retreat,<sup>163</sup> and so it is from this, as well as Deshpande's work,<sup>164</sup> that much of the below discussion will draw from. Again, it must be noted, that Cowan's account of the expedition was distinctly partisan and sought to shift blame for the failure to the Portuguese.

Cowan reported on 6 January 1722 that the allied force was harassed by Angré's cavalry during their march and suffered losses as a result.<sup>165</sup> Cowan's suggestion that Angré had

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<sup>157</sup> Cowan to William Dawsonne, Bombay, 6 Jan. 1722, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1AA, f. 106v).

<sup>158</sup> Cowan to William Dawsonne, Bombay, 6 Jan. 1722, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1AA, f. 106v); Cowan to Alexander Cairnes, Bombay, 6 Jan. 1722, (f. 108v).

<sup>159</sup> Cowan to Alexander Cairnes, Bombay, 6 Jan. 1722, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1AA, f. 108v).

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>161</sup> Cowan to John Gould, Goa, 25 Nov. 1721, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1AA, f. 101v); Cowan to Mr. Clarke, Goa, 25 Nov. 1721, (f. 103v).

<sup>162</sup> Cowan to William Dawsonne, Bombay, 6 Jan. 1722, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1AA, f. 106v); Cowan to Alexander Cairnes, Bombay, 6 Jan. 1722, (f. 108v).

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>164</sup> Deshpande, 'Limitations of Military Technology'.

<sup>165</sup> Cowan to Alexander Cairnes, Bombay, 6 Jan. 1722, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1AA, f. 108v).

access to cavalry was significant as the use of horsemen was often decisive in Indian warfare at this time.<sup>166</sup> Having cavalry also gave the ability to send messages to potential allies such as the Sou Raja, a factor which proved to be decisive. Upon their arrival before Alibaug the allied army made camp and surveyed the fortress, expecting there to be an opportunity of making an easy breach during an assault.<sup>167</sup> The European force had been formed as was required under the terms of the treaty, but was notable because of their combined force of approximately 4,500, there were only 1,000 Europeans enlisted.<sup>168</sup> However, Deshpande argued that the force totalled 6,000.<sup>169</sup> Most of the Europeans had come from the Portuguese garrison at Choul,<sup>170</sup> just south of Alibaug. However, Cowan argued that of Choul's garrison only 1,000 men or less were fit for active service.<sup>171</sup> Whether Cowan meant fit in the literal sense or if he was alluding to a predominantly native garrison was unclear. Given Cowan's criticism of the quality of native troops, however,<sup>172</sup> the latter was most likely.

The morning after they arrived before Alibaug, the allied force made an attack on the fort with 500 men.<sup>173</sup> Cowan and the viceroy expected their force to find a gate which they would be able to force open. However, the only means of entering the fort proved to be a single flight of narrow steps which was strongly defended by Angré's men. Having failed to gain entry, the allied forces retreated with a loss of 50 killed and 50

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<sup>166</sup> Rosalind O'Hanlon, 'Military Sports and the History of the Martial Body in India,' *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, 50, No. 4 (2007), 492-4.

<sup>167</sup> Cowan to Alexander Cairnes, Bombay, 6 Jan. 1722, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1AA, f. 110).

<sup>168</sup> Cowan to Alexander Cairnes, Bombay, 6 Jan. 1722, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1AA, f. 108v).

<sup>169</sup> Deshpande, 'Limitations of Military Technology', 902.

<sup>170</sup> Modern-day Chaul.

<sup>171</sup> Cowan to Alexander Cairnes, Bombay, 6 Jan. 1722, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1AA, f. 110).

<sup>172</sup> Cowan to Alexander Cairnes, Bombay, 6 Jan. 1722, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1AA, ff. 108-108v).

<sup>173</sup> Cowan to Alexander Cairnes, Bombay, 6 Jan. 1722, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1AA, f. 110).

wounded.<sup>174</sup> This setback was compounded by the viceroy falling ill on the second day of the siege, an event which caused the Portuguese contingent to shrink and lose heart according to Cowan.<sup>175</sup> With the viceroy ill, Cowan was then in overall command of the siege and ordered his 4 batteries of cannon to fire at the fort overnight in the hope of reducing its defences.<sup>176</sup> This point on the use of 4 cannons also contradicts Deshpande's narrative, which suggested the allied force had 16 cannons.<sup>177</sup>

Crucially, on the third day of the siege, Baji Rao, the chief general to the Sou Raja, appeared at Alibaug with a force of 2,000 foot and 4,000 cavalry to reinforce Angré.<sup>178</sup> Not only were the numbers overwhelming, but the allied force was confronted by an army with a far greater number of horsemen.<sup>179</sup> Cowan reported that native soldiers dreaded having to face cavalry in battle, and that those under his command were terrified by the appearance of Baji Rao and his army.<sup>180</sup> This fear of a large, highly-mobile force tied in with Deshpande's argument that it was the use of attritional warfare through making use of superior numbers and geographical features that was crucial in securing native victories against European foes in the eighteenth century.<sup>181</sup>

Faced with the strength of the Maratha forces it was unsurprising that the allied army was unsuccessful, but it was the fallout from the Portuguese peace with Angré and the Sou Raja which caused greater problems. Under the terms of the Anglo-Portuguese

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<sup>174</sup> Ibid.

<sup>175</sup> Cowan to William Dawsonne, Bombay, 6 Jan. 1722, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1AA, f. 106v); Cowan to John Cowan, Bombay, 6 Jan. 1722, (f. 113v).

<sup>176</sup> Cowan to Alexander Cairnes, Bombay, 6 Jan. 1722, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1AA, f. 110v).

<sup>177</sup> Deshpande, 'Limitations of Military Technology', 902.

<sup>178</sup> Cowan to William Dawsonne, Bombay, 6 Jan. 1722, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1AA, f. 106v).

<sup>179</sup> Ibid.

<sup>180</sup> Cowan to Alexander Cairnes, Bombay, 6 Jan. 1722, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1AA, f. 108v).

<sup>181</sup> Deshpande, 'Limitations of Military Technology', 903.

treaty, both parties were bound to only make peace with their enemy jointly.<sup>182</sup> The Portuguese, however, sued for a separate peace and retreated to Choul.<sup>183</sup> Cowan described this as ‘scandalous’ behaviour and directed the entire blame for the defeat at the Portuguese.<sup>184</sup> Having made much of the viceroy’s qualities as a soldier whilst at Goa, Cowan was disappointed that he fell ill almost as soon as the expedition had begun.<sup>185</sup> Cowan reported conventional reasons such as the enemy reinforcement and the repulse during the attack on the fort, though these points were framed by the failings of his Portuguese allies.<sup>186</sup> Any potential failings by the English contingent were not mentioned.

The failure of the expedition had a great personal impact on Cowan. He noted the damage which might have been done to his professional reputation. Cowan bemoaned his failed attempt at soldiering, and lamented that he would likely ‘hang up his sword’ in this respect.<sup>187</sup> There was also an element of personal disappointment for Cowan at the failure.<sup>188</sup> This was unsurprising given the length of time and effort that Cowan invested in bringing the alliance to a conclusion, and given the expense incurred by the Company in fitting out the expedition. As a result of this, Cowan might justifiably have

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<sup>182</sup> Articles of an Alliance, Offensive and Defensive, made by the British and Portuguese Nations, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/3A1, f. 36).

<sup>183</sup> Cowan to Alexander Cairnes, Bombay, 6 Jan. 1722, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1AA, f. 108v).

<sup>184</sup> Cowan to Alexander Cairnes, Bombay, 6 Jan. 1722, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1AA, f. 108v); Cowan to John Sherman, Bombay, 6 Jan. 1722, (f. 114); Cowan to William Cowan, Bombay, 6 Jan. 1722, (f. 115).

<sup>185</sup> Cowan to William Dawsonne, Bombay, 6 Jan. 1722, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1AA, f. 106v).

<sup>186</sup> Cowan to William Dawsonne, Bombay, 6 Jan. 1722, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1AA, f. 106v); Cowan to Henry Cairnes, Bombay, 6 Jan. 1722, (f. 110).

<sup>187</sup> Cowan to Alexander Cairnes, Bombay, 6 Jan. 1722, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1AA, f. 110v); Cowan to Mr. Stuart, Bombay, 26 Jan. 1722, (f. 119).

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid.*



felt concerned for his career prospects. However, he acknowledged that the directors were unlikely to hold him personally responsible for the failed campaign.<sup>189</sup>

Despite Cowan's exoneration for the loss, there was also the geo-political aspect to consider. Cowan lamented that two European powers had been unable to reduce a native enemy, and expressed concern for the implications.<sup>190</sup> Such a decisive loss might have led native powers to question the actual strength of the Europeans in the western Indian Ocean. Cowan was aware of this prospect, and highlighted the importance of maintaining English naval power in India so as to both protect trade and maintain influence.<sup>191</sup> Such a stance, having shifted from previous Company reliance on static fortifications, concurred with Watson's argument that the exertion of force, and the projection of supposed power, was required to be flexible in its application to be successful.<sup>192</sup> Cowan's thinking was in line with what A.P. Thornton has described as the importance of portraying an image of dominance.<sup>193</sup> This strong opinion regarding the portrayal of power was one which he held throughout his career in India. This developed across his various placements, most notably as chief of Mocha<sup>194</sup> and latterly as governor of Bombay.<sup>195</sup> Although Cowan did not provide details as to the terms which the Portuguese agreed with Angré, he alleged that these terms were 'scandalous'<sup>196</sup> and

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<sup>189</sup> Cowan to John Cowan, Bombay, 6 Jan. 1722, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1AA, f. 114); Court of Directors to President and Council at Bombay, London, 24 Mar. 1722, (BL, India Office Records, IOR/E/3/101, f. 130v).

<sup>190</sup> Cowan to William Dawsonne, Bombay, 6 Jan. 1722, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1AA, f. 106v).

<sup>191</sup> Cowan to William Dawsonne, Bombay, 6 Jan. 1722, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1AA, f. 107); Cowan to Henry Cairnes, Bombay, 6 Jan. 1722, (f. 109).

<sup>192</sup> Watson, 'Fortifications and the "Idea" of Force', 71.

<sup>193</sup> A.P. Thornton, *Doctrines of Imperialism*, (New York, 1967), p. 2.

<sup>194</sup> Cowan to Henry Frankland, Mocha Rd., 2 May 1727, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1C, f. 235v); Cowan to Edward Harrison, Bombay, 30 May 1727, (f. 240v).

<sup>195</sup> Cowan to Henry Lyall, Bombay, 25 Sept. 1728, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2A, f. 41v); Cowan to Edward Harrison, Bombay, 3 Jan. 1729, (f. 43v); Cowan to John Gould Jr., Bombay, 6 Jan. 1729, (f. 60).

<sup>196</sup> Cowan to William Dawsonne, Bombay, 6 Jan. 1722, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1AA, f. 106v).

'cowardly.'<sup>197</sup> This in turn led to a deterioration of Anglo-Portuguese relations after the conclusion of the expedition. It must also be noted that Cowan used private information sharing networks, such as those suggested by Mentz,<sup>198</sup> to funnel pro-Cowan information about the failed expedition and poor performance of the Portuguese to his correspondents in Europe.

The inability of the joint force to reduce Angré led to unrestricted raiding by his forces until his death in July 1729.<sup>199</sup> Instead of preventing the so-called Maratha piracy during this period, Angré appears to have been buoyed by his success against the European powers. As such, raids on European shipping by Angré's forces continued throughout the 1720s and were carried on by his sons into the 1730s as well.<sup>200</sup> In the context of Cowan and his experience with the Marathas, it is prudent to point out that no further expedition was planned against Angré or his sons, with or without Portuguese involvement. The Company did, however, keep the threat of Angré in mind.<sup>201</sup> As governor of Bombay, Cowan made frequent references to the harassment of Angré's naval forces on the west coast of India. The English response was largely defensive in nature, however, and took the form of utilizing galleys to cruise commonly used sea lanes.<sup>202</sup> As a result of his experiences, Cowan argued that there could never have been

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<sup>197</sup> Cowan to William Dawsonne, Bombay, 6 Jan. 1722, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1AA, f. 106v); Cowan to Mr. Bronson, Bombay, 6 Jan. 1722, (f. 108); Cowan to Henry Cairnes, 6 Jan. 1722, (f. 110); Cowan to Hugh Henry, Bombay, 6 Jan. 1722, (f. 113).

<sup>198</sup> Mentz, *The English Gentleman Merchant*, p. 81.

<sup>199</sup> Cowan to Henry Lowther, Bombay, 7 Jul. 1729, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1D, f. 39v).

<sup>200</sup> Cowan to John Deane, Bombay, 16 Dec. 1729, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1E, f. 48); Cowan to Martin French, Bombay, 24 Feb. 1730, (f. 102v).

<sup>201</sup> Court of Directors to President and Council at Bombay, London, 22 Mar. 1724, (BL India Office Records, IOR/E/3/101, f. 263v); Court of Directors to President and Council at Bombay, London, 27 Feb. 1729, (BL India Office Records, IOR/E/3/104, f. 349).

<sup>202</sup> Cowan to Henry Lowther, Bombay, 29 Jul. 1730, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1F, f. 101v); Cowan to Henry Lowther, Bombay, 14 Sept. 1730, (f. 153v); Cowan to John Horne, Bombay, 22 Oct. 1730, (f. 174).

peace with Angré as he posed too much of a threat since his fortress of Alibaug was so close to Bombay.<sup>203</sup>

#### **IV - Robert Cowan and his Posting to Surat, Apr.- Aug. 1722**

Following his posting at Goa, Cowan was appointed by Bombay governor Charles Boone to examine the Company accounts at Surat in April 1722.<sup>204</sup> The native brokers used by the Company at Surat were suspected of fraud whilst dealing in the company's affairs.<sup>205</sup> The choice of Cowan for this mission must be viewed from the perspective of his previous success at Goa, with Cowan also having believed that he had entered the Company's good graces.<sup>206</sup> Cowan's deployment to Surat must also be viewed in the context of the ongoing economic and political troubles in the province of Gujarat and the Mughal empire at large. Surat had long been regarded as an Indian trading hub, and its population at the time was estimated to be between 200,000 and 400,000.<sup>207</sup> Cowan acknowledged that Surat was the principal place of trade for India during this time,<sup>208</sup> and the success of Surat has been well documented in scholarship for both the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.<sup>209</sup> Surat did, however, experience a commercial change over the course of the long eighteenth century, with the precise starting point

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<sup>203</sup> Cowan to William Dawsonne, Bombay, 6 Jan. 1722, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1AA, f. 106v).

<sup>204</sup> Cowan to William Dawsonne, Surat, 20 Apr. 1722, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1AA, f. 138).

<sup>205</sup> Cowan to William Dawsonne, Surat, 20 Apr. 1722, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1AA, f. 138); Cowan to Charles Boone, Surat, 20 Apr. 1722, (f. 138v); Cowan to Mr. Ralle, Surat, 20 Apr. 1722, (f. 139).

<sup>206</sup> Cowan to Charles Boone, Goa, 13 May 1721, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1AA, f. 34v).

<sup>207</sup> Ashin Das Gupta, 'The Crisis at Surat, 1730-32,' *Bengal: Past and Present*, 80, (1967), 157.

<sup>208</sup> Cowan to Mrs. Cairnes, Surat, 20 Apr. 1722, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1AA, f. 141).

<sup>209</sup> Om Prakash, 'English Private Trade in the Western Indian Ocean, 1720-1740', *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, 50, No. 2/3, Spatial and Temporal Continuities of Merchant Networks in South Asia and the Indian Ocean (2007), 66.

of this being difficult to definitively identify.<sup>210</sup> Due to this alteration, Cowan recorded that he expected fatigue at the very least from this posting.<sup>211</sup>

Whilst Cowan referred to the changing political and economic landscape at Surat as something akin to a decline, the arguments put forward by C.A. Bayly have long argued against this understanding of affairs in eighteenth-century India. He has contested that Mughal India went through a phase of increased regionalisation in the eighteenth century, as opposed to a decline or fragmentation of established politics and society.<sup>212</sup> This was in part due to the emergence of a group of politically astute merchants who used political connections to further their financial desires,<sup>213</sup> and the ability of great merchant families to reproduce capital and influence over the generations. In northern Indian in particular, these great merchant families increased their standing in the eighteenth century.<sup>214</sup> There was also the case of the Indian merchant capitalist to consider. With the reduction in regional influence of the Mughal court, portfolio capitalists saw the opportunity to diversify their interests. The most interesting aspect of this was their increasing desire to control labour. Through this process, many new zamindari landlords were created which drew rents away from central funding.<sup>215</sup>

However, whilst portfolio capitalists were able to diversify into land revenues, they were lacking in liquid capital when compared to the great merchant families. It was this aspect that was crucial to the eventual fall of the Indian portfolio capitalist. Whilst they could

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<sup>210</sup> This gradual change was a topic which Cowan referred to frequently during his time in India and shall be touched upon throughout this study.

<sup>211</sup> Cowan to Mr. Ralle, Surat, 20 Apr. 1722, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1AA, f. 139).

<sup>212</sup> C.A. Bayly, *Imperial Meridian: The British Empire and the World, 1780-1830*, (New York, 1990), pp. 17-18.

<sup>213</sup> Sanjay Subrahmanyam & C.A. Bayly, 'Portfolio Capitalists and the Political Economy of Early Modern India', *The Indian Economic and Social Review*, 25, Vol. 4, (Dec. 1988), 412.

<sup>214</sup> *Ibid.*, 416-7.

<sup>215</sup> *Ibid.*, 418.

appear strong in the face of European competition and were able to mobilize military force when threatened, Subrahmanyam and Bayly have identified English private traders as having been their greatest challenge. Whilst the portfolio capitalists were dependent on Indian based finance which had a great deal of competition for it, European private trading interests could tap into European financial networks and sources of finance to give them the edge in competition, preventing them from thriving in the changing political system.<sup>216</sup>

Whilst the Mughal state had always delegated rule to the periphery in exchange for tribute to maintain authority, the growing complexity of provincial society made it more and more difficult to control local power structures, such as new merchant elites and landlords, which could not be as easily broken up as the old military aristocratic families could.<sup>217</sup> Following the increase of power and wealth in the regions compared to the centre, Mughal elites became more dependent on Indian capital markets which naturally drew them further into the spheres of the capital-rich merchant families of the periphery and the European commercial elites.<sup>218</sup> As Bayly has argued, whilst the Mughal court held influence throughout India, the potential for regionalism was always there due to the number of semi-autonomous smaller kingdoms and states operating at the periphery.<sup>219</sup> This regionalization was, it is argued, likely what Cowan was viewing when he gave emphasis on the decline or fragmentation of the Mughal state.

A hallmark of Cowan's Indian letter books was that he reported any success to his personal network. A good example of this was when Cowan highlighted his appointment

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<sup>216</sup> Ibid., 421.

<sup>217</sup> Bayly, *Imperial Meridian*, p. 32.

<sup>218</sup> Bayly, *Indian Society and the Making of the British Empire*, (Cambridge, 1988), p. 10.

<sup>219</sup> Ibid., p. 23.

as examiner at Surat.<sup>220</sup> For the period April 20-29 1722, Cowan wrote 9 letters which dealt almost exclusively with describing his new task. These letters were sent to friends and patrons in England, with Henry Cairnes and John Gould the most prominent.<sup>221</sup> Cowan also used this method to demonstrate his advancement and talents to senior Company servants of whom he desired favour. In the case of the Surat examinership, Cowan wrote to William Dawson<sup>222</sup> to highlight his credentials, and further advised of his promotion to the governing council of Bombay in August 1721.<sup>223</sup> This example of network building was also used by Cowan in seeking the favour of his patrons' wives as a tool for personal and political advancement.

Cowan wrote to both Mrs. Cairnes and Mrs. Gould to advise them of his assignment at Surat.<sup>224</sup> What was particularly interesting in the case of the Surat placement was Cowan's specifically thanking Mrs. Gould for letters of recommendation which she had sent him.<sup>225</sup> This was not something reported again by Cowan. This was also, however, suggestive of Cowan's continued management of his horizontal network structure to strengthen his position with Company circles, particularly along intimate or familial lines. This is reminiscent of Finn's arguments on the usage of imperial familial structures in empire.<sup>226</sup> Cowan further used his wider correspondence to give regular updates of

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<sup>220</sup> Cowan to William Dawsonne, Bombay, 20 Apr. 1722, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1AA, f. 138); Cowan to Mr. Ralle, Bombay, 20 Apr. 1722, (f. 139); Cowan to John Gould, Surat, 20 Apr. 1722, (f. 139v).

<sup>221</sup> Cowan to Henry Cairnes, Surat, No date, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1AA, f. 139); Cowan to John Gould, Surat, 20 Apr. 1722, (f. 139v).

<sup>222</sup> Chair of the East India Company for 1720.

<sup>223</sup> Cowan to William Dawsonne, Goa, 27 Aug. 1721, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1AA, f. 77).

<sup>224</sup> Cowan to Mrs. Cairnes, Surat, 20 Apr. 1722, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1AA, f. 140v); Cowan to Mrs. Gould, Surat, 20 Apr. 1722, (f. 141).

<sup>225</sup> Cowan to Mrs. Gould, Surat, 20 Apr. 1722, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1AA, f. 141).

<sup>226</sup> Margot C. Finn, 'Family Formations: Anglo India and the Familial Proto-State', in David Feldman & Jon Lawrence (eds), *Structures and Transformations in Modern British History*, (Cambridge, 2011), pp. 101-3.

the progress made during his Surat investigation.<sup>227</sup> Again, this returns to Mentz's suggestions about the use of private information sharing networks.<sup>228</sup>

Upon arriving at Surat, Cowan arranged a private interview with a broker to gather intelligence on the alleged frauds.<sup>229</sup> However, the broker did not wish to speak publicly and so the assumption must be made that reprisals or a loss of reputation was feared. Cowan did not mention this broker by name, though it was likely to have been the banian merchant Loldas Parack<sup>230</sup> who came forward to cooperate with Cowan in this regard.<sup>231</sup> The Parack family also had an interest in seeing the downfall of the incumbent Company brokers, the Rustum family, due to longstanding tension between them.<sup>232</sup> This assumption is based on the fact that it was ultimately Loldas who acted on behalf of the Company in this affair. Cowan later reported to William Phipps, governor of Bombay, that Loldas' evidence and trading accounts could prove the alleged fraud.<sup>233</sup> Indeed, Cowan suggested that Loldas worked aggressively in prosecuting the suspected brokers.<sup>234</sup>

Loldas' account books confirmed the alleged fraud, and Cowan subsequently summoned the guilty brokers to appear before him and show their books.<sup>235</sup> It is

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<sup>227</sup> Cowan to William Phipps, Surat, 29 Apr. 1722, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1AA, f. 142v); Cowan to John Courtney, Surat, 29 Apr. 1722, (f. 143); Cowan to Robert Sutton, Surat, 2 May 1722, (f. 145).

<sup>228</sup> Mentz, *The English Gentleman Merchant*, p. 81.

<sup>229</sup> Cowan to William Phipps, Surat, 29 Apr. 1722, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1AA, f. 142v)

<sup>230</sup> A member of the Parack family of brokers who had served the East India Company during the late seventeenth century.

<sup>231</sup> Cowan to William Phipps, Surat, 2 May 1722, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1AA, f. 144).

<sup>232</sup> Das Gupta, 'The Merchants of Surat, c. 1700-1750' in E. Leach & S.N. Muckherjee (eds), *Elites in South Asia*, (Cambridge, 1970), pp. 213-214.

<sup>233</sup> Cowan to William Phipps, Surat, 30 Apr. 1722, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1AA, f. 143).

<sup>234</sup> Cowan to William Phipps, Surat, 2 May 1722, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1AA, f. 145); Cowan to William Phipps, Surat, 22 May 1722, (f. 149v).

<sup>235</sup> Cowan to William Phipps, Surat, 2 May 1722, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1AA, f. 146v).

important to highlight, however, that Company brokers were not necessarily directly employed by European trading companies, and instead acted as wholesale merchants. As a result of this, there would have been no employer-employee bond which would have forced the brokers to appear before him. Cowan reported that he was certain the brokers were unaware one of their own had betrayed them.<sup>236</sup> Cowan did not doubt the brokers guilt and that he would be able to unravel the fraud at Surat, though he did fear that the level of alleged financial mismanagement may have been far greater than previously thought.<sup>237</sup> This was very troubling for Cowan and the Company, and it was agreed that these brokers should be suspended from service until the matter was resolved.<sup>238</sup> What was clear, however, was that Cowan's intent was to remove the incumbent Rustums from power, likely as an element of intra-Company politics.<sup>239</sup>

Through his assistance to Cowan, and the suspension of the allegedly guilty former brokers, Loldas became the sole Company broker at Surat.<sup>240</sup> Loldas remained in the company service right the way through Cowan's tenure in India,<sup>241</sup> and as such was a figure who played an increasingly important role in Cowan's career and correspondence. The result for the Parack family was that it was once again the leading mercantile family at Surat for fifteen years, displacing the Rustum family in the

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<sup>236</sup> Cowan to William Phipps, Surat, 30 Apr. 1722, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1AA, f. 143v).

<sup>237</sup> Cowan to William Phipps, Surat, 2 May 1722, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1AA, ff. 144-144v).

<sup>238</sup> Cowan to William Phipps, Surat, 2 May 1722, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1AA, f. 144); Cowan to William Phipps, Surat, 9 May 1722, (f. 147).

<sup>239</sup> The popularity of native brokers could wax and wane just as the popularity of covenanted servants could. With this in mind, Cowan was likely trying to align himself to the party in the ascent within the Company lobby.

<sup>240</sup> Cowan to 'Sir', Surat, 29 Jun. 1722, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1AA, f. 161); Court of Directors to President and Council at Bombay, London, 22 Mar. 1724, (BL, India Office Records, IOR/E/3/101, f. 261v).

<sup>241</sup> Cowan to William Phipps, Bombay, 6 Jan. 1730, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2B, f. 5); Court of Directors to President and Council at Bombay, London, 12 Mar. 1730, (BL, India Office Records, IOR/E/3/105, f. 132).



process.<sup>242</sup> Loldas' function comprised the sourcing of goods for export, securing finance on bills of exchange, and the sale of Company produce.<sup>243</sup> Loldas' role remained constant during Cowan's time in India, though he was relied upon more and more for the sourcing of goods for the annual shipments back to England as the 1720s drew to a close.<sup>244</sup>

The alignment of a broker such as Loldas to Cowan and the Company was understandable in two ways. First, that he stood to gain financially from the arrangement. Second, that the Hindu banian classes at Surat actively sought to align themselves with the English as the political environment became increasingly unstable. This effectively caused a greater divide between Hindu and Muslim mercantile communities.<sup>245</sup> It is also fascinating to note that Cowan, whilst fulfilling his Company allotted role at Surat, was also successfully building his own network of personal loyalties. By incorporating Loldas into his network, Cowan was ensuring that he had a native source of information, goods and potentially credit outside of the Company network. This again returns to Erikson's arguments on the potential for horizontal network structures and loyalties to emerge out of Company service.<sup>246</sup> Further, this again highlights the manner in which Stern and Erikson's seemingly divergent philosophies can be reconciled in the study of a character such as Cowan.

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<sup>242</sup> Das Gupta, 'The Merchants of Surat', pp. 213-4.

<sup>243</sup> Cowan to William Phipps, Surat, 16 May 1722, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1AA, ff. 148-148v); Cowan to William Phipps, Surat, 26 May 1722, (f. 152v); Cowan to William Phipps, Surat, 4 Jun. 1722, (f. 155v).

<sup>244</sup> Cowan to William Phipps, Surat, 4 Jun. 1722, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1AA, f. 155v); Cowan to 'Sir', Surat, 25 Jun. 1722, (f. 159v); Cowan to 'Sir', Surat, 29 Jun. 1722, (f. 161).

<sup>245</sup> Michelguglielmo Torri, 'Trapped inside the Colonial Order: The Hindu Bankers of Surat and Their Business World during the Second Half of the Eighteenth Century', *Modern Asian Studies*, 25, No. 2 (May, 1991), 368.

<sup>246</sup> Erikson, *Between Monopoly and Free Trade*, pp. 19-20.

Throughout the investigation, Cowan reported that Loldas appeared intent on proving his own innocence through the prosecution of the other brokers.<sup>247</sup> In spite of his aggressive stance, Cowan acknowledged that Loldas was the only broker to have been exonerated of any wrongdoing during the investigation.<sup>248</sup> Cowan recognised the usefulness of Loldas as even though the former brokers refused to surrender their books, Loldas' accounts showed sufficient evidence to prove their guilt.<sup>249</sup> The main concern for the prosecution was that the Mughal government of Surat may have sought to undermine the investigation. This may have been the case as Cowan suspected that the government was engaged in a conspiracy to cover up the brokers' alleged fraud.<sup>250</sup>

Despite the initial success of the investigation, the brokers supposedly produced a false set of accounts to deceive Cowan and the Company in March 1722.<sup>251</sup> By this stage, Cowan noted that the investigation had become public knowledge at Surat, and so they had been forced to devise more effective measures of proving their innocence. In response to this, Cowan asserted that the brokers were flattering themselves if they thought that they could get away with defrauding the Company.<sup>252</sup> The brokers petitioned the government several times to intervene, but each time they were rejected.<sup>253</sup> Cowan had also reported that there were 'insolent' suggestions being publicly circulated that the Company had agreed to discharge the debts and outstanding

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<sup>247</sup> Cowan to William Phipps, Surat, 2 May 1722, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1AA, f. 145).

<sup>248</sup> Cowan to William Phipps, Surat, 6 May 1722, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1AA, f. 146).

<sup>249</sup> Cowan to William Phipps, Surat, 9 May 1722, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1AA, f. 147); Cowan to William Phipps, Surat, 22 May 1722, (f. 149v).

<sup>250</sup> Cowan to William Phipps, Surat, 2 May 1722, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1AA, f. 146v); Cowan to William Phipps, Surat, 22 May 1722, (f. 149).

<sup>251</sup> Cowan to William Phipps, Surat, 26 Mar. 1722, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1AA, f. 152v).

<sup>252</sup> Cowan to William Phipps, Surat, 26 Mar. 1722, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1AA, f. 153v).

<sup>253</sup> Cowan to William Phipps, Surat, 22 May 1722, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1AA, f. 149v); Cowan to 'Sir', Surat, 16 Jul. 1722, (f. 164v).

funds.<sup>254</sup> Based on the language and tone used by Cowan in his report, as well as a lack of evidence, the conclusion must be made that these were merely rumours circulated by the brokers in an attempt to counter the Company prosecution.

Aside from false evidence, Cowan highlighted the concern that the Company's firman<sup>255</sup> rights may have been taken away at Surat.<sup>256</sup> This would have been a heavy blow for the Company at Surat and in the wider intra-Asian trading sphere. A loss of firman rights would have led to an increased customs burden for Company goods at Surat which would have caused an increase in the price of Company goods. This in turn would have made the Company's products less attractive and likely led to a fall in profits. Cowan, however, appeared undaunted by such a possibility and rubbished the suggestion that such an action might have been taken.<sup>257</sup> Ultimately, the Surat government chose not to intervene, and instead ruled that the Company had the right to act as judge in its own affairs.<sup>258</sup> Cowan was confident that the Company would suffer no repercussions as a result and moved to propose Loldas as the sole Company broker at Surat in May 1722.<sup>259</sup> This was a clear mark of intent regarding the Company's desire to exercise a much firmer hand on their interests at Surat in the future.

Cowan made steady progress in both his Company work and his activity in the intra-Asian trade, particularly for arak, in the early part of his career. This experience was useful to Cowan when, during his posting to Mocha in 1724-7, he became more active

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<sup>254</sup> Cowan to William Phipps, Surat, 4 Jun. 1722, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1AA, f. 155v).

<sup>255</sup> Literally meaning 'decree' or 'order' in Persian, these documents issued by Islamic Governments conferred special rights or privileges upon European trading companies.

<sup>256</sup> Cowan to William Phipps, Surat, 16 May 1722, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1AA, f. 148v).

<sup>257</sup> Ibid.

<sup>258</sup> Cowan to 'Sir', Surat, 16 Jul 1722, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1AA, ff. 164v-165).

<sup>259</sup> Cowan to William Phipps, Surat, 9 May 1722, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1AA, f. 147).

and moved into the lucrative coffee trade. This increased involvement in his own private trade shall be more thoroughly discussed in the following chapters. This is possible due to the far greater number of account and letter books for the period 1724-35 which have survived.

In respect of the central research question, Cowan's experiences at Goa and Surat have shown that his career incorporated many diverse elements ranging from intra-Asian trade to relationships with native brokers. Whilst he did suffer setbacks in the form of personal difficulties and the failed Anglo-Portuguese campaign, these were factors beyond his control and contributed to the wider Company narrative. Finally, his building of personal and professional networks of correspondence was a vital component of his long-term success in India. These clearly worked within the vertical hierarchical structure of the Company, yet also enabled Cowan to facilitate his wider horizontal network. It was these networks which ultimately enabled him to progress in the Company service, and latterly to make his personal fortune through private trade. The complementary Stern-Erikson dichotomy which saw Cowan benefit from both vertical and horizontal network structures played a key role in this. As such, Cowan's private trade shall be explored in greater detail in the next chapter.

### Chapter Three: Mocha, 1724-7

Following his initial success at Goa and Surat, Cowan was appointed as the Company chief at the Mocha factory in January 1724. This posting, according to Cowan, was of his own choosing and was selected with the expectation of making his fortune through private trade.<sup>1</sup> Though Cowan may have had high hopes for his placement at Mocha,<sup>2</sup> his experiences and fortunes there proved to be a disappointment. This was in contrast to what had been described to him, and served to provide a useful lens through which to view his career development. Instead of a flourishing factory with great commercial prospects, Cowan was faced with the financial mismanagement of his predecessor, as well as a country on the brink of civil war.<sup>3</sup> This was part of the wider troubles experienced by Islamic empires during the period highlighted by Sanjay Subrahmanyam and C.A. Bayly.<sup>4</sup> This ultimately caused the local market exchange to be badly impacted and sent the price of coffee, the main trading interest in Mocha, spiralling upwards during Cowan's tenure<sup>5</sup>.

It is important at this point to highlight why Mocha was important. Mocha was, and still is, a port city on the Red Sea coast of Yemen which was famous as a marketplace for arabica coffee beans which were produced in the neighbouring regions of Yemen, Persia

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<sup>1</sup> Cowan to Mrs. Gould, Mocha, 8 Jul. 1724, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1C, f. 8v); Cowan to Thomas Woolley, Mocha, 10 Jul. 1724, (f. 18).

<sup>2</sup> Cowan to William Cowan, Mocha, 29 Oct. 1724, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1B, f. 28); Cowan to John Sherman, Mocha, 8 Nov. 1723, (f. 35v); Cowan to John Courtney, Mocha, 16 Dec. 1723, (f. 41).

<sup>3</sup> Cowan to Mrs. Macrae, Mocha, 8 Jul. 1724, PRONI Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1C, f. 2); Cowan to John Gould Jr., Mocha, 8 Jul. 1724, (f. 3v).

<sup>4</sup> Sanjay Subrahmanyam & C.A. Bayly, 'Portfolio Capitalists and the Political Economy of Early Modern India', *The Indian Economic and Social Review*, 25, Vol. 4, (Dec. 1988), 412.

<sup>5</sup> Cowan to Thomas Woolley, Mocha, 10 Jul. 1724, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1C, f. 18v); Cowan to William Phipps, Mocha, 10 Mar. 1725, (f. 54v).

and Ethiopia.<sup>6</sup> Mocha had also been described as the ‘treasure chest of the Mughal’ due to the great amount of bullion which flowed from the region to India.<sup>7</sup> The city of Mocha dates back to approximately the fourteenth century, and was under Ottoman influence until Al-Mu’ayyad Muhammad<sup>8</sup> established an independent Zaidi state in Yemen and drove the Ottomans out of Mocha in 1634. The Zaidi Imams went on to control Mocha until the reinvasion of the Ottoman Turks in 1848.<sup>9</sup> During the time that Mocha, and indeed Yemen at large, was ruled by the Zaidi Imams there was an interesting cultural phenomenon at work. This was the dichotomy of the rulership of a conservative Muslim Imamate and the growth of an international trading destination.<sup>10</sup>

Being a port city with a naturally formed bay, Mocha had easy access to the Red Sea maritime trading routes of the eighteenth century.<sup>11</sup> These trade routes, which shall be expanded upon below, connected Mocha to the great Indian trading port of Surat and the Company mart at Bombay, and gave access to the wider intra-Asian trading network. Mocha, having been strategically placed at the straits of Bab al-Mandab, was in a position to control access to the Red Sea proper if a sufficiently strong naval force was

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<sup>6</sup> Nancy Um, ‘Spatial Negotiations in a Commercial City: The Red Sea Port of Mocha, Yemen, during the First Half of the Eighteenth Century’, *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, 62, No. 2 (Jun., 2003), 178.

<sup>7</sup> Ashin Das Gupta, ‘Indian Merchants and the trade in the Indian Ocean, c. 1500-1750’ in T. Raychaudhuri & I. Habib (Eds), *The Cambridge Economic History of India, Vol.1: c. 1200 - c. 1750*, (Cambridge, 1982), p. 416.

<sup>8</sup> Al-Mu’ayyad Muhammad (1582 – Sept. 1644). Imam of Yemen 1620-44. Credited with expelling the Ottoman Turks from Yemen and establishing a Zaidi state.

<sup>9</sup> Um, ‘Spatial Negotiations in a Commercial City’, 178.

<sup>10</sup> This matter will be touched upon below, but the subject of the Zaidi Imamate has been primarily included for background reference.

<sup>11</sup> Om Prakash, ‘English Private Trade in the Western Indian Ocean, 1720-1740’, *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, 50, No. 2/3, Spatial and Temporal Continuities of Merchant Networks in South Asia and the Indian Ocean (2007), 219.

in place. It also provided a convenient stopover port for pilgrims travelling to Mecca and Medina via the port of Jeddah, which was located further up the coast of the Red Sea.<sup>12</sup>

For the Company, the settling of a factory at Mocha gave access to the Mochan marketplace which was vital in the sourcing of coffee. As Kosambi has noted, the European trading companies chose trading sites that were at the fringes of Asian empires so as to overlap with their existing trading routes.<sup>13</sup> This is a point which was well demonstrated in the case of Mocha as the Company were in search of access to the already established supply of coffee in the region. However, by the time of Cowan's tenure the Company's position had weakened due to poor management and the lapsing of privileges. Despite this, the great profits which it was possible to make out of coffee meant that a continued presence at Mocha was desirable.<sup>14</sup> The Company position at Mocha during Cowan's tenure was beset with problems, most notably the civil wars fought amongst the Zaidi rulers of Yemen. As the power base of the Zaidi imamate was held in the mountain regions of Yemen, the supply of coffee from the mountain farms, in areas between 4,000 and 7,000 feet above sea level, to the lowland port of Mocha was badly interrupted. As a result, the English commercial position at Mocha was uncertain by 1724.

In terms of Cowan's interests, it must be remembered his role as chief of Mocha represented a promotion within the Company hierarchy. This gave him greater access to resources and potential for making money on his private trading account.<sup>15</sup> This latter

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<sup>12</sup> Um, 'Spatial Negotiations in a Commercial City', 181.

<sup>13</sup> Meera Kosambi, 'Commerce, Conquest and the Colonial City: Role of Locational Factors in Rise of Bombay', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 20, No. 1 (Jan. 5, 1985), 32.

<sup>14</sup> Court of Directors to Chief and Council at Mocha, 21 Oct. 1725, (BL India Office Records, IOR/E/3/103, ff. 3-3v).

<sup>15</sup> Cowan to Henry Lowther, Mocha, 8 Jul. 1724, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1C, f. 3).

aspect was key given the common desire of Company servants who travelled to India to make their fortune, with this desire often having come into conflict with the interests of the Company itself. Over the period 1660-1740, Company servants such as Cowan enjoyed a great deal of what Erikson has described as legitimate autonomy in private interests.<sup>16</sup> This follows into the rational actor theory, advocated by Erikson, which holds that in the absence of supervision, 'actors' will divert resources and attention to benefit their own ends.<sup>17</sup> Cowan, whilst clearly aware of the opportunity which was presented, also latterly drew attention to what he believed was a common misconception amongst ambitious men in England. He refuted that adventuring to India in the service of the Company was a guarantee of making a fortune for oneself.<sup>18</sup>

Prakash has noted that whilst there were likely a large number of servants trading on a private account, often to the detriment of the Company, there are very few surviving records for private trading in this context.<sup>19</sup> It is in this regard that Cowan's private accounts and letter books provide the opportunity for a fresh approach. From the Company's perspective, Cowan was in Mocha to secure their supply of coffee and to resolve a number of issues which had come about under his predecessors' management.<sup>20</sup> However, Cowan went to Mocha with the ambition of making money personally and so a great number of his actions and writings during this time must be viewed with this in mind. Again, this links to the alignment of horizontal and vertical network expectations. Finally, although he claimed to have faced little prospect at

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<sup>16</sup>Emily Erikson, *Between Monopoly and Free Trade: The English East India Company 1600-1757*, (Princeton, 2014), pp. 108-9.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Cowan to Mrs. Cairnes, Bombay, 20 Dec. 1725, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1C, ff. 135-135v).

<sup>19</sup> Prakash, 'English Private Trade', 218.

<sup>20</sup> Court of Directors to Chief and Council at Mocha, 16 Oct. 1724, (BL India Office Records, IOR/E/3/102, f. 159).



Mocha, his accounts for this period will be scrutinised in order to dispel any possible exaggeration or misdirection on the part of Cowan.

## **I - The Mocha Coffee Market and Company Trade**

Trade for coffee was the main commercial interest for European trading companies at Mocha in the early eighteenth century. This was reflected by Cowan's letter books and accounts which showed a great interest in coffee. The original supply of coffee for the English had been from the Yemeni marketplaces of Mocha and Bayt Al-Fayiq, though the dependence on the region shifted away from the Red Sea towards the Caribbean after 1750. The English introduced the coffee plant to the island of Jamaica in 1728 and the first commercially viable export crop was produced in 1737.<sup>21</sup> This was interesting from the point of view that the English had cultivated a valuable cash crop originating in the Middle East in an Atlantic colonial setting. This suggested that those in power were aware of the similarities in climate between the two zones and had thus viewed the map in terms of a global setting as opposed a regionalised one. Such a development in the wider coffee market happened at the same time as Cowan was involved in the supply of coffee and the reappraisal of the Company's interests at Mocha. The Mochan market was highly responsive to outside stimuli upon it, and so issues which impacted the market will be closely examined below.

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<sup>21</sup> S.D. Smith, 'Accounting for Taste: British Coffee Consumption in Historical Perspective', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 27, No. 2 (Autumn, 1996), 185-7.

The crux of the coffee trade within the western Indian Ocean sphere was that it was bought at the market in Mocha, having been taken down from the hillside farms by camel, to then be loaded onto ships.<sup>22</sup> The coffee produced was of interest to the European trading companies as homeward bound stock,<sup>23</sup> but it is also important to highlight its movement within the intra-Asian trading sphere. From the Red Sea, the coffee was carried along the well-worn sea trading routes to ports such as Surat or Bombay where the coffee was unloaded and then presented for the re-export market.<sup>24</sup> The directors noted in their letter to Mocha on 16 October 1724 that there was occasionally an additional step involved in the Mochan coffee chain where coffee was also presented at Mocha for re-export from suppliers in Abyssinia, before being forwarded to Surat or Bombay.<sup>25</sup> A similar process was observed in the pepper, arak, cloth and China-goods trades, whereby Surat acted as the commercial fulcrum for extra-Asian trade.<sup>26</sup> It must be noted that Surat was the predominant maritime trading hub in the Indian Ocean at this stage and so much of India's trade was processed here and through its various satellite ports. However, much of this commercial activity was both spurred by, and dependent on, the inflow of European bullion into Mughal coffers.<sup>27</sup> The export of European bullion to India from the Red Sea facilitated this, with large amounts of bullion having been shipped in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

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<sup>22</sup> Cowan to William Phipps, Mocha, 10 Mar. 1725, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1C, f. 54v).

<sup>23</sup> Court of Directors to Chief and Council at Mocha, 21 Oct. 1725, (BL India Office Records, IOR/E/3/103, ff. 1v-3).

<sup>24</sup> Cowan to John Sherman, Mocha, 8 Jul. 1724, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1C, f. 16); Cowan to Robert Frankland, Bombay, 27 Jul. 1726, (f. 182v).

<sup>25</sup> Court of Directors to Chief and Council at Mocha, London, 16 Oct. 1724, (BL India Office Records, IOR/E/3/102, f. 162v).

<sup>26</sup> Cowan to Edward Harrison, Bombay, 23 Sept. 1728, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2A, f. 15); Cowan to John Gould Jr. Bombay, 25 Sept. 1728, (f. 24v); Cowan to Henry Lyell, Bombay, 6 Jan. 1729, (f. 51).

<sup>27</sup> Najaf Haider, 'Precious Metal Flows and Currency Circulation in the Mughal Empire', *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, 39, No. 3, Money in the Orient (1996), 299.

It was the early preference of the directors that coffee was loaded directly onto a ship for England at Mocha.<sup>28</sup> Cowan challenged this policy and argued for utilising the intra-Asian shipping network to move the coffee from Mocha to Bombay, and then onwards to England from there. Cowan viewed it as inefficient to send ships directly to Mocha when it was more cost effective to use Bombay as a clearing zone for goods.<sup>29</sup> Whilst Cowan argued that this system was, allegedly, the most efficient method for the Company, this must be viewed with a degree of caution as Cowan was suspected by the directors of advocating such a method for his own interests.<sup>30</sup> Interestingly, this can be seen as an early example of when Cowan's vertical and horizontal networks clashed over a specific policy decision.

The bulk of Cowan's Company work at Mocha involved the sourcing of coffee at an acceptable rate.<sup>31</sup> This was a task which was problematic due to the political troubles which were taking place there, which in turn led to a fluctuation in the price of coffee. Cowan noted that in July 1724 the price of coffee had risen from 80 to 200 Spanish dollars per bale, with supposedly little prospect of the price decreasing in the future.<sup>32</sup> The fluctuation in the price of coffee during the period 1724-9 led to considerable disturbance in the ordinary operation of trade, and so an alternative trading strategy was required. This was attempted by sourcing smaller quantities from other settlements

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<sup>28</sup> Court of Directors to President and Council at Bombay, London, 13 Apr. 1726, (BL India Office Records, IOR/E/3/103, f. 130v).

<sup>29</sup> Cowan to Henry Lyall, Bombay, 6 Sept. 1726, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/C, f. 184v); Cowan to Josias Wordsworth, Bombay, 6 Sept. 1726, (f. 185); Cowan to Sir Matthew Decker, Bombay, 6 Sept. 1726, (f. 187).

<sup>30</sup> Stewart vs. East India Company, London, 1739, (National Archives, Kew, C11/1557/20).

<sup>31</sup> Cowan to John Gould, Mocha, 8 Jul. 1724, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/C, f. 9v); Court of Directors to Chief and Council at Mocha, London, 21 Oct. 1725, (BL India Office Records, IOR/E/3/103, f. 3).

<sup>32</sup> Cowan to John Gould, Mocha, 8 Jul. 1724, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/C, f. 9v); Cowan to James Macrae, Mocha, 18 Jul. 1724, (f. 21v).

such as Jeddah and Bayt Al-Fayiq. In contrast, the Dutch allegedly succeeded in managing a supply from Java, though with changeable quality of goods, according to Cowan.<sup>33</sup> Additionally, the Dutch also purchased coffee at Mocha with the intention of pushing the price up for their competitors.<sup>34</sup> This interference by the Dutch further distorted the market price at Mocha, and was part of the larger Anglo-Dutch commercial rivalry in the intra-Asian sphere.

Whilst the temporary difficulty in purchasing coffee for the Company led Cowan to scale back operations at Mocha and reduce the allocations of coffee for Europe ships,<sup>35</sup> there was also an opportunity for the wider Indian Ocean trade. Cowan's letters revealed that the Mochan interest in certain European goods remained constant.<sup>36</sup> Goods such as English copper and iron remained popular in the Mochan marketplace. However, not at a sufficient level to convince Cowan that this trade could offset the disappointments with coffee.<sup>37</sup> There was also a problem with the market mechanisms at Mocha due to the alleged interference of Cosim Turbatty.<sup>38</sup> Turbatty was a merchant of Mocha with considerable influence over the Mochan government. Very little information was provided by Cowan about Turbatty, though Nancy Um described the merchant 'Quasim Turbati' as having been a very wealthy merchant at Mocha in 1706 who had been involved in trade with the Dutch at that point.<sup>39</sup> It was likely that this was the same man,

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<sup>33</sup> Cowan to William Dawson, Bombay, 1 Jan. 1726, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1C, f. 140v).

<sup>34</sup> Cowan to William Phipps, Mocha, 25 Mar. 1725, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1C, f. 65v).

<sup>35</sup> Cowan to Henry Lyall, Mocha, 15 Jul. 1725, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1C, f. 101v).

<sup>36</sup> Cowan to James Macrae, Mocha, 12 Apr. 1725, (PRONI, Cowan Papers D654/B/1/1C, f. 69v); Cowan to Edward Harrison, Mocha, 2 Aug. 1725, (f. 108).

<sup>37</sup> Cowan to William Phipps, Mocha, 1 May 1725, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1C, f. 78); Cowan to Edward Harrison, Mocha, 2 Aug. 1725, (f. 108).

<sup>38</sup> Cowan to William Phipps, Mocha, 10 Mar. 1725, (PRONI, Cowan Papers D654/B/1/1C, f. 55v); Cowan to William Phipps, Mocha, 25 Apr. 1725, (f. 75v).

<sup>39</sup> Um, 'Spatial Negotiations in a Commercial City', 182.

or was at least part of the same kin group. Crucially for the Company, Turbatty was in debt to them for 30,000 Spanish dollars in October 1723.<sup>40</sup>

Clearly, this was not an acceptable situation for the Company. The Company reported that Turbatty was a large debtor for cloth at Mocha, with numerous petitions to the Imam having led to the debt owed being stripped from Turbatty.<sup>41</sup> However, by the following year the Company was frustrated that the balance of this debt was only subject to a promise by the Mochan government that a discount of 4,000 Spanish dollars would be discounted from customs owed.<sup>42</sup> This promise of the Imam was bought with a very large cash present to him by the Company.<sup>43</sup> These events placed Turbatty's trading interests and influence as having been well in place prior to Cowan's arrival at Mocha.

Further, as shown by Cowan's letter books, Turbatty remained in a prominent position throughout Cowan's tenure at Mocha. Turbatty was reported as having allegedly orchestrated a monopoly on the purchase of European goods for himself, thus preventing any competitors from bidding on imported goods.<sup>44</sup> This monopoly was noteworthy as Cowan only began to report on it in 1725, whereas the Company had been aware of Turbatty and had distrusted him since October 1723.<sup>45</sup> This begs the question as to why Cowan was so enthusiastic about his placement to Mocha when

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<sup>40</sup> Court of Directors to Chief and Council at Mocha, London, 30 Oct. 1723, (BL India Office Records, IOR/E/3/102, f. 3v).

<sup>41</sup> Court of Directors to Chief and Council at Mocha, London, 30 Oct. 1723, (BL India Office Records, IOR/E/3/102, ff. 3v-4).

<sup>42</sup> Court of Directors to Chief and Council at Mocha, London, 21 Oct. 1725, (BL India Office Records, IOR/E/3/103, ff. 2).

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> Cowan to William Phipps, Mocha, 1 May 1725, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1C, f. 78).

<sup>45</sup> Court of Directors to Chief and Council at Mocha, London, 30 Oct. 1723, (BL India Office Records, IOR/E/3/103, f. 3v).

Company officials possessed the knowledge that there was fraud in the Mochan market?

It was likely that Cowan was ignorant of the alleged issues at Mocha. However, the situation there deteriorated significantly during his time there. The methods used by Turbatty, according to Cowan, included intimidation, imprisonment and torture. Cowan specifically noted two episodes orchestrated by Turbatty which he felt were particularly devious. The first was the kidnap of the Company's moneychanger at Mocha which ultimately led to his ransom being paid from the Company account.<sup>46</sup> The second was the imprisonment and torture of a Company broker, an event which shocked Cowan.<sup>47</sup> Cowan noted that many of the brokers and merchants that were, or would have been, employed in the purchase of European goods were removed from engaging in the markets. The degree to which Turbatty's campaign of intimidation was successful can be judged by the fact that native Mochan merchants were completely dissuaded from approaching the Company's factory house.<sup>48</sup> The result of this was that the price of these European goods was kept artificially low for Turbatty's benefit.

Despite the temporary decline of the coffee trade and the interference in the market equilibrium by Turbatty, it is important to note that trade in the western Indian Ocean sphere did keep moving. Cowan recorded the arrival and departure of a number of ships and commented on the various freight arrangements which were current between freighters and the Mochan Government.<sup>49</sup> It was common for Cowan to have included

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<sup>46</sup> Cowan to William Phipps, Mocha, 10 Mar. 1725, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1C, f. 55v); Cowan to William Phipps, Mocha, 19 Apr. 1725, (f. 73v).

<sup>47</sup> Cowan to William Phipps, Mocha, 10 Mar. 1725, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1C, f. 55v).

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Cowan to Thomas Woolley, Mocha, 10 Jul. 1724, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1C, f. 18v); Cowan to William Phipps, Mocha, 10 Mar. 1725, (f. 57v).

shipping news and details of ships' departures and cargoes in many of his letters. In this way Cowan maintained a regular log of shipping movements in the region which ensured both he and his Company colleagues had accurate information as to ships' whereabouts. This again returns to Soren Mentz's assumptions on the nature of information sharing networks.<sup>50</sup> Despite the civil wars and collapse in coffee prices, the Mochan marketplace was also important due to its use as an export market for Gujarati cloth.<sup>51</sup> Although the Gujarati merchants were often taxed by the Mochans to pay for their wars, this represented the continuance of market mechanisms.

Cowan commented regularly on the voyages and opportunities which were proposed by Company colleagues, and gave both an appraisal of the likely voyage outcome as well as his own desire to be concerned in the voyage.<sup>52</sup> A good example of one such voyage was that proposed to Cowan by John Fotheringham<sup>53</sup> on 20 May 1725.<sup>54</sup> The suggested voyage was intended to touch at Goa and Bengal before returning to discharge at Surat. Cowan dismissed this voyage on two grounds. First, that the Goa market was always poor. Second, that a great deal of sugar passed from Macao to Surat every year so that the profit on any Bengal sugar would have been offset by this competition in the market.<sup>55</sup> Although Cowan was often sceptical of such voyages, the fact that they were being proposed suggested that there was some optimism in the market and a willingness to trade. However, one must also caution that such voyages were likely the

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<sup>50</sup> Soren Mentz, *The English Gentleman Merchant at work: Madras and the City of London, 1660-1740*, (Copenhagen, 2005), p. 81.

<sup>51</sup> Das Gupta, 'Indian Merchants', p. 433.

<sup>52</sup> Cowan to John Fotheringham, Mocha, 20 May 1725, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1C, f. 87); Cowan to William Dawson, Mocha, 15 Jul. 1725, (f. 104); Cowan to Edward Harrison, Mocha, 8 Jun. 1726, (f. 171v).

<sup>53</sup> 1724 – Engineer.

<sup>54</sup> Cowan to John Fotheringham, Mocha, 20 May 1725, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1C, f. 87).

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

proposals of servants seeking to make quick money through speculation whilst more senior investors, such as Cowan, bore the brunt of the voyage risk.

During Cowan's time at Mocha he described a number of 'Arab' vessels controlling the Mochan trade and plying the waters between Surat and the Red Sea.<sup>56</sup> It was unclear to whom Cowan was referring as being specifically Arab in his description, though Prakash has noted that the ship owning community in the region at the time were predominantly Gujarati Muslims.<sup>57</sup> These vessels clearly highlighted that the European difficulty with the market mechanisms at Mocha did not hinder the wider Indian Ocean trade and suggested that there was a demand for capacity. Indeed, to enable vessels to remain occupied and to avoid demurrage charges, freight tonnage was often let out to native merchants. The native-owned vessels provided competition to the Company's vessels to engage the most freight to the ports of Bombay and Surat. Cowan argued that the tonnage charged by English ships was justifiably higher than that of native shipping due to the superior security which was available,<sup>58</sup> and the beneficial customs arrangements in place for ships sailing under an English pass.<sup>59</sup> This created a quality versus quantity decision to be made at point of sale. Whilst Indian shipping was certainly preferred by Indian merchants, the act of owning ships outright was not popular with them.<sup>60</sup> This meant that there were many opportunity costs for those seeking cargo transshipment in the Indian Ocean.

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<sup>56</sup> Cowan to John Gould, Bombay, 10 Sept. 1726, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1C, ff. 190-190v).

<sup>57</sup> Prakash, 'English Private Trade', 216.

<sup>58</sup> Cowan to John Robinson, Bombay, 6 Jan. 1730, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1E, f. 64v).

<sup>59</sup> Prakash, 'English Private Trade', 225.

<sup>60</sup> Das Gupta, 'Indian Merchants', p. 417.



The European involvement in the intra-Asian shipping market did, however, only contribute to an increase in trading volume according to Prakash. This was because there was already a sophisticated trading mechanism in place, meaning that Europeans were forced to integrate into the market rather than dictate it.<sup>61</sup> Whichever method of shipping was ultimately used, the key element here was that the intra-Asian trade, which so greatly facilitated the trade in coffee, remained active and thrived during this period. What was interesting in the context of both the trading difficulties at Mocha as well as the competition between native and European shipping, was that Cowan reported an alleged campaign by Turbatty to prevent Europeans from buying coffee direct from suppliers at Mocha.<sup>62</sup>

The supply of coffee, as Cowan understood it, had to come from Arab merchants at Mocha, who presumably added a broking charge on top of the price of the coffee, or from Surat merchants who had carried coffee from Mocha to Surat.<sup>63</sup> This situation offered clarity to Cowan's statement that 'Arab' ships were controlling the Surat-Mocha trade as they were the only ones who were permitted to do so. The change in the Company's rights for the transshipment of coffee from Mocha was clearly a heavy blow. This was undoubtedly a factor in the Company seeking redress from the Imam's government, and indeed taking direct intervention in the form of the blockade of Mocha in January of 1727.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 216.

<sup>62</sup> Cowan to John Gould, Bombay, 10 Sept. 1726, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1C, ff. 190-190v).

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Cowan to William Dawson, Mocha, 15 Jul. 1725, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1C, f. 104); Cowan to Thomas Woolley, Mocha, 1 Aug. 1725, (f. 110).

The Company's involvement in the coffee trade was a cog in a much wider apparatus. Coffee was traded from Abyssinia through the Red Sea to Mocha, and then onwards to Bombay and Surat where it was prepared for transshipment to Europe. The early modern trading world does not then, in agreement with Stern's work, necessarily have to be described with terms such as Atlantic, Asian, intra-Asian or European in which geo-political regions are fenced off for convenience. They can alternatively be approached from the point of view that it is the way in which the various spheres such as Atlantic or intra-Asian interact with one another, through elements such as the coffee trade, which can provide a fresh approach to the period and commercial world.<sup>65</sup>

Mocha was a good example of this as it neatly demonstrated how a city could have interlocked with the wider world, whilst also building a network on interdependence through the supply of a quality crop such as coffee. Whilst it is interesting to view the supply and movement of coffee from Mocha through the lens of Company interests, Smith has proposed the argument that the majority of the Yemeni coffee supply was taken up by a Middle Eastern consumer section. Thus, European purchases comprised a minor component of the total supply. Smith's estimation was that during the 1720s, only one eighth of the total Yemeni output was determined for the European market.<sup>66</sup> Therefore, Europeans might be said to have only acted as an alternative export market for the Yemeni coffee producers.

This was an important aspect to consider when discussing European involvement in Asia during what has often been termed the colonial period. To invoke Ranajit Guha's

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<sup>65</sup> Philip Stern, 'British Asia and British Atlantic: Comparisons and Connections', *William and Mary Quarterly*, Third Series, 63, No. 4 (Oct., 2006), 693-5.

<sup>66</sup> Smith, 'Accounting for Taste', 189.

arguments on the British conquest of India, supremacy was not won due to a single event, such as the Battle of Plassey, but was achieved by slow consolidation.<sup>67</sup> The intra-Asian trade, in the same way, took a great deal of time to dominate. As such, it was still in its infancy during Cowan's tenure, and it was not until later in the eighteenth century that British dominance was most evident, particularly on the west coast of India.<sup>68</sup>

## **II - Cowan's Personal Experience of Mocha**

Whilst Cowan faced a very difficult professional role at Mocha, he also documented his personal challenges there on a continual basis. Cowan's outlook was largely negative due to the great stress and disappointment which he faced. Much of the language Cowan used in his descriptions of Mocha and the populace suggested a negative opinion, and therefore a heavy bias. Cowan, for example, reported to his London acquaintance Ms. Furness that Mocha was devoid of entertainments such as theatres and playhouses, and might have proven to be an unsuitable place for a young English lady to reside.<sup>69</sup> Intriguingly, however, Cowan mentioned in this same letter that he and this young lady might have reasonably sat beside a fountain and shared a drink together without having aroused the disapproval of the natives.<sup>70</sup> Such a view did not, however, take into account any real understanding of the native culture, and was likely an

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<sup>67</sup> Ranajit Guha, 'A Conquest Foretold', *Social Text*, No. 54 (Spring, 1998), 85-6.

<sup>68</sup> Ruby Maloni, 'Europeans in Seventeenth Century Gujarat: Presence and Response', *Social Scientist*, 36, No. 3/4 (Mar. - Apr., 2008), 64.

<sup>69</sup> Cowan to Ms. Furness, Mocha, 8 Jul. 1724, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1C, f. 1v).

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*

observation based on the supposed apathy of the Mochans. This, combined with a lack of fellow Europeans to offer reproach at such supposed intimacy.

Cowan also referred to the Mochan people negatively in terms of both their work ethic and general demeanour, with them being described as generally 'rascally' and 'insolent.'<sup>71</sup> The dress and physical appearance of women at Mocha was also noted by Cowan; 'Lady's go in masquerade all the year round. In England, with your masks you hide your charms being conscious of mischief you would do in exposing them, but here they serve to hide ugly faces through the pretence of using them in modesty.'<sup>72</sup> This was likely a biased aspect of his narrative which was distorted by his negative experience at Mocha.

Regarding the physical layout of Mocha during Cowan's time there, there are few sources on which to draw. In order to discuss the topic, it has been necessary to draw on the limited primary material available and reliable secondary material. Many assumptions will, however, have to be made due to the lack of evidence for the early eighteenth century. In response to this, evidence and scholarship for the nineteenth century will be used to assist in the discussion. The work of Um is of particular interest in this regard.<sup>73</sup> Figure 3.1, below, has been taken from her article 'Spatial Negotiations in a Commercial City' to demonstrate her reconstruction of early eighteenth-century Mocha.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Cowan to James Macrae, Mocha, 18 Jul. 1724, (PRONI, Cowan Papers D654/B/1/1C, f. 21); Cowan to William Phipps, Mocha, 10 Mar. 1725, (f. 54v).

<sup>72</sup> Cowan to Ms. Furness, Mocha, 8 Jul. 1724, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1C, f. 1v).

<sup>73</sup> Um, 'Spatial Negotiations in a Commercial City'.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 190.



Fig. 3.1 Map showing the location of major buildings in eighteenth-century Mocha.<sup>75</sup>

As can be seen from figure 3.1, Mocha was a walled coastal port city. Um has highlighted several aspects which are of great interest to the current study. First among these was the inclusion of the Dutch, English and French factory houses. In her work, Um has discussed how the Europeans sourced rented residencies and used them for accommodation, storage and trade.<sup>76</sup> Here, it is important to highlight Um's argument that the European houses at Mocha functioned in a different way to the any factories

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 183.

throughout India. The European residences would have been identical to many other buildings in the city, and Um has argued that the manner in which these buildings were used for trade was similar to the native Mochan model.<sup>77</sup> Whilst Um has acknowledged that no houses from eighteenth-century Mocha are still standing, buildings from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries may shed light on building practices. She has described the ground floor of the houses as having been used as a sub-divided trading and storage space, whilst the upper floors and roof were used as living quarters.<sup>78</sup> The European and native merchant houses were used interchangeably as sites of commerce, whereby those wanting to trade would have visited the houses on a daily basis.<sup>79</sup> This was a practice confirmed by Cowan when he suggested that brokers and merchants regularly called at the English residence.<sup>80</sup> To provide context for the living arrangements and diet of Cowan and his colleagues at Mocha the below table, figure 3.2, showing the Mocha factory provisions for 1724 has been included.<sup>81</sup>

Reproduced factory provisions account for the Mocha factory as at 1 May 1724.				
Prices shown are in Spanish dollars.				
<u>Item</u>	<u>Quantity</u>	<u>Unit Price</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>Net</u>
Bombay Rice	3.27	5	17.20	
Surat Rice	15	8	120	

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 184.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 183.

<sup>80</sup> Cowan to William Phipps, Mocha, 10 Mar. 1725, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1C, f. 55v).

<sup>81</sup> Mocha Factory Provisions 1724, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/7B, ff. 12-13).

Bengal Sugar	6.2 ½	1.40	9.30	
Candles	3.1 ½	11	34.54	
Corks	30 gross	1.10	36.36	
Wheat	2 tons	7.4	15	
China Sugar	24.7	50 <sup>82</sup>	39.78	
Shyrash	Half-chest	20.90	109.28	
Wheat	12.5	7	84.70	
Oil	155	3 ½	44.48	
			511.26	<b>420.67</b>
French Wine	14 dozen	10	140	
Old hock	13 dozen	8	104	
Galician	13 dozen	8	104	
Rhenish	12 dozen	8	96	
Lisbon	12 dozen	8	96	
Strong Beer	11 dozen	3	33	
Small Beer	14 dozen	2	28	

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<sup>82</sup> This figure listed in rupees.

Stout	1 puncheon	30	30	
Shyrash	5 chests of 10 flasks	20	100	
			731	<b>731.00</b>
Household Furniture <sup>83</sup>	Sundries	N/A	188.65	<b>188.65</b>
				<b>1340.52</b>

Fig. 3.2 Mocha factory provisions 1724.<sup>84</sup>

As can be seen from figure 3.2, the Mocha factory was clearly well supplied, particularly with various beers and wines. This suggested that it was possible to obtain luxury alcohol products at a reasonable price, and of course that there was demand for them. Following on from the discussion of Cowan's interest in the wine trade in chapter two, it was possible that this variety and expense was a result of Cowan's influence. The peculiar presence of Lisbon wine in the accounts was also an interesting aspect in this regard. Whilst there was clearly a well-established English residence, there was also a problem at Mocha which led to Cowan's appointment. Cowan's predecessor, John

<sup>83</sup> No further detail provided in the factory provisions account.

<sup>84</sup> Mocha Factory Provisions 1724, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/7B, ff. 12-13).



Sarson,<sup>85</sup> was allegedly removed due to poor management of the Company's trade and expenses.

Sarson, in Cowan's view, was doubly culpable for the ongoing difficulties at Mocha. First, he claimed that Sarson was guilty of putting his own interests before that of the Company within the Mocha trade, and suggested that Sarson misappropriated Company funds when trading on his personal account.<sup>86</sup> Cowan bolstered these allegations when he reported that he did not believe a Company servant could make his fortune at Mocha, save that he put his own interest before that of the Company. This was something which he pointed out to Sir John Gould and Henry Cairnes that he would never have done.<sup>87</sup> Second, he argued that Sarson was responsible for overseeing a period of stagnation at Mocha during which time the Company's rights and privileges, established under the terms of their Mochan charter agreements, were eroded and ceased to be regarded or enforced.<sup>88</sup>

The official charge against Sarson was that he was guilty of 'vile behaviour' in making use of Company cash for private affairs. This was a charge levied against Sarson's predecessor, Mr. Albert, as well and which the directors recognised had not been halted during Sarson's tenure.<sup>89</sup> In addition to Cowan's own suspicions and findings, the directors commented that Cowan discovered that Sarson had spent all of the allocated

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<sup>85</sup> July 1713, 1715, 1716, 1717 - Writer; 1718 - Writer/Junior Factor; 1719 – Junior Factor/Assistant Accountant; 1721 – Junior Merchant/Assistant Accountant; 1722 - 8th in Council/Accountant; 1723 - 7th in Council.

<sup>86</sup> Cowan to John Gould Jr., Mocha, 8 Jul. 1724, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1C, f. 3v); Cowan to William Dawson, Mocha, 8 Jul. 1724, (f. 11).

<sup>87</sup> Cowan to Sir John Gould, Mocha, 8 Jul. 1724, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1C, f. 9); Cowan to Henry Cairnes, Mocha, 15 Jul. 1725, (f. 92v).

<sup>88</sup> Cowan to John Gould Jr., Mocha, 8 Jul. 1724, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1C, f. 3v); Cowan to William Dawson, Mocha, 8 Jul. 1724, (f. 11).

<sup>89</sup> Court of Directors to Chief and Council at Mocha, 30 Oct. 1723, (BL India Office Records, IOR/E/3/102, ff. 9-10); Court of Directors to Chief and Council at Mocha, 16 Oct. 1724, (ff. 159-159v).

Company treasure prior to Cowan's arrival.<sup>90</sup> Cowan reported in several letters that the factory coffers were empty and he had no capital with which to begin investment. Further, when back at Bombay, he noted that he had been forced to draw heavily on the Bombay governing council for credit to keep the factory afloat.<sup>91</sup> In their letter to Bombay on 25 March 1724, the directors noted the dire financial situation of the Mocha factory, describing the situation as 'inconceivable.'<sup>92</sup> It is worthwhile to point out that Sarson's, and indeed Albert's, tenure at Mocha overlapped with the period of time that the directors first expressed concern over Turbatty. The possibility that Sarson and Albert may have been taken advantage of by Turbatty, or indeed been complicit in his fraud, was a factor which the Company cannot have ignored. As such, it was likely that Sarson and Albert were heavily linked to private interest ventures running counter to the Company's own. This was likely why Cowan, as a man with a growing reputation, was appointed as chief in 1724.<sup>93</sup>

Whilst Cowan had been installed at Mocha to fix the many problems which had grown up at the factory, little regard was given to how the Mochan situation may have impacted Cowan or his predecessors personally. Factors as a result of migrational anxiety or the dislocation from familiar surroundings or people must be considered in this regard. The categorising of Mocha as a different variety of placement is supported by Um's argument that Mocha stood in contrast to the many other Arab ports scattered throughout the Middle East and North Africa. This was due to Mocha's involvement in

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<sup>90</sup> Cowan to William Dawsonne, Mocha, 8 Jul. 1724, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1C, f. 11).

<sup>91</sup> Cowan to Sir Matthew Decker, Mocha, 8 Jun. 1726, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1C, f. 161); Cowan to Josias Wordsworth, Mocha, 8 Jun. 1726, (f. 162).

<sup>92</sup> Court of Directors to Chief and Council at Mocha, London, 21 Oct. 1725, (BL India Office Records, IOR/E/3/103, f. 3).

<sup>93</sup> Cowan to Mrs. Gould, Mocha, 8 Jul. 1724, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1C, f. 8v); Cowan to Thomas Woolley, Mocha, 10 Jul. 1724, (f. 18).

widespread maritime trade. This, according to Um, meant that many of the merchants who visited the port of Mocha were accustomed to vastly different processes and interactions.<sup>94</sup> Whilst the topic of migrational anxiety and mental illness for colonial servants such as Cowan is beyond the current study, it is the subject of an upcoming article by the author.

It was clear that at Mocha, Cowan found himself in an uncomfortable position. Although he had been given his first position as chief of a Company factory, he was clearly unable to enjoy the experience as much as he might have hoped. The situation which he inherited from Sarson was one of poor prospects for his career. Cowan's success was to have been judged on his ability to secure the Company's coffee supply when the market was in flux and he had no capital with which to trade. The extent to which he managed trade personally at Mocha will be discussed in the following section.

### **III - Cowan's Personal Finances and Trade 1724-7**

As suggested in chapter two, Cowan travelled to India with the primary goal of making a fortune for himself. Cowan's opportunities for engaging in private trade were limited when he first arrived in India due to his alleged lack of capital and seniority.<sup>95</sup> As a result, his time at Goa and Surat was largely limited to his involvement in small concerns such as the wine and arak trade, whereas he expected far greater opportunities when stationed at Mocha. Against the backdrop of his successes at Goa and Surat, Cowan

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<sup>94</sup> Um' 'Spatial Negotiations in a Commercial City', 186.

<sup>95</sup> Cowan to John Cowan, Mocha, 8 Jul. 1724, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1C, f. 15v).

headed to Mocha with a great deal of optimism for both his career and personal fortunes.<sup>96</sup> This optimism must also, however, be viewed in relation to how private trading networks operated, and indeed how his actions may have displeased the Company. This again returns to the alignment of horizontal and vertical private trading network structures.

By July 1724, Cowan was disenchanted with Mocha as he wrote to his father to highlight that he was actively seeking a return to Bombay.<sup>97</sup> Before arriving at Mocha, Cowan was sure that his posting there was a certain way of making a fortune through private trade.<sup>98</sup> The reality, he alleged, was far removed from his expectations and the promises of Company colleagues. Cowan, whilst bemoaning his own predicament, also drew attention to what he believed was a common misconception amongst ambitious men in England. This was that adventuring to India was a guarantee of making a fortune.<sup>99</sup> Cowan dispelled this notion on two grounds: first, that a sufficient amount of capital would have been necessary to commence any commercial venture;<sup>100</sup> second, that he believed that one in ten Englishmen seeking their fortune in India did not live to enjoy their fortune and return home to England.<sup>101</sup> In Cowan's own words, such a fortune was 'dearly bought.'<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Cowan to Thomas Woolley, Mocha, 10 Jul. 1724, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1C, f. 18); Cowan to Mrs. Cairnes, Bombay, 20 Dec. 1725, (f. 134v).

<sup>97</sup> Cowan to John Cowan, Mocha, 8 Jul. 1724, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1C, f. 15v).

<sup>98</sup> Cowan to Henry Lowther, Mocha, 8 Jul. 1724, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1C, f. 3).

<sup>99</sup> Cowan to John Sherman, Carwar, 11 Dec. 1724, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1C, f. 46).

<sup>100</sup> Cowan to John Cowan, Mocha, 8 Jul. 1724, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1C, f. 15v); Cowan to Mrs. Cairnes, Bombay, 20 Dec. 1725, (f. 135v).

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*

It was also at this time that Cowan's remarked that Mocha was his own choice, and that he might have chosen to serve as chief of Surat instead.<sup>103</sup> Though Surat was the larger and more active trading hub, Mocha was chosen because it was supposedly more lucrative for private trade. There was also the consideration that Surat was beset with political problems at this time.<sup>104</sup> Though Cowan significantly misjudged the situation at Mocha, he was correct about the difficulties at Surat.<sup>105</sup> Cowan was, it seemed, to suffer disappointment no matter where he chose to serve. However, despite Cowan's suggestions that he was hampered in his potential fortune making at Mocha, Timothy Davies has correctly argued that Cowan was regularly involved in the trade for a number of commodities at Mocha. In particular, the coffee trade from which the Company was so keen to bar its servants.<sup>106</sup>

Davies has identified Mr. Gerrard<sup>107</sup> as a man to whom Cowan entrusted several thousand Spanish dollars to invest on his personal account. The issue was that Cowan's personal investment in coffee for 1725-6 was in excess of the Company's own. This, Davies commented, led the Company to investigate Cowan for a breach of his covenant.<sup>108</sup> Clearly, Cowan had allegedly put private interests above his public obligations within the coffee trade. It is important to bear in mind, however, that senior Company officials were commonly criticised when rivals sought to undermine them. It was in the Mochan trade for coffee that Cowan first opened himself up for criticism

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<sup>103</sup> Cowan to John Sherman, Mocha, 15 Jul. 1725, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1C, f. 102v).

<sup>104</sup> Cowan to Thomas Woolley, Mocha, 10 Jul. 1724, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1C, f. 18); Cowan to Mrs. Cairnes, Bombay, 20 Dec. 1725, (f. 134v).

<sup>105</sup> This is a topic which shall be revisited in chapter four.

<sup>106</sup> Timothy Davies, 'British Private Trade Networks in the Arabian Seas, c. 1680 – c. 1760', PhD Thesis, University of Warwick, (2012), p. 212.

<sup>107</sup> A Company agent at the port of Bayt Al-Fayiq

<sup>108</sup> Davies, 'British Private Trade Networks', pp. 212-3.

which would later follow when he was near the end of his Indian employment. Further, Davies has suggested that Cowan was ultimately cleared on this point.<sup>109</sup> Davies' arguments on the Company's investigation into Cowan's are correct to a point in that he rightly concluded that Cowan was cleared on charges of breaching his covenant at Mocha. However, a more detailed investigation into Cowan's letter books has shown that Cowan was criticised and removed from office by the Company in 1734 due to his activity in private trade, extravagance with his living costs at Mocha, manipulation of customs, and his handling of a Portuguese trading vessel called the *Europa*.<sup>110</sup> This shall be dealt with in greater detail in chapter four. However, it is important to note here that these charges all suggested that Cowan had not fully disclosed his actions to the Company.

Cowan complained to several colleagues that he had been under the impression that he could make a fortune at Mocha, something which he almost immediately rebutted due to the fact that there were no prospects for trading at Mocha in general.<sup>111</sup> Of this, Cowan argued that there was no opportunity of making money at Mocha at all.<sup>112</sup> Utilising trading networks was, unsurprisingly, difficult to do when the trade of the whole region was stifled. Despite Cowan's insistence that he had not been able to effectively trade at Mocha, the directors charged him with trading excessively on his private account at Mocha.<sup>113</sup> However, these accusations only came forward in 1733

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<sup>109</sup> Ibid., p. 213.

<sup>110</sup> Cowan to William Phipps, Parel, 4 Sept. 1734, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2D, ff. 131-131v); Cowan to Josias Wordsworth, Bombay, 31 Aug. 1734, (ff. 142v-143).

<sup>111</sup> Cowan to Henry Lowther, Mocha, 8 Jul. 1724, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1C, f. 3).

<sup>112</sup> Cowan to Mrs. Macrae, Mocha, 8 Jul. 1724, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1C, f. 2).

<sup>113</sup> Davies, 'British Private Trade Networks in the Arabian Seas', 212-3.

when he was approaching the end of his career. The assumption was that he had used his position to trade to his benefit ahead of the Company's.<sup>114</sup>

Cowan's involvement in a variety of ventures at Mocha cannot be avoided, despite his negative tone. Although Cowan bemoaned the fact that he had only a modest starting capital,<sup>115</sup> his accounts and letter books still showed a considerable investment schedule. As such, Cowan clearly had some capital to begin trading with despite his complaints. This ties in with the assumption that he did not fully disclose his investments. Further, this likely contributed to the directors' suspicion of him when it came to investigating his conduct. Catherine Manning has also identified the French agent Nicolas Briand de la Feuillée as a likely source of capital for Cowan.<sup>116</sup> Figure 3.3, below, shows Cowan's voyages for the period 1724-5.<sup>117</sup>

Cowan's voyages for the period 1724-5 <sup>118</sup>				
<u>Vessel</u>	<u>A/C Date</u>	<u>Origin</u>	<u>Destination</u>	<u>A/C Payment</u>
<i>Fort St. George</i>	4 Apr. 1724	Mocha	Malacca	1,240.00
<i>Fame</i>	4 Apr. 1724	Mocha	Judda	4,194.68
<i>Fame</i>	4 Apr. 1724	Bombay	Judda	5,000.00

<sup>114</sup> Cowan to Edward Harrison, Bombay, Aug. 1733, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2D, f. 16v); Cowan to Sir Matthew Decker, Bombay, Aug. 1733, (f. 21).

<sup>115</sup> Cowan to John Cowan, Mocha, 8 Jul. 1724, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1C, f. 15v).

<sup>116</sup> Catherine Manning, *Fortunes Á Faire: The French in Asian Trade, 1719-48*, (Abingdon, 2017), p. 114.

<sup>117</sup> PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/7B.

<sup>118</sup> Amounts given are in Spanish dollars.

<i>Fame</i>	4 Apr. 1724	Mocha	Maldives	2,380.76
-	1 Oct. 1724	Mocha	China	309.42
<i>Parel Galley</i>	20 Apr. 1725	Mocha	Bussorah	6,490.00

Fig. 3.3 Table showing the voyages invested in by Cowan during the period 1724-5.<sup>119</sup>

As can be seen from figure 3.3, Cowan was involved in 6 voyages between April 1724 and April 1725. Whilst this was not a large amount compared to his figures as governor of Bombay, this was still a reasonable outlay for a servant with a small amount of capital.<sup>120</sup> It must also be remembered that Cowan reported severe disruptions to both the Mocha and Surat marketplaces during this period.<sup>121</sup> If this was the case, Cowan clearly made the most of his opportunities during a period of depressed trade in the western Indian Ocean sphere. The figures involved were also an interesting aspect of Cowan's voyages. As can be seen, 5 out of the 6 voyages involved sums of between 1,000 and 6,000 dollars. The only exception having been Cowan's voyage to China. Whilst these figures might not appear large by the standards set in the late eighteenth century, they still represented a considerable outlay for a man of Cowan's means. Indeed, if the rupees to Spanish dollars conversion rate is taken at 2:1, this meant approximately 40,000 rupees having resulted from Cowan's Mocha voyages.

<sup>119</sup> PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/7B.

<sup>120</sup> Cowan to John Cowan, Mocha, 8 Jul. 1724, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1C, f. 15v).

<sup>121</sup> Cowan to John Gould, Mocha, 8 Jul. 1724, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/C, f. 9v); Cowan to James Macrae, Mocha, 18 Jul. 1724, (f. 21v); Cowan to Mrs. Cairnes, Bombay, 20 Dec. 1725, (f. 134v).



The other interesting aspect was the extent to which the destinations were localised. There was a clear split in which 3 were voyages to the Middle Eastern ports of Bussorah and Judda, whilst the remaining 3 were sent to the Far Eastern regions of China, Malacca and the Maldives. The differentiation having been that the majority of funds were invested in the Middle East which was local to Mocha and therefore a lower investment risk. Conversely, a far smaller layout was invested in voyages to the Far East. This suggested that Cowan's trading focus during his Mocha years was consolidation rather than speculation. The benefits of this approach were demonstrated by Cowan's success in diversifying his trading interests after he became governor of Bombay in 1729.<sup>122</sup>

Cowan's finances were not limited to private trade in the intra-Asian sphere, however. Aside from his investment in voyages, he also sought to remit funds and luxury goods back to Europe. These were intended for his family, friends and business partners. Whilst Cowan wrote occasional letters to his family in Londonderry up until 1724, there was little evidence to suggest a financial connection to Ireland. This trend changed by 1725 when Cowan remitted bonds for £300 to his father in Londonderry. These were transmitted by Cowan's Dublin acquaintance Hugh Henry, and by Cowan's friend and patron Henry Cairnes in London.<sup>123</sup> This was evidence of the functioning of the above-mentioned Presbyterian International commercial network in action. These payments continued throughout Cowan's tenure in India, and were intended to have augmented John Cowan's own income of £300-£400 per annum to give him a more comfortable standard of living.<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> This shall be expanded upon in Chapter Four.

<sup>123</sup> Cowan to Henry Cairnes, Bombay, 25 Dec. 1725, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1C, f. 127v); Cowan to Henry Cairnes, Surat, 11 Jan. 1726, (f. 143).

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

As alluded to above, Cowan's financial situation was a far more complicated than he had suggested in his letters.<sup>125</sup> Cowan claimed he arrived at Mocha facing dismal prospects due the flux of the unstable market and his lack of capital, but he still managed to engage in private trade. Indeed, his trading interests at Mocha were in fact rather diverse. His interests included, but were not limited to, Mochan coffee, diamonds and intra-Asian voyages. Further, he was able to participate in trade to the Far East which was both high risk and costly. Again, this ran counter to what Cowan had written of his prospects for trade at Mocha. It must be remembered, however, that Cowan had gone to Mocha with very high expectations.<sup>126</sup> His overly negative language thus likely resulted from his disappointment at not being able to meet those expectations. However, despite his disappointment, Cowan clearly made a reasonable return on his investments as he was able to remit money to Ireland. The payments of £300 made to his father represented the doubling of his father's annual income. This must be viewed as significant as Cowan had not only improved his father's standard of living, but likely also made enough to be able to spare the instalments of £300.

Whilst Cowan's financial concerns fluctuated during his tenure at Mocha, it must be acknowledged that he was by no means a failure in this regard. Cowan had gone there with high hopes for making his fortune and these had not been met. However, he did engage to the best of his ability in a variety of investments. In terms of the relative success or failure of his tenure at Mocha in commercial terms, it is fair to comment that it was a mix. In professional terms, he had understood the market mechanisms and had

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<sup>125</sup> Cowan to Mrs. Macrae, Mocha, 8 Jul. 1724, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1C, f. 2); Cowan to Henry Lowther, Mocha, 8 Jul. 1724, (f. 3).

<sup>126</sup> Cowan to Henry Lowther, Mocha, 8 Jul. 1724, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1C, f. 3).

done his best to make them work for himself and the Company. However, in personal terms, he was left disappointed by his failure to make a vast fortune at Mocha.

#### **IV - Cowan's Interpersonal Network**

One of the most interesting aspects of the Cowan archive is the great quantity and variety of his letters. As might be expected of such a large archive, there were also a large number of correspondents. During Cowan's Mocha years, he wrote a total of 588 letters to 149 recipients. A variety of assumptions and arguments can be put forward based on this data to assist in the reconstruction of Cowan's personal network. The reconstruction of this network will allow for a fuller study of Cowan the individual, and will assist in the discussion of Cowan's career progression in India. This is in line with Bailey's arguments on the usefulness of social networks in tracing the complex series of patronage between professional migrants as they moved through empire.<sup>127</sup>

The use of interpersonal networks was vital in the transference of information and wealth, and it has been shown above how Cowan's network enabled him to make use of different contacts based on specific purposes. This again returns to Mentz's discussion of the role of private trading networks in the transmission of information.<sup>128</sup> The patronage aspect was a vital factor in his network. At Goa and Surat, it was shown how Cowan used his patronage network to inform his patrons in London of his

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<sup>127</sup>Craig Bailey, 'Metropole and Colony: Irish Networks and Patronage in the Eighteenth-Century Empire', *Immigrants & Minorities*, 23, Nos. 2-3, (Jul. – Nov. 2005), 163.

<sup>128</sup> Mentz, *The English Gentleman Merchant*, p. 81.

successes, and also how he sought to petition them for further assistance.<sup>129</sup> This pattern of correspondence with his patrons was also reproduced during his Mocha years. The below table, figure 3.4, has been included to demonstrate his correspondence with letters sent between 1724 and 1727.

Cowan's patron correspondence 1724-7	
<u>Patron</u>	<u>Number</u>
Charles Boone	6
Charles Savage Jr.	2
Edward Harrison	11
Henry Cairnes	11
John Gould	8
John Gould Jr.	8
Josias Wordsworth	6
Sir Matthew Decker	6
William Dawson	5
Total	<b>63</b>

Fig. 3.4 Table showing the number of letters Cowan sent to his EIC patrons in London, 1724-7.

<sup>129</sup> Cowan to Henry Cairnes, Surat, No date, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1AA, f. 139); Cowan to John Gould, Surat, 20 Apr. 1722, (f. 139v); Cowan to Mrs. Cairnes, Surat, 20 Apr. 1722, (f. 140v); Cowan to Mrs. Gould, Surat, 20 Apr. 1722, (f. 141).

As can be seen from figure 3.4, Cowan wrote to a total of 9 men who have been identified as patrons to him.<sup>130</sup> A total of 63 letters were sent to these men, with the values having ranged from 2 to 11 letters. The high value of 11 letters each were sent to Edward Harrison and Henry Cairnes. In the context of Cowan's time at Mocha this was not surprising. Edward Harrison was man whom Cowan was keen to ingratiate himself with and to earn formal patronage. As such, Cowan began a process of informing Harrison of the key developments at Mocha and his opinions on the situation.<sup>131</sup> Cowan was ultimately successful in gaining Harrison's favour, as Cowan counted Harrison as a staunch patron during his tenure as governor of Bombay.<sup>132</sup> Henry Cairnes was a man whom Cowan had known during his time in London prior to sailing for India. Cairnes was also in regular contact with Cowan at this time due to his role as Cowan's London attorney. The other entries of particular note at this time were John Gould senior and junior, and Charles Boone. The Goulds were friends of Cowan's from his time in London, and Cowan was betrothed to John Gould senior's daughter Elizabeth.<sup>133</sup> In contrast, Charles Boone had been Cowan's superior as governor of Bombay when he first arrived in India. Cowan had continued his deferential relationship with Boone out of friendship and the hope of advancing his interests within Company circles.

The aspect of a network of information sharing and transmittance was also evident in Cowan's letter books. Through the examination of information sharing networks, scholars of the Company may gain access to another layer of the Company's operations

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<sup>130</sup> All were involved with the Company during Cowan's Indian career.

<sup>131</sup> Cowan to Edward Harrison, Mocha, 22 May 1726, (D654/B/1/1C, f. 130); Cowan to Edward Harrison, Mocha, 8 Jun. 1726, (f. 171); Cowan to Edward Harrison, Mocha, 25 Jul. 1726, (f. 177v).

<sup>132</sup> Cowan to John Gould, Bombay, 18 Aug. 1733, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2D, f. 51v); Cowan to Sir Matthew Decker, Bombay, 18 Aug. 1733, (f. 53v); Cowan to John Drummond, Bombay, 18 Aug. 1733, (f. 55v).

<sup>133</sup> Mostly referred to as Betty by Cowan throughout his letter books.

during the early modern period. In this way an entry in a Company letter book relating to trading difficulties due to native politics or civil war may be viewed in a new light and thus allow a further study of the conflicts to take place. An example of this has been Ghulam Nadri's work into early modern trading links into the Gulf of Kachh.<sup>134</sup> On the growth of trade there, Nadri argued that the rise of the Omani trading empire was a direct consequence of the commercial troubles at Surat. The numerous political crises at Surat, Nadri suggested, led to Gujarati merchants having chosen to relocate to Kachh in the hope of greater freedom and opportunity.<sup>135</sup>

During Cowan's time at Mocha, and after, he recorded a great deal of information in his letters regarding the political situation at Mocha.<sup>136</sup> Cowan's letters therefore allow the reader to view the situation not merely as an internal political problem, but on the wider scale of the Indian Ocean and global spheres. The information which was being fed by Cowan to his superiors in India, and back in England, had the potential to define opinions and policies on given topics. This is in line with Mentz's arguments regarding the potential of private merchants in balancing local autonomy and central authority in obtaining information for London.<sup>137</sup> Cowan suggested that civil war in Gujarat and India followed civil war in Persia within a few short years.<sup>138</sup> Central to the issue in both cases would appear to have been the increasing decentralisation of Government and tensions along ethno-religious lines. This ties in with Subrahmanyam and Bayly's findings on the

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<sup>134</sup> Ghulam A. Nadri, 'Exploring the Gulf of Kachh: Regional Economy and Trade in the Eighteenth Century', *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, 51, No. 3 (2008), 460-86.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.* 460; 471.

<sup>136</sup> Cowan to Hugh Henry, Mocha, 8 Jul. 1724, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1C, f. 7); Cowan to John Hope, Mocha, 10 Mar. 1725, (f. 53v); Cowan to William Dawson, Mocha, 15 Jul. 1725, (f. 104).

<sup>137</sup> Mentz, *The English Gentleman Merchant*, p. 81.

<sup>138</sup> Cowan to Hugh Henry, Mocha, 8 Jul. 1724, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1C, f. 7); Cowan to John Drummond, Bombay, 20 Dec. 1725, (f. 122v); Cowan to Josias Wordsworth, Bombay, 1 Jan. 1726, (f. 140v).

changing state of Islamic empires in the eighteenth century.<sup>139</sup> In the Mochan case, it was shown that the rivalry between the Persian monarch and Afghan rebels led to the destabilisation of the region.<sup>140</sup>

It was tempting for the observer to view the Persian-Afghan war as an internal Persian problem due to the extent of the cultural and governmental influence that Persian society had on the Afghan populace. Such a stance was, however, fundamentally flawed due to the inherent links which connected the Persian, Afghan and Indian civilisations. As such, it was unsurprising that an event incorporating an element of a wider socio-political body might cause ripples for another. Cowan's communication patterns and opinions might then be viewed as having had an impact on shaping Company policy, again returning to Mentz's arguments on the subject.<sup>141</sup> Figure 3.5, below, shows the various channels which Cowan used to remit his information.

Table showing Cowan's information-sharing channels, 1724-7		
<u>Name</u>	<u>Description</u>	<u>Number of Letters</u>
Benjamin Francia	EIC Servant	25
Captain Martin French	EIC Captain	16
Captain Walley Echlin	EIC Captain	8
Court of Directors	EIC Directors	2

<sup>139</sup> Subrahmanyam & Bayly, 'Portfolio Capitalists', 412.

<sup>140</sup> Cowan to Henry Lowther, Mocha, 8 Jul. 1724, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1C, f. 3); Cowan to Henry Lyall, Bombay, 26 Dec. 1725, (f. 121v).

<sup>141</sup> Mentz, *The English Gentleman Merchant*, p. 81.

Edward Harrison	Patron / EIC Director	11
Francis Dickinson	EIC Servant	16
Henry Lowther	Chief of Surat	17
Hezekiah King	EIC Servant	8
John Courtney	Chief of Surat	49
John Deane	Governor of Calcutta	5
John Gould	Patron / EIC Director	8
Thomas Woolley	EIC Secretary	2
William Phipps	Governor of Bombay	18
Total		185

Fig. 3.5 Table showing Cowan's information network, 1724-7.

The individuals highlighted in figure 3.5 represent the core of Cowan's information network based on their importance and the number of letters they received. As can be seen, Cowan's information network was diverse. It included Company directors, servants and captains. There were of course many occasions where Cowan's relationship with these people overlapped due to patronage, friendship or hierarchy. The standout individual was clearly William Phipps who was Cowan's immediate



superior in the western presidency. However, Cowan also incorporated a number of other senior Company administrators in India. The aspect of communication with Company captains, which was touched upon in chapter two, was also a significant point with regard to the sharing of information. In an age where long distance communication was heavily reliant on sea travel, the role played by ships' commanders as managers of a semi-autonomous trading emporium was vital.<sup>142</sup> They not only carried mail and exchanged it with other captains they encountered, but news given by word of mouth had the potential to spread very quickly. It was customary for captains to share news with one another, and upon making port it was likely that news would have been shared liberally. The captains themselves were therefore a very active role in the Company's information sharing apparatus.

The example of the political difficulties experienced in the Middle East during 1722-9, as highlighted above, was a useful episode to use as a case study. Cowan made many references to the civil wars which plagued Yemen during the period. He noted specifics such as the participants, accounts of sieges, as well as conclusions on the end result. It is argued that the information compiled by Cowan provided the Company the means for a debate what their policy for dealing with the crisis should have been. Their position had already been undermined by the mismanagement of Sarson and the distortion of the coffee trade by Turbatty. With this in mind, the Company was faced with the decision of what their future relationship with Mocha was to have been. Their choices were to maintain the status quo and do nothing, attempt to renegotiate with the Mochan government, or to cut their losses and withdraw the factory. All of these

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<sup>142</sup> Erikson, *Between Monopoly and Free Trade*, p. 83.

options meant further difficulties for the Company, and so accurate local information was needed. Cowan, as the chief at Mocha, was the best placed to provide this information.<sup>143</sup> Cowan, and his information sharing network, therefore played a vital role in the directors' decision-making process for Mocha.<sup>144</sup>

Cowan's first acknowledgement that there was a problem at Mocha was in his letter of 8 July 1724 to Henry Lowther.<sup>145</sup> In this letter, Cowan alleged that the trade of Mocha had been diminished due to a scarcity of goods and the ongoing civil war.<sup>146</sup> Further, he reported that the dysfunctional market equilibrium had caused a famine at Mocha and the surrounding region.<sup>147</sup> His knowledge might have been viewed by the directors as evidence of commercial mismanagement by the Mochan government. However, the situation on the ground in Mocha was complicated. Cowan advised Phipps that Turbatty had told the Imam that it was the Company who had caused the economic slowdown due to their having withheld trade.<sup>148</sup> Cowan, however, suggested that the Imam had not been provided with all of the information and was instead being manipulated by Turbatty.<sup>149</sup> Das Gupta has also commented that this period was the worst in years for Gujarati traders to Mocha due to government oppression.<sup>150</sup> As a result of the famine and widespread trading losses, Cowan alleged that most of the Mochan populace was

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<sup>143</sup> Cowan to Henry Lyall, Mocha, 15 Jul. 1725, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1C, f. 101v); Cowan to Sir Matthew Decker, Mocha, 15 Jul. 1725, (f. 103v); Cowan to Thomas Woolley, Mocha, 15 Jul. 1725, (f. 110).

<sup>144</sup> Court of Directors to Chief and Council at Mocha, London, 21 Oct. 1725, (BL India Office Records, IOR/E/3/103, f. 3); Court of Directors to President and Council at Bombay, London, 21 Oct. 1725, (f. 6).

<sup>145</sup> 1719 – Junior Factor; 1721, 1722, 1723 – Factor; 1724 – Factor/Junior Merchant; 1726, 1728 – 7th in Council; 1727 – 8th in Council; 1729 – 4th in Council.

<sup>146</sup> Cowan to Henry Lowther, Mocha, 8 Jul. 1724, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1C, f. 3).

<sup>147</sup> Ibid.

<sup>148</sup> Cowan to William Phipps, Mocha, 10 Mar. 1725, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1C, f. 56).

<sup>149</sup> Cowan to William Phipps, Mocha, 10 Mar. 1725, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1C, ff. 57v; 60v).

<sup>150</sup> Das Gupta, 'India and the Indian Ocean in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century' in A. Das Gupta and M.N. Pearson (eds), *India and the Indian Ocean, 1500-1800*, (Oxford, 1987), pp. 137-8.

in favour of having the Imam removed from power.<sup>151</sup> 'The troubles in this country are greater than ever, and as most people wish the present Imam deposed so they think and says it is most likely to be so.'<sup>152</sup>

The potential coup presented a problem for Cowan and the Company. If the Imam was removed from power it would have caused further disruption to the market and the supply of coffee, the two things which they were concerned most about. It would have also left the Company in the position of having to renegotiate all of its trading privileges with a new ruling Imam. In short, this would have cost the Company a great deal of time and money. Conversely, as Cowan noted on 1 August 1725, it was not possible to have a freedom of trade at Mocha under that Imam as Cowan felt that he and his advisors were inherently corrupt. The Imam was, according to Cowan, intent on 'fleecing merchants' at every opportunity.<sup>153</sup> However, the issue of the Imam's oppression did not disappear and Cowan pushed for a decision to be made. The Imam and his government were apparently oblivious to the widespread problems and it was, according to Cowan, pointless to have brought any complaint or grievance to him or his governor at Mocha.<sup>154</sup> Emir Ally Rizick, Cowan opined, was governor of Mocha in name only and was instead merely a cipher for Turbatty.<sup>155</sup> Cowan reported to Thomas Woolley<sup>156</sup> that the Imam had given Turbatty arbitrary power at Mocha for a period of

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<sup>151</sup> Cowan to William Phipps, Mocha, 10 Mar. 1725, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1C, f. 57v); Cowan to Josias Wordsworth, Mocha, 15 Jul. 1725, (f. 100).

<sup>152</sup> Cowan to William Phipps, Mocha, 10 Mar. 1725, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1C, f. 57v)

<sup>153</sup> Cowan to Thomas Woolley, Mocha, 1 Aug. 1725, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1C, f. 111).

<sup>154</sup> Cowan to Thomas Woolley, Mocha, 1 Aug. 1725, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1C, ff. 111-111v).

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>156</sup> EIC secretary.

three years, and that he had used this opportunity to extort money through the charging of high customs rates.<sup>157</sup>

The other connection which Cowan's information network made was that between the civil war in Persia and that in the Mughal Empire. Cowan noted that both empires were suffering from the ill effects of civil war at the same time, with the net effect being that commerce in the western Indian Ocean was likely to have been ruined for years.<sup>158</sup> Of particular interest to Cowan was the situation which had developed at the Gujarati port of Surat during the period 1722-9. As Cowan highlighted, the ongoing civic strife within both Surat and the Mughal Empire at large served to weaken Surat's position commercially. When it is considered that commerce at the port of Surat underwent change in the eighteenth century, the wider civil wars and political regionalization documented by Cowan perhaps make an interesting argument regarding affairs at Surat. Whereas the late eighteenth century is held up in some quarters as the most likely period for Surat's decline due to Bombay's gradual rise, this estimate is too late and broad. Instead it is argued that the early eighteenth century was more accurate. Das Gupta also agreed with this timing when he suggested that the decline happened sometime in the 1720s.<sup>159</sup>

It must be acknowledged that Cowan's description of Mocha provides much interesting evidence to support this. It is fascinating to note that Mocha was, at the same time as

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<sup>157</sup> Cowan to Thomas Woolley, Mocha, 1 Aug. 1725, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1C, ff. 111-111v).

<sup>158</sup> Cowan to Sir Matthew Decker, Bombay, 1 Jan. 1726. (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1C, f. 132); Cowan to John Sherman, Bombay, 3 Dec. 1726, (f. 200v); Cowan to Charles Savage Jr., Bombay, 6 Jan. 1727, (f. 207v).

<sup>159</sup> Das Gupta, 'The Crisis at Surat, 1730-32,' *Bengal: Past and Present*, 80, (1967), 148.

Surat, beginning to feel the ill effects of declining prosperity.<sup>160</sup> In this way, Cowan provided what may yet prove to have been a very useful perspective in reimagining the decline of two preeminent trading ports in the western Indian Ocean trading sphere. It would, however, be a great jump to argue that Mocha underwent the same difficulties as Surat. Cowan's letters have, however, given an indication that the western Indian Ocean trading world was an interdependent system. The units of this apparatus thrived, and in turn withered, depending on the free flow of goods and capital between the major power centres of India, Persia and Ottoman Turkey.<sup>161</sup> It is with this in mind that Cowan's correspondence with John Courtney and Henry Lowther was intriguing. Both men served as chief of the Company factory at Surat and were in regular contact with Cowan. In total, as seen in figure 3.5, 66 letters were sent to the chief of Surat between 1724 and 1727. This pointed towards a series of shared interests and membership of a common privately interested network, in line with arguments presented by Cain and Hopkins.<sup>162</sup>

Throughout his time in India, communication was a key factor in Cowan's daily life. This section, however, in dealing with Cowan's networks, has more so looked at the way in which Cowan communicated. Two distinct strands were picked up on; namely, his patronage circle and his information sharing network. These were chosen as they had the most immediate impact on his career in India. The topics of his letters to these people, in conjunction with his communication strategy, can be seen to have helped

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<sup>160</sup> Cowan to Henry Lowther, Mocha, 8 Jul. 1724, PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1C, f. 3); Cowan to Sir Matthew Decker, Bombay, 1 Jan. 1726, (f. 132).

<sup>161</sup> Cowan to Sir Matthew Decker, Bombay, 1 Jan. 1726, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1C, f. 132); Cowan to John Sherman, Bombay, 3 Dec. 1726, (f. 200v).

<sup>162</sup> P.J. Cain. & A.G. Hopkins, *British Imperialism: Innovation and Expansion, 1688-1914*, (New York, 1994), pp. 71-3.

both his career and the Company outlook in the Red Sea. This again returns to the arguments of Mentz.<sup>163</sup> Without communication on the part of Cowan, and indeed the wider body of Company servants, the Company apparatus would simply not have functioned.

### **V - The East India Company Withdrawal from Mocha**

From the examination of Cowan's information sharing networks, it can be seen that the Company position in Mocha was threatened during his tenure there. These threats included poor market operation, political interference and civil war(s). It was telling that by July 1725, Cowan was already advocating the withdrawal of the Company factory.<sup>164</sup> His arguments came just over a year after he arrived at Mocha. This suggested a view held by Cowan that the factory was beyond saving. Such a negative stance also pointed to his tenure at Mocha having been a failure in both personal and professional aspects. Due to the decline in commercial activity and the increasingly difficult political climate, Cowan argued vociferously that the Mocha factory should be withdrawn.<sup>165</sup> This must, however, also be contextualised with his negative personal experiences there, as well as the potential to form another strand of the public versus private interest dichotomy in Cowan's career. Whilst it might be convenient to argue that this was a likely ploy used

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<sup>163</sup> Mentz, *The English Gentleman Merchant*, p. 81.

<sup>164</sup> Cowan to Henry Lyall, Mocha, 15 Jul. 1725, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1C, f. 101v); Cowan to Sir Matthew Decker, Mocha, 15 Jul. 1725, (f. 103v); Cowan to Thomas Woolley, Mocha, 15 Jul. 1725, (f. 110).

<sup>165</sup> Cowan to William Dawson, Mocha, 15 Jul. 1725, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1C, f. 104); Cowan to Thomas Woolley, Mocha, 1 Aug. 1725, (f. 110).

by a man who wished to resign his posting gracefully, it is also significant to note that Cowan wrote to many of the Company directors in a similar vein. In what Cowan described as his 'public and private opinion' of the state of affairs at Mocha, he presented a developed commercial proposal to his superiors.<sup>166</sup> Indeed, it can be seen that he wrote to directors such as Josias Wordsworth,<sup>167</sup> Sir Matthew Decker, Sir John Gould and Edward Harrison, and gave very damning evidence as to the state of things at Mocha. Cowan did, as is important to note, have experience in the process of withdrawing Company factories. This was evidenced by his appointment as supervisor of the factory at Carwar in December 1724.<sup>168</sup> At the time of Cowan's appointment, the Company servants at Carwar had complained of repeated interference from the local Raja, as well as numerous attempts being made by his courtiers to rescind the benefits enjoyed by the Company at the port. A clear similarity to the Mochan situation can be seen here.

Cowan's interpretation was that it would be best to withdraw the factory and deploy its servants to another port on the Carnatic coast.<sup>169</sup> Cowan's concerns were validated by the increase in pressure from the local Raja as a result of aggression from a neighbouring Raja, Sambhaji. Sambhaji was seeking to reclaim lands which were previously held by his grandfather in the area surrounding Carwar, and so the Company servants there

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<sup>166</sup> Cowan to Henry Lyall, Mocha, 15 Jul. 1725, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1C, f. 101v); Cowan to Sir Matthew Decker, Mocha, 15 Jul. 1725, (f. 103v); Cowan to Thomas Woolley, Mocha, 15 Jul. 1725, (f. 110).

<sup>167</sup> 1712 – Company Director; 1724 – Patron. EIC chairman 1717; 1722; 1723; 1728; 1733-5; 1738. EIC deputy chairman 1715; 1727; 1730; 1732; 1737.

<sup>168</sup> Cowan to Henry Cairnes, Carwar, 8 Dec. 1724, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1C, f. 42v); Cowan to John Sherman, Carwar, 11 Dec. 1724, (f. 46v); Court of Directors to President and Council at Bombay, 13 Apr. 1726, (BL India Office Records, IOR/E/3/103, ff. 130-133v).

<sup>169</sup> Cowan to Robert Adams, Carwar, 5 Dec. 1724, PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1C, f. 37v); Cowan to William Phipps, Carwar, 5 Dec. 1724, (f. 38); Cowan to Charles Boone, Carwar, 8 Dec. 1724, (f. 40v).

found themselves in the middle of a regional power struggle.<sup>170</sup> Such an instance was readily comparable to the situation at Mocha, and Cowan's actions at Carwar provided him with the necessary experience and skills for dealing with just such a scenario. Cowan's solution, following numerous failed attempts at negotiation, was to withdraw all of the Company's servants and goods. These were then redeployed to the port of Onor, also on the Carnatic coast.<sup>171</sup> However, the factory house was to be kept intact and to be maintained by two trusted brokers in case the Company ever wished to return and re-establish their interests there.<sup>172</sup>

The case study presented by developments at Carwar very closely mirrored events at Mocha in the following years. Cowan, having received permission to withdraw his position to Bombay, later followed the similar process of withdrawing Company interests and maintaining a shell presence at Mocha.<sup>173</sup> In answer to the question of where the Company was to source its coffee from, the focus can very steadily be seen to have altered throughout Cowan's time at Mocha. This was the tendency towards sourcing an additional supply from the ports of Bayt-Al-Fayiq and Jeddah. Since this contingency plan was already in place upon withdrawal from Mocha,<sup>174</sup> there was no need for a separate factory to be established as was the case at Onor.<sup>175</sup> As such, the Company's commercial interest was secured.

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<sup>170</sup> Cowan to Charles Boone, Carwar, 8 Dec. 1724, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1C, f. 40v).

<sup>171</sup> Cowan to John Gould, Mocha, 15 Jul. 1725, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1C, f. 93v); Cowan to Charles Boone, Mocha, 15 Jul. 1725, (f. 98v).

<sup>172</sup> Cowan to William Phipps, Mocha, 10 Mar. 1725, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1C, f. 78v).

<sup>173</sup> Cowan to John Gould, Mocha, 15 Jul. 1725, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1C, f. 93v); Cowan to John Courtney, Bombay, 28 Aug. 1727, (f. 242).

<sup>174</sup> Cowan to William Phipps, Mocha, 25 Mar. 1725, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1C, f. 65v); Cowan to Robert Frankland, Bombay, 5 Sept. 1726, (f. 182v); Cowan to Court of Directors, Mocha Rd., 25 Mar. 1727, (f. 231).

<sup>175</sup> Cowan to Henry Lyell, Mocha, 15 Jul. 1725, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1C, f. 101); Cowan to John Heathcote, Bombay, 12 Jan. 1727, (f. 204).



Cowan petitioned for a removal of the Mocha factory as early as July 1725,<sup>176</sup> yet it was not until May 1727 that Cowan returned to Bombay following a successful withdrawal of the factory.<sup>177</sup> During the nearly two years that elapsed between Cowan's first petitions and the factory closure, Cowan continued his role in attempting to procure coffee from the Mochan marketplace and in managing the Company's affairs at Mocha in general. This role was, as highlighted above, badly undermined by the interference of private interests such as Turbatty and the continued political difficulties. It was the understanding of the Company directors that the governor of Mocha demanded an annual increase in dues from the Company over the years 1723-5. This placed an increased strain on the Company finances.<sup>178</sup> It was due to both these increased demands and the uncertainty of the supply of coffee that the directors wrote to Mocha on 21 October 1725 that after much consideration they were resolved to withdraw the factory.<sup>179</sup>

A detailed set of instructions for the withdrawal was laid out in this letter, in which aspects such as the recovery of outstanding debts were addressed. As long as the factory at Mocha continued to operate, despite the plans to withdraw, the directors insisted on the continuance of the stipulated 600 bales of coffee per annum to be exported from Mocha customs free.<sup>180</sup> Such an expectation was, however, easier to

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<sup>176</sup> Cowan to Josias Wordsworth, Mocha, 15 Jul. 1725, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1C, f. 100); Cowan to William Dawsonne, Mocha, 15 Jul. 1725, (f. 104).

<sup>177</sup> Cowan to Edward Harrison, Bombay, 30 May 1727, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1C, f. 240v).

<sup>178</sup> Cowan to William Phipps, Mocha, 10 Mar. 1725, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1C, f. 54v); Court of Directors to Chief and Council at Mocha, London, 21 Oct. 1725, (BL India Office Records, IOR/E/3/103, ff. 2-5).

<sup>179</sup> Court of Directors to Chief and Council at Mocha, London, 21 Oct. 1725, (BL India Office Records, IOR/E/3/103, ff. 2-5).

<sup>180</sup> Cowan to William Phipps, Mocha, 10 Mar. 1725, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1C, f. 54v); Court of Directors to Chief and Council at Mocha, London, 21 Oct. 1725, (BL India Office Records, IOR/E/3/103, ff. 2-5).

order than to enforce on the ground. As such, the Company servant Charles English was despatched from London to inspect affairs at Mocha and the subordinate settlements.<sup>181</sup> This appointment was resented by Cowan who viewed it as a signal that the directors viewed him with suspicion. The directors, however, moved quickly to reassure Cowan on this matter and sought news of him.<sup>182</sup> The question as to why Cowan was so optimistic about his prospects at Mocha prior to his arrival, when the Company had flagged a series of problems over Mocha as early as 30 October 1723,<sup>183</sup> was not referenced by Cowan. It is argued that he likely felt there was an opportunity there, as he had stated prior to his arrival in January 1724.<sup>184</sup>

This was likely true of the Company as well when considering the withdrawal of Mocha. There was a great opportunity which they were presented with due to the ongoing civil war in Persia. The Company's physical position at Mocha was weak due to their limitations in land-based power projection and the severe lack of financial backing. Cowan made the observation on several occasions that the port of Mocha, and her shipping, would be incredibly vulnerable to a naval blockade in the event of there being an issue which needed forcing.<sup>185</sup> This observation was in keeping with Watson's assertion that a direct naval blockade against native powers might have been used as a last resort in the case of diplomacy or naval interdiction against native trading vessels

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<sup>181</sup> Court of Directors to Charles English, London, 21 Oct. 1725, (BL India Office Records, IOR/E/3/103, f. 5v).

<sup>182</sup> Court of Directors to President and Council at Bombay, 13 Apr. 1726, (BL India Office Records, IOR/E/3/103, ff. 138-138v).

<sup>183</sup> Court of Directors to Chief and Council at Mocha, 30 Oct. 1723, (BL India Office Records, IOR/E/3/102, ff. 1-3v).

<sup>184</sup> Cowan to Nicholas Hammond, Bombay, 5 Oct. 1723, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1B, f. 13); Cowan to John Cowan, Bombay, 20 Oct. 1723, (f. 13v); Cowan to Betty Gould, Bombay, 20 Oct. 1723, (f. 14v).

<sup>185</sup> Cowan to Edward Harrison, Mocha, 8 Jun. 1726, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1C, f. 171).

having failed.<sup>186</sup> Such a step would have served the dual intention of re-establishing respect for the English in the Red Sea and in forcing the Mochan government to secede to English demands.

By January 1727, the Company was ready to launch its expedition against Mocha with a squadron of ships which had been provisioned at Bombay. These ships were the *Fame*, *Fort St. George* and a bomb ketch.<sup>187</sup> Cowan was chosen to lead the squadron as he was still the serving chief of the Mocha factory.<sup>188</sup> This mission to intimidate Mocha was the second military command of his career in India after his failed campaign against Kanhoji Angré in 1721.<sup>189</sup> This second naval adventure was notable due to both its success and the fact the naval power projection, which had failed to be decisive in the campaign against Angré, had proved to be the deciding factor. Thus, the strategic deterrent of European naval supremacy served to establish what Watson referred to as the symbiosis of offence and defence for Company interests in the region.<sup>190</sup>

Cowan recorded that his primary objectives were the recovery of a large number of debts which were owed to both the Company and several of its servants, as well as the forcible reparation of the Company's charter agreement with the Imam's government.<sup>191</sup> The negotiations which took place were framed against the backdrop of English aggression in the bay of Mocha, with no ships having been permitted to

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<sup>186</sup>I.B. Watson, 'Fortifications and the "Idea" of Force in Early East India Company Relations with India', *Past and Present*, No. 88 (Aug., 1980), 75.

<sup>187</sup> Cowan to Robert Frankland, Mocha, 26 Mar. 1727, PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1C, f. 232).

<sup>188</sup> Cowan to Charles Savage Jr., Bombay, 6 Jan. 1727, PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1C, f. 207v); Cowan to Robert Adams, At Sea, 4 Feb. 1727, (f. 227v).

<sup>189</sup> Cowan to John Cowan, Bombay, 6 Jan. 1722, PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1AA, f. 113v); Cowan to James Macrae, Bombay, 11 Jan. 1722, (f. 117).

<sup>190</sup> Watson, 'Fortifications and the "Idea" of Force', 71.

<sup>191</sup> Cowan to Robert Frankland, Mocha, 26 Mar. 1727, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1C, f. 232); Cowan to Philip Wheak, Mocha, 26 Mar. 1727, (f. 232v).

discharge until an agreement was reached.<sup>192</sup> Such overwhelming force gave the Mochan government few options and served to force the issue through a defined resolution timeframe. However, Cowan's approach to the talks themselves was intriguing given that he absolutely refused to leave the safety of his flagship. Instead, he chose to use a proxy in the form of his Mocha assistant Francis Dickinson<sup>193</sup> to negotiate.<sup>194</sup> Cowan's choosing to remain aboard his ship was grounded in his aversion to having to set foot at Mocha ever again.<sup>195</sup>

The negotiations were hampered by the ongoing civil war in Persia which served to delay communication times. The opportunity which the Company had won was therefore mitigated by the same circumstances. There was also the determination of the Imam to have his rights of consulage, and thus his revenue stream, enforced to be considered.<sup>196</sup> As the Yemeni Imams had their power base in the mountainous regions, the Imam's view of the situation was clouded by his relative personal security. Faced with such a deadlock, Cowan employed Mulna Mahmud Ally, a well-regarded and prosperous merchant from Surat,<sup>197</sup> to act as a mediator.<sup>198</sup> Cowan described him as 'Chief Merchant of Surat' in his letter to the directors on 25 March 1727.<sup>199</sup> Whilst the use of native translators and brokers by Europeans in the intra-Asian sphere was by no means uncommon, the employing of so venerable a man was interesting. A like for like

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<sup>192</sup> Cowan to John Fotheringham, Mocha Rd., 5 Apr. 1727, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1C, f. 234).

<sup>193</sup> 1727, 1728, 1729 – Junior Merchant; 1730, 1731 – Senior Merchant; 1732 – 6th/8th in Council; 1733 – 7th/8th in Council; 1734, 1735 – 9th in Council.

<sup>194</sup> Cowan to Martin French, Mocha Rd., 5 Apr. 1727, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1C, f. 234).

<sup>195</sup> Cowan to John Gould Jr., Mocha, 25 Jul. 1726, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1C, f. 177v); Cowan to Hugh Henry, Bombay, 12 Sept. 1726, (f. 191v).

<sup>196</sup> Cowan to Martin French, Mocha Rd. 5 Apr. 1727 (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1C, f. 234);

Cowan to Henry Frankland, Mocha Rd., 2 May 1727, (f. 235).

<sup>197</sup> Das Gupta, 'The Crisis at Surat', 150.

<sup>198</sup> Cowan to James Macrae, Mocha Rd., 3 May 1727, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1C, f. 237).

<sup>199</sup> Cowan to Court of Directors, 25 Mar. 1727, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1C, f. 230).

comparison with standard broker contracts is, however, difficult due to the very specific nature of the negotiations. The question of why such a man would so readily have chosen to act for the Company in such a way, in so very specific a place and at such short notice must surely be raised.

The answer, partly at least, was to be found in the chance that Mahmud Ally was undertaking a personal pilgrimage to Mecca and happened to find himself taking passage to the Red Sea on one of the Company ships.<sup>200</sup> The pilgrimage to Mecca from India at this time was reliant on the use of Mocha as a staging post on the journey to the port of Jeddah. Pilgrims would have transferred from their ship at Mocha to a smaller vessel which would have ferried them up the coast towards Jeddah, and thus onwards to their destinations of Mecca and Medina. With this in mind, Mahmud Ally's motivation for assisting Cowan must be assumed to have been practical in nature due to his desire to continue his journey to Mecca as soon as possible. Onward transportation from Mocha was, after all, difficult due to the port being blocked up, though one must also consider the wider implications of Mahmud Ally's trading interests. He was heavily involved in the Mocha to Surat trading paradigm as described above,<sup>201</sup> and so it was in his interests to stimulate the movement of goods and shipping once again. Das Gupta has further suggested that Mahmud Ally held the monopoly of trade between Mocha and Gujarat.<sup>202</sup> It is unclear, however, if Mahmud Ally was in any way incorporated into Cowan's private network.

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<sup>200</sup> Cowan to Court of Directors, 25 Mar. 1727, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1C, f. 230).

<sup>201</sup> Cowan to James Macrae, Mocha Rd., 3 May 1727, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1C, f. 237v); Henry Lowther to Robert Cowan, Surat, 15 Jan. 1727, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/5A/7); Henry Lowther to Robert Cowan, Surat, 17 Feb. 1731, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/5A/13).

<sup>202</sup> Das Gupta, 'The Crisis at Surat', 150.

Essentially, Mahmud Ally had nothing to lose by his involvement and stood to gain both practically and in terms of prestige through a speedy resolution of the dispute. The crux of Mahmud Ally's involvement in negotiations was a decisive one as contingency agreements for the discharging of goods and repayment of some of the outstanding debts were very quickly reached once he became involved.<sup>203</sup> It was unclear whether Cowan engaged Mahmud Ally prior to his voyage to act on his behalf, though Cowan certainly presented it as a coincidence. It was plausible that a wealthy Muslim merchant wanted to travel to Mecca aboard a safe Company ship. However, Cowan must have been aware of Mahmud Ally travelling in his party and was thus alert to the potential opportunity if required.<sup>204</sup>

Despite the initial success of Mahmud Ally in the opening rounds of talks, Cowan's withdrawal from Mocha to Bombay was due to the death of the Imam rather than the success of negotiations.<sup>205</sup> Following his retreat, Cowan left Dickinson behind to conclude negotiations with the new Imam.<sup>206</sup> In his previous season at Mocha, 1726-7, Cowan noted that he would likely have to return to Mocha to secure the outstanding debts there<sup>207</sup> and to redress the customs situation.<sup>208</sup> This he clearly did in the form of the expedition. Following his decision to return to Bombay in May 1727 he reported that he had completed his mission and had left Dickinson behind to finalise

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<sup>203</sup> Cowan to James Macrae, Mocha Rd., 3 May 1727, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1C, f. 237v); Cowan to Edward Harrison, Bombay, 30 May 1727, (f. 240v).

<sup>204</sup> Cowan to Mulna Mahmud Ally, Mocha Rd., 20 Mar. 1727, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1C, f. 229v).

<sup>205</sup> Cowan to John Courtney, Bombay, 28 Aug. 1727, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1C, f. 242).

<sup>206</sup> Cowan to John Courtney, Bombay, 29 May 1727, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1C, f. 240).

<sup>207</sup> Cowan to Robert Adams, Bombay, 18 Aug. 1727, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1C, f. 243).

<sup>208</sup> Cowan to Sir Matthew Decker, Bombay, 6 Sep. 1726, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1C, f. 187); Cowan to John Gould Jr., Bombay, 9 Sep. 1726, (f. 188); Cowan to Court of Directors, Bombay, 6 Sep. 1726, (f. 192v).

proceedings.<sup>209</sup> It is unclear what direct involvement Cowan had in the negotiations, or what his specific directions were. However, his correspondence suggested that he wished to be seen to have played a full and decisive role, with many of his letters advising of success at Mocha despite his early departure.<sup>210</sup> This suggested a self-interested slant on his information sharing channels.

Cowan, despite the challenges he faced at Mocha, did try to resolve them and to promote the Company interest. Whilst also being the man who was responsible for having his own settlement withdrawn from regular Company activity, it is argued that he utilised his experience during the withdrawal at Carwar and applied it to the Mochan situation. As a result of this, he demonstrated a development in his governance and strategic skills over a period of four years. It is also pertinent to note that during the entire duration of his experience at Mocha, Cowan very carefully and systematically maintained his wider correspondence and used it to his benefit. In maintaining his circle of correspondence, Cowan highlighted to his patrons the actions he was taking to overcome the difficulties at Mocha.

Whilst Cowan endured difficulties and at times failed to meet the targets set by himself and the Company, it is fair to acknowledge that he learnt from his mistakes and applied them to benefit his own commercial and personal development. During challenging times, such as Goa and Mocha, it must be noted that Cowan continued in his role and achieved noteworthy feats in both instances. The Anglo-Portuguese treaty of 1721 and

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<sup>209</sup> Cowan to Edward Harrison, Bombay, 30 May 1727, PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1C, f. 240v); Cowan to John Courtney, Bombay, 28 Aug. 1727, (f. 242); Cowan to Robert Adams, Bombay, 28 Aug. 1727, (f. 243).

<sup>210</sup> Cowan to Captain John Hunter, Mocha Rd., 16 May 1727, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1C, f. 238); Cowan to Francis Dickinson, Mocha Rd., 3 May 1727, (f. 238v).

the Company withdrawal from Mocha in 1727 being good examples of this. Cowan's tenure at Mocha was also the time in which his private trading interests began to grow and take shape, with him having become involved in voyages and in the remittance of cash and precious stones. In chapter five, Cowan's investments during his time at Bombay will be scrutinised and it will be demonstrated that his investment scope increased following his time at Mocha. Finally, Cowan's experiences and reports from his time at Mocha have allowed a window to be opened in which Company affairs in the Red Sea can be viewed on the global scale as opposed a mere regional one.



## **Chapter Four: Bombay, 1728-35, Part I**

Cowan's promotion to governor of Bombay was the most significant posting of his career, and therefore represented the area in which he had the most impact and potential. As Cowan noted, appointment to governor was a post of great honour within the Company network. There was, however, also a perceived lack of potential for personal gain when compared to Fort St. George.<sup>1</sup> This was due to the poor trading outlook for the west coast of India in the 1720s. As governor, Cowan was responsible for Bombay's dependent settlements in the western presidency.<sup>2</sup> This included settlements along the west coast of India, as well as the Red Sea.<sup>3</sup> In order to discuss Cowan's tenure as governor, it is necessary to have an understanding of Bombay during the years 1728-35.

It must be acknowledged that the evaluation of Cowan's Bombay must largely be a study of European Bombay. This is due to a lack of native sources or relevant secondary material for the topic, and the particular issue of charting Bombay's native population in the early eighteenth century. Cowan's observations will be contrasted with Sharma's work and travellers' accounts from individuals such as John Fryer<sup>4</sup> and John Ovington,<sup>5</sup> who travelled throughout India in the late seventeenth century, in order to better discuss the topic. These accounts were largely from the late seventeenth century, and

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<sup>1</sup> Cowan to Hugh Henry, Bombay, 30 Aug. 1728, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2A, f. 4v).

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> During Cowan's period the settlements subordinate to Bombay were Anjenjo, Bussorah, Cambay, Gombroon, Mocha, Onor, Surat and Tellicherry.

<sup>4</sup> Thomas Roe & John Fryer, *Travels in India in the Seventeenth-Century*, (London, 1873).

<sup>5</sup> John Ovington, *A Voyage to Surat in the Year 1689*, (London, 1696).

so it was likely Bombay had changed between their publication and Cowan's time there. It must be remembered, however, that observations and opinions were likely subject to European biases. The potential for preconceived ideas about Bombay and India to dominate accounts such as these was therefore high. This ties in with Edward Said's arguments on orientalist attitudes of Europeans in India. These hold that orientalism was a tool for European colonial powers to come to terms with the orient's place in the western experience of it.<sup>6</sup> It is, however, acknowledged that the bulk of orientalist studies began later in the eighteenth century than Cowan's period.

To undertake a description of what Bombay was, it is necessary to resort to a number of ill-fitting labels to act as a guide. As an island archipelago, Bombay might reasonably be termed a maritime city. This label suggests a reliance on sea trade and commerce. However, whilst this identity is convenient and Bombay did rely heavily on trade routes, it gives the reader preconceived notions similar to the assumptions of orientalists. Das Gupta has argued that whilst the term maritime has remained useful, it has been understood as referring to something static. This, he argued, was never the true case and that whilst a city may be open, the society was not necessarily so.<sup>7</sup> The living part of the city, the people, was not fixed in location, identity or design, and so was free to exchange ideas. As such, it possessed a diverse population.<sup>8</sup> This was a key element of Bombay's identity and ties in with Jane Jacob's arguments on the functions of populaces, independent of their physical environments.<sup>9</sup> The other major problem has

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<sup>6</sup> Edward Said, *Orientalism*, (London, 2003), pp. 1-4.

<sup>7</sup> Ashin Das Gupta, 'The Maritime City' in I. Banga (ed), *Ports and their Hinterlands in India, 1700-1950*, (New Delhi, 1992), pp. 359-62.

<sup>8</sup> Richard Cobbe to the Bishop of London, Bombay, 5 Oct. 1715, *Bombay Church: or, a true account of the building and finishing the English Church at Bombay*, (London, 1766), p. 21.

<sup>9</sup> Jane Jacobs, *Death and Life of Great American Cities*, (New York, 2011), pp. 168-9.

been the tendency of historians to categorise the history of the west coast of India with terms such as Company, Mughal and European. Whilst inevitable due to the scope of sources available, this has also led to a removed approach. Consequently, as Das Gupta has concluded, the suggestion that the Indian world revolved around the Company has erroneously crept in.<sup>10</sup>

Spatially, Bombay was a complicated vision in the early modern period. Fryer reported in 1671 that Bombay consisted on an archipelago of seven islands.<sup>11</sup> However, this archipelago possessed the most notable and secure harbour in India which was popular during the monsoon months.<sup>12</sup> As Tim Riding has discussed, the topography of Bombay changed drastically between 1704 and 1728.<sup>13</sup> Fryer referred to high tides which tended to flood land between Choul and Bassein, particularly in the spring.<sup>14</sup> This phenomenon was known as the great breach in Company circles, and a debate over how to manage it had gone on since the late seventeenth century.<sup>15</sup> Works on stopping the great breach began in 1710-1711, though due to a number of delays and local disputes it was not until 1728 that work was completed. The below figures 4.1, 4.2 and 4.3, which have been reproduced from Tim Riding's article 'Making Bombay Island', show a series of geographical conceptions of Bombay.

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<sup>10</sup> Das Gupta, 'Some Problems of Reconstructing the History of India's West Coast from European Sources' in J. Correia-Afonso (ed), *Indo-Portuguese History*, (Oxford, 1981), 175-177.

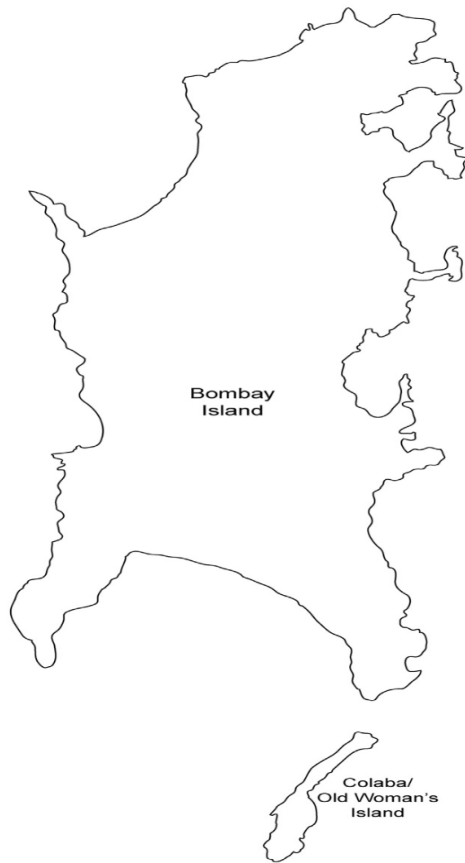
<sup>11</sup> Bombaim, Canorein, Trumbay, Elephanta, The Putachoes, Munchumbay and Kerenjaw.

<sup>12</sup> Roe & Fryer, *Travels in India in the Seventeenth Century*, pp. 228-30

<sup>13</sup> Tim Riding, 'Making Bombay Island: Land Reclamation and Geographical Conceptions of Bombay, 1661-1728,' *Journal of Historical Geography*, 59, (2018), 35-7.

<sup>14</sup> Roe & Fryer, *Travels in India*, pp. 228-30.

<sup>15</sup> Court of Directors to President and Council at Surat, London, 28 Feb. 1678, (BL, IOR/E/3/89, f. 54); Bombay to Court of Directors in London, Bombay, 15 Dec. 1673, (BL, IOR/G/3/6, pt. 4, f. 24); Court of Directors to resident and Council at Surat, London, 5 Mar. 1674, (BL, IOR/E/3/88, f. 166).



The early modern English conception of Bombay



Post-1843 historical reconstructions of Bombay

Fig. 4.1 The early modern conception of Bombay.<sup>16</sup>

Fig. 4.2 Nineteenth-century reconstruction of spatial

Bombay.<sup>17</sup>

As can be seen from figure 4.1, the overall early modern conception of Bombay was as a unified island space. The reality of the situation was, as discussed above and represented in figure 4.2, an archipelago of islands. Figure 4.2, although a later reconstruction, gives a better understanding of what spatial Bombay was prior to the program of land reclamation. Finally, figure 4.3 demonstrates the spatial representation of Bombay after reclamations in 1728.

<sup>16</sup> Riding, 'Making Bombay Island', 30

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

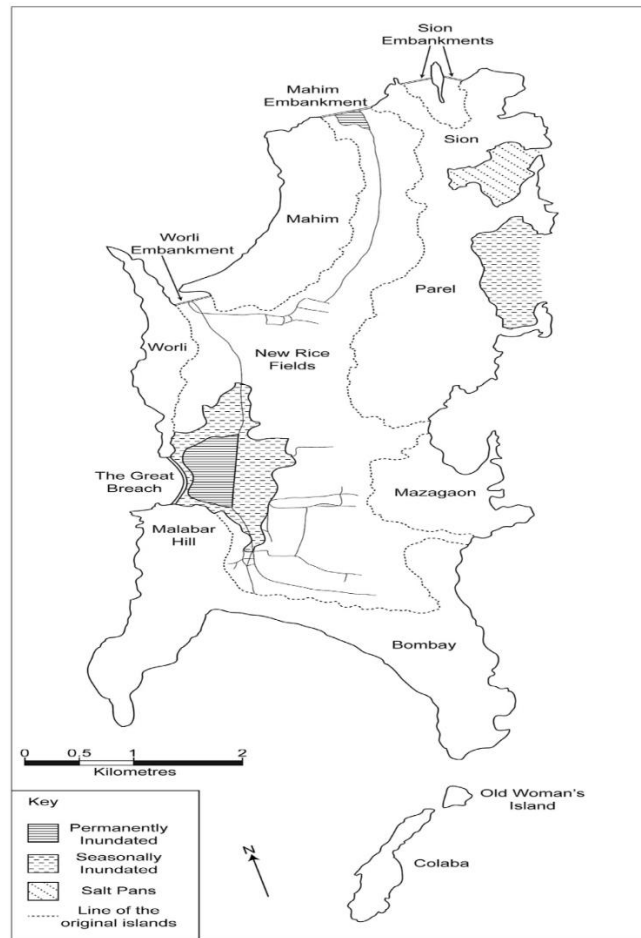


Fig. 4.3 Diagram of the lands reclaimed by the Bombay reclamation program, 1704-1728.<sup>18</sup>

The population of Bombay during Cowan's period was difficult to determine due to the lack of census material for the native population and the high mortality rate of Europeans. However, Cowan estimated that Bombay's total population during his time as governor was approximately 30,000.<sup>19</sup> In contrast, Richard Cobbe<sup>20</sup> estimated the Bombay population at 16,000 in 1715.<sup>21</sup> However, this likely only accounted for the island of Bombay itself which he described separately.<sup>22</sup> In terms of the European

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

<sup>19</sup> Cowan to Hugh Henry, Bombay, 30 Aug. 1728, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2A, f. 5).

<sup>20</sup> Chaplain of Bombay 1714-?

<sup>21</sup> Richard Cobbe to the Bishop of London, Bombay, 5 Oct. 1715, *Bombay Church*, p. 22.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

population, it is more difficult to come to an approximate figure. Cowan reported that there were 120 Europeans in the Bombay garrison at the time. There was a high mortality rate for European sailors in India, and so a specific figure for the Bombay marine cannot be provided.<sup>23</sup> Sharma suggested that the European garrison consisted of 444 Europeans and 1,004 topasses in 1742, although no information was provided for Cowan's period.<sup>24</sup> Further, based on the list of servants provided in the Bombay personnel listings,<sup>25</sup> it has been estimated that another 80 to 100 Europeans were based at Bombay at this time.

This comes with the caveat that these were servants employed in the western presidency, and so may have been deployed to a number of Bombay's subordinate settlements. They have been included in the calculation as servants often spent the off season at Bombay, as was the case with Cowan during his Mocha years.<sup>26</sup> Finally, it is suggested that 80 to 100 is a fair estimate for the number of Europeans at Bombay who came under the heading of undocumented. This category includes women, travelling merchants, itinerants and the unemployed. Taking the highest estimates of each category, and allowing for error, it is suggested that the European population of Bombay during Cowan's period was approximately 440 to 800.

Regarding the layout and development of Bombay, there has been solid work done by Mitter, Kosambi and Brush on the layout and development of colonial port cities in India.

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<sup>23</sup> Cowan to Edward Harrison, Bombay, 23 Sept. 1728, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2A, f. 16); Cowan to Josias Wordsworth, Bombay, 25 Sept. 1728, (f. 29v); Cowan to Henry Lyall, Bombay, 25 Sept. 1728, (f. 41v).

<sup>24</sup> Vaibhav Sharma, 'Bombay and the English Company: The Making of a Town (1661-1755)', PhD Thesis, Jawaharlal Nehru University, (2008), p. 367.

<sup>25</sup> IOR/O/5/31; 37.

<sup>26</sup> Cowan to John Courtney, Bombay, 8 Sep. 1724, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1C, f. 28); Cowan to Edward Harrison, Mocha, 2 Aug. 1725, (f. 108); Cowan to Henry Lyall, Bombay, 6 Sep. 1726, (f. 184v).

Bombay, as one of the three original English port cities, has featured heavily in their research. In order to construct an effective evaluation of Bombay, this work will be examined in conjunction with Cowan's letter books, Company letter books, and the descriptions of John Fryer. A convenient place to start is the argument put forward by Kosambi and Brush regarding the shared features of Bombay, Calcutta and Madras in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. They have argued that there was a common schematic spatial model, shown below in figure 4.4, which governed the key patterns of development for the settlements.<sup>27</sup>

It has been acknowledged that the unique island layout of Bombay meant that there were spatial distortions which led to a more organic development.<sup>28</sup> This was a conclusion which Mitter also reached.<sup>29</sup> The crux of Kosambi and Brush's argument was that Europeans tended to cluster around the fort and government districts, whilst the native population was separated into other sections. With this, what have been termed as black and white towns emerged.<sup>30</sup> This spread of locational uses is particularly well represented by figure 4.4, below.

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<sup>27</sup> Meera Kosambi & John E. Brush, 'Three Colonial Port Cities of India', *Geographical Review*, 78, No. 1 (Jan., 1988), 33.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 46-47.

<sup>29</sup> Partha Mitter, 'The Early British Port Cities of India: Their Planning and Architecture Circa 1640-1757', *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, 45, No. 2 (Jun., 1986), 102.

<sup>30</sup> Kosambi & Brush, 'Three Colonial Port Cities of India', 33.

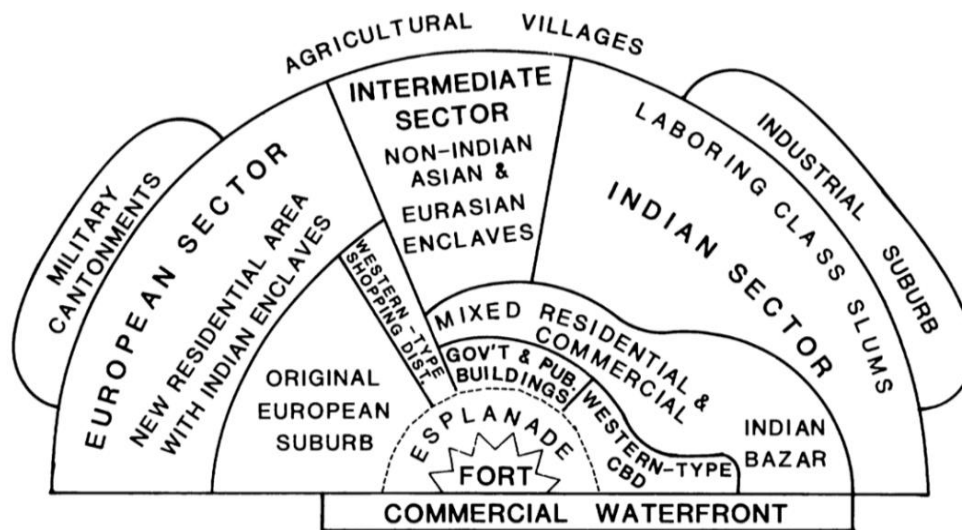


Fig. 4.4 Schematic Spatial Model for Colonial Bombay, Calcutta and Madras.<sup>31</sup>

As can be seen from figure 4.4, the waterfront fort was the centre of the settlement and all of the other sections radiated out from it. The fort was important as it was both the seat of government and the guarantor of the settlement's safety. The strength of the fort was an ongoing debate between Bombay and the directors for many years due to the high costs of improving its defences. Fryer recorded that the English inherited a poorly fortified house with 4 brass guns from the Portuguese. However, he noted that by 1671 the fort had been upgraded with a number of bastions and had 120 guns mounted.<sup>32</sup> By December 1718, under the direction of Governor Boone, a town wall had also been added.<sup>33</sup> Cowan's 1728 report recorded that Bombay had 'a very strong fort with a good number of cannon and warlike stores.'<sup>34</sup> The town itself was surrounded by a curtain wall with eight bastions. In addition to this, there were also a number of

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Roe & Fryer, *Travels in India*, pp. 232-4.

<sup>33</sup> Richard Cobbe to Robert Adams, Bombay, 10 Jan. 1719, *Bombay Church*, pp. 57-9.

<sup>34</sup> Cowan to Hugh Henry, Bombay, 30 Aug. 1728, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2A, f. 5).



smaller satellite forts at remote parts of the island.<sup>35</sup> Clearly there had been considerable investment in fortifications at Bombay between 1664 and 1728. However, the development was sporadic due to many orders for reductions in military spending issued by the company during the late seventeenth century.<sup>36</sup>

Security was an important aspect for the inhabitants of Bombay due to its precarious geo-political location. Whilst it was naturally defensible due to its island location, it was also within the political spheres of the Maratha and Mughal Empires. Bombay's location also gave it access to numerous trading routes which crossed the western Indian Ocean, and this made it an attractive target for other European powers. Bombay's defences encompassed the fort, its garrison and three naval cruisers.<sup>37</sup> Bombay's garrison, like its fort, was also an element which fluctuated in strength and Company funding. Fryer reported in 1671 that the Company garrison comprised 2,500; 300 of these were English.<sup>38</sup> In contrast, Cowan noted in 1728 that the garrison had been reduced to 700 men, of which 120 were European. These were supplemented by four companies of sepoys who manned the outlying guard posts.<sup>39</sup> This was clearly a marked drop from the 1671 level. The Company's desire for cost reduction in the late seventeenth century likely accounted for this, as orders were continually issued to reduce costs in the same manner as the fortifications during this period.<sup>40</sup> It was this constant reduction in

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Court of Directors to Deputy Governor and Council at Bombay, London, 28 Feb. 1679, (BL, India Office Records, IOR/E/3/89, f. 57); Court of Directors to President and Council at Surat, London, 19 Mar. 1680, (f. 109); President and Council at Surat, London, 15 Mar. 1681, (f. 181v); EIC Secret Committee Transactions, London, 15 Aug. 1684, (BL, India Office Records, IOR/E/3/90, f. 200).

<sup>37</sup> The topic of Bombay's marine force will be dealt with in a separate section below.

<sup>38</sup> Roe & Fryer, *Travels in India*, pp. 232-4.

<sup>39</sup> Cowan to Hugh Henry, Bombay, 30 Aug. 1728, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2A, f. 5).

<sup>40</sup> Court of Directors to Deputy Governor and Council at Bombay, London, 28 Feb. 1679, (BL, India Office Records, IOR/E/3/89, f. 57); Court of Directors to President and Council at Surat, London, 15 Mar. 1681, (f. 178); Court of Directors to President and Council at Surat, London, 16 Nov. 1683, (BL, India Office Records, IOR/E/3/90, f. 131).

military spending which led to the Keigwin Rebellion of 1683-4.<sup>41</sup> However, by Cowan's time it was clear that the Bombay garrison had not returned to pre-rebellion levels. This was despite the fact that the fort had been significantly upgraded in the following years. Whilst the discussion has centred on the European angle of Bombay, there was also evidence to suggest a vibrant native element in Cowan's time. Cowan visited the pagoda at Canorein, Salsette, and spent time there viewing caverns and sculptures which Cowan attested had been hewn into solid rock. He also gave descriptions of the temple and reported that there was a very popular tank nearby where people gathered.<sup>42</sup> Fryer commented on what he saw as the confusing habitation of English, Portuguese and natives in the 'small town' of Bombay which had a well-stocked bazaar. Houses were low built and were thatched with leaves from coconut trees.<sup>43</sup> This was due to the large number of coconut trees on the island as a primary crop,<sup>44</sup> whilst the bumbelo fish was also an important source of food.<sup>45</sup> Whilst natives had their own places of worship and healing, the English were limited to a small chapel within the fort. Gerald Aungier built a hospital at Bombay in the 1670s, though Cowan complained that by the 1730s it was unfit for use. The issue of the hospital was not solved until 1733 when the existing

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<sup>41</sup> Following the reduction of military salaries at Bombay, Captain Richard Keigwin (d. 21 Jun. 1690) rebelled against the Company government there in 1683. He protested against the lack of military spending at Bombay in the face of multiple threats. Keigwin ultimately petitioned King Charles II to reclaim control of Bombay following the perceived failure of Company rule. A naval squadron was despatched to Bombay to settle the affair in 1684, and Keigwin surrendered to the crown forces. He was subsequently given a general pardon and reassigned.

<sup>42</sup> Cowan to Hugh Henry, Bombay, 30 Aug. 1728, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2A, ff. 5-8).

<sup>43</sup> Roe & Fryer, *Travels in India*, pp. 237-8.

<sup>44</sup> Richard Cobbe to the Bishop of London, Bombay, 5 Oct. 1715, *Bombay Church*, p. 22.

<sup>45</sup> Roe & Fryer, *Travels in India*, pp. 237-8.

hospital was replaced with a new one.<sup>46</sup> Meanwhile, the church was opened on Christmas Day 1718 following the labours of Richard Cobbe.<sup>47</sup>

In relation to Cowan's official duties as governor, he was responsible for defence, macro trade and diplomacy. Whilst chairing meetings of the Bombay council, he also served at the bench in the newly established mayor's court system.<sup>48</sup> The role of governor meant responsibility for Company affairs, as well as de facto leadership of the English community at Bombay. Cowan did not provide much detail on his official role; however, Richard Cobbe's letters described some of the duties and pageantry involved. Cobbe's letter of 10 January 1719 described the spectacle of the church's opening. He described the governor, council, merchants and military proceeding from the fort to the church which was decorated with palm leaves.<sup>49</sup> The governor then entertained the town and ordered a 21-gun salute from the fort. Following this, the leading members of the community were given drinks in the church vestry. The natives, according to Cobbe, were 'well pleased' with the English method of worship.<sup>50</sup> The governor's role clearly incorporated elements of both public displays of English power and more personal acts of hospitality within the English community. The development of Company pageantry stemmed from the need to impress natives early on, and subsequently progressed to being a key component of rule in India for British residents. This was in line with Michael Fisher's arguments on colonial court ritual in India.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Mitter, 'The Early British Port Cities of India', 111.

<sup>47</sup> Owen Philipps to Richard Cobbe, Bombay, 24 Dec. 1718; Richard Cobbe to Robert Adams, Bombay, 10 Jan. 1719, *Bombay Church*, pp. 77-8; 57-9.

<sup>48</sup> Cowan to Edward Harrison, Bombay, 24 Jan. 1731, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2B, f. 85v); Cowan to John Gould Jr., Bombay, 20 Jan. 1731, (f. 106).

<sup>49</sup> Richard Cobbe to Robert Adams, Bombay, 10 Jan. 1719, *Bombay Church*, p. 21.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> Michael Fisher, 'The Resident in Court Ritual, 1764-1858', *Modern Asian Studies*, 24, No. 3 (Jul., 1990), 420-421.

In 1729 Bombay was the seat of the western presidency and served as the commercial hub for the transshipment of goods back to Europe. Being so close to Surat, which is approximately 160 miles north, meant it was ideally placed to tap into the trading networks which crossed the western Indian Ocean. Walter Fischel has argued that Surat maintained its dominant trading position throughout the eighteenth century despite the growing power of Bombay, and that it was only come the end of the eighteenth century that the rise of Bombay and Calcutta relegated Surat to a lesser status.<sup>52</sup> The aspect of trade was one which was greatly impacted by Cowan's governorship. He had pushed for a restructuring of Europe bound trade during his time at Mocha,<sup>53</sup> and he continued his efforts at Bombay. The entire west coast of India suffered trading difficulties at this time and Cowan was responsible for dictating the Company's response to this. Likewise, the recurring problem of Maratha aggression also troubled Cowan's governorship. These elements were key in understanding both the role of governor and Cowan's own tenure. To be as effective as possible, it has been decided to split Cowan's time at Bombay, 1728-35, into two segments. These will not follow the chronological format as in previous chapters, and will instead follow a thematic approach. The present chapter will deal with the macro topics of Cowan's time at Bombay, including trade, military, security and diplomacy. Chapter five will then discuss Company and native politics, private trade and Cowan's interpersonal networks. As in previous chapters, the role which Cowan's personal correspondence played in his professional and interpersonal development in

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<sup>52</sup> Walter J. Fischel, 'The Jewish Merchant-Colony in Madras (Fort St. George) during the 17th and 18th Centuries: A Contribution to the Economic and Social History of the Jews in India', *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, 3, No. 1 (Apr., 1960), 1; 16.

<sup>53</sup> Cowan to Henry Lyall, Bombay, 6 Sept. 1726, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/C, f. 184v); Cowan to Josias Wordsworth, Bombay, 6 Sept. 1726, (f. 185); Cowan to Sir Matthew Decker, Bombay, 6 Sept. 1726, (f. 187).

India will be argued as having been key to his progress. With this in mind, it is important to highlight once again the potential for Cowan's divergence from the vertical organisational structure of the Company, discussed by Stern,<sup>54</sup> in favour of the horizontal network structure articulated by Erikson.<sup>55</sup>

The nature of patrimonialism meant that as well as agreeing to serve the Company's interests, Cowan also had to swear allegiance to the interests of his private patrons. This then acted as one of the foundation stones of political power within Company networks.<sup>56</sup> This naturally created a situation of split loyalty for Cowan and his contemporaries. Due to the great distance between Bombay and London, and the variety of opinions which arose on what course was best for the management of the presidency amongst directors and patrons, the potential for Cowan and his network to deviate and manage as he saw best was great. This is in line with Soren Mentz's arguments on the potential flaws of the Company's hierarchical system of management.<sup>57</sup> This line of thought which shall be followed below and in chapter five.

## **I - East India Company Trade in the Western Ocean**

Following Cowan's previous experience at Mocha, he was well placed to manage the Company's trade in the western Indian Ocean. Since the Red Sea was subordinate to

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<sup>54</sup> Philip Stern, *The Company State: Corporate Sovereignty & the Early Modern Foundations of the British Empire in India*, (Oxford, 2011), pp. 8-10.

<sup>55</sup> Emily Erikson, *Between Monopoly and Free Trade: The English East India Company 1600-1757*, (Princeton, 2014), pp. 19-20.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19.

<sup>57</sup> Soren Mentz, *The English Gentleman Merchant at work: Madras and the City of London, 1660-1740*, (Copenhagen, 2005), p. 71.

Bombay in the Company hierarchy,<sup>58</sup> he was required to maintain a keen interest there. Prakash has noted that there was a specific trading link between Surat and Mocha in the early eighteenth century, and Cowan's correspondence supported this.<sup>59</sup> The Company interest in Mocha during this period remained the supply of coffee. However, the difficulties which Cowan experienced there remained. Whilst Company affairs in Persia were in a sorry state, there was hope in January 1729 that the company would have its Persian rights restored. Dickinson was tasked with negotiating for the restoration of these rights. The Company demanded a rebate on all customs paid over the previous 15 years as a settlement for the losses they incurred.<sup>60</sup>

Despite the Company's withdrawal and the ongoing disputes, there was a constant demand for coffee. As such, the Company continually sent instructions for purchases.<sup>61</sup> By July 1729, Cowan reported that Dickinson had successfully negotiated a new firman with Mocha. The Company would, according to Cowan, have been in a stronger position if their rights were infringed upon in the future.<sup>62</sup> Cowan expected the Company to be customs free in Persia from that point onwards, and argued that the new firman was the first of its kind given to a European company.<sup>63</sup> The restoration of company rights in Persia presented two opportunities in addition to the restoration of the coffee trade in Cowan's mind. First, that the Company would have greater access to the Carmentia

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<sup>58</sup> Cowan to Hugh Henry, Bombay, 30 Aug. 1728, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2A, ff. 4v-5).

<sup>59</sup> Om Prakash, 'English Private Trade in the Western Indian Ocean, 1720-1740', *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, 50, No. 2/3, Spatial and Temporal Continuities of Merchant Networks in South Asia and the Indian Ocean (2007), 215.

<sup>60</sup> Cowan to Josias Wordsworth, Bombay, 6 Jan. 1729, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2A, f. 53).

<sup>61</sup> Court of Directors to President and Council at Bombay, London, 28 Feb. 1727, (BL, India Office Records, IOR/E/3/104, f. 107v); Court of Directors to Governor and Council at Bombay, London, 27 Feb. 1729, (f. 352); Court of Directors to President and Council at Bombay, London, 12 Mar. 1730, (BL, India Office Records, IOR/E/3/105, f. 115).

<sup>62</sup> Cowan to Edward Harrison, Bombay, 25 Jul. 1729, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2A, f. 77).

<sup>63</sup> Cowan to John Gould Jr., Bombay, 25 Jul. 1729, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2A, f. 82v).

wool trade which was superior quality to other varieties. Second, that Persia may in turn have served to be a market for finished English woollen goods.<sup>64</sup> Immediately, it can be seen how Cowan identified an opportunity for the Company which might also be exploited by his wider horizontal network. Whilst an emerging market might have been viewed officially as the preserve of the Company's public interest, the variety of opinion amongst directors and the poorly established rules and regulations complicated matters. This was due to the dependency on political factors working on networks in both London and India.<sup>65</sup>

In the early eighteenth century, England already had an established cloth export industry. As Charles Hill has noted, there was also a considerable degree of product specialisation combined with a vibrant export trade to colonies in Africa, the Americas and India.<sup>66</sup> Thus, the sourcing of high quality Carmentia wool, and the export of finished goods to Persia, displayed how the English and Indian Ocean commercial spheres had a degree of interdependence. Cowan's confidence in the Carmentia wool trade was justified as the directors instructed their servants in Persia source it.<sup>67</sup> Despite this encouraging start to Persian affairs under Cowan's tenure, there was an ongoing threat of revolution in Persia which made trade difficult. The Dutch presence at Mocha was also a factor in need of consideration. The Dutch continued their factory at Mocha for the 1730 season with the intention of inflating the price of coffee for their competitors.<sup>68</sup> Cowan opined that this was out of necessity due to the coffee at Java not

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<sup>64</sup> Cowan to John Gould Jr., Bombay, 6 Jan. 1729, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2A, f. 58).

<sup>65</sup> Mentz, *The English Gentleman Merchant*, p. 71.

<sup>66</sup> C.P. Hill, *British Economic and Social History: 1700-1982*, (Bath, 1985), pp. 21-2.

<sup>67</sup> Court of Directors to President and Council at Bombay, London, 12 Mar. 1730, (BL, India Office Records, IOR/E/3/105, f. 118); Court of Directors to President and Council at Bombay, London, 8 Dec. 1732, (BL, India Office Records, IOR/E/3/105, f. 270).

<sup>68</sup> Cowan to John Gould Jr., Bombay, 7 Jan. 1730, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2B, f. 15).

being of sufficient quality to satisfy European markets.<sup>69</sup> However, this was most likely attempted Dutch interference into market exchanges through trading under assumed names.<sup>70</sup>

Surat, as the preeminent trading centre on the west coast of India, had great influence over markets in the western Indian Ocean. At this time, large amounts of woollens were being sent to Surat on various private trading accounts, which in turn had the effect of keeping the price low. Indeed, the directors noted as far back as February 1727 that the sale of English cloth had been very poor.<sup>71</sup> This was in contrast to the export of iron goods to Surat which had not taken place for over two years, and as a result the price of iron goods rose.<sup>72</sup> The continued export of English woollens to Surat was made possible because the broker Loldas bought large quantities of woollens in an attempt to gain favour with the Company. The pitfall was that he was then unable to sell these goods on due to a lack of demand. He was then stuck with the goods after drawing heavily on Company credit to do so. Cowan alleged that Company trade at Surat was being hampered by instances such as this, with Loldas' debt levels having reached near unsustainable levels.<sup>73</sup> However, Cowan did not blame any Company servant, but consistently shifted the focus onto the careless management of Loldas.<sup>74</sup> This was interesting as Cowan chose to censure a native elite within his own network. This was likely due it having been more prudent to align with the vertical network of the Company

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<sup>69</sup> Cowan to Sir Matthew Decker, Bombay, 10 Jan. 1730, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2B, f. 25).

<sup>70</sup> Das Gupta, 'Some Problems of Reconstructing', p. 179.

<sup>71</sup> Court of Directors to President and Council at Bombay, London, 28 Feb. 1727, (BL, India Office Records, IOR/E/3/104, f. 106).

<sup>72</sup> Court of Directors to President and Council at Bombay, London, 12 Mar. 1730, (BL, India Office Records, IOR/E/3/105, f. 117).

<sup>73</sup> Cowan to Edward Harrison, Bombay, 24 Jan. 1731, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2B, ff. 81-81v).

<sup>74</sup> Cowan to William Phipps, Bombay, 6 Jan. 1730, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2B, f. 5); Cowan to Edward Harrison, Bombay, 10 Jan. 1730, (f. 23).



at this time, owing to damaging management of Loldas. From this it can be commented that Cowan had the awareness to be flexible with his network loyalties and was willing to conform to the Company's expectations when his own position was in danger.

The trading interests of the Company in western India during this time were pepper from the Malabar coast and cloth from Gujarat and Malabar. The interest in pepper represented a shift from earlier policy in which the Company were keen to reimpose themselves on the Indonesian pepper trade to retake market share from the Dutch.<sup>75</sup> The general malaise impacting trade at Surat also hit the entire west coast trading sphere as well, according to Cowan. In September 1728, he suggested that profits from across the region were very low and that a program of retrenchment had been undertaken in the presidency in response.<sup>76</sup> In Cowan's view, Company trade on the west coast was likely to have been a disappointment to the directors.<sup>77</sup> A fluctuation in the availability and price of goods was evidently at work at the time, and Cowan provided regular updates as such to the directors throughout 1729-30.<sup>78</sup> The period 1729-30 was also a good example of the spikes which can occur in market situations as a result of the supply and demand of goods. Cowan reported the likelihood of a solid supply of pepper from Anjenjo for 1729,<sup>79</sup> and then predicted a poorer showing for 1730.<sup>80</sup> For pepper in particular, Cowan noted that the Company had only a small outlay

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<sup>75</sup> Stern, *The Company State*, p. 73.

<sup>76</sup> Cowan to John Gould Jr., Bombay, 25 Sept. 1728, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2A, f. 25v).

<sup>77</sup> Cowan to Edward Harrison, Bombay, 10 Jan. 1730, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2B, f. 23).

<sup>78</sup> Cowan to John Gould Jr., Bombay, 25 Sept. 1728, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2A, f. 25v); Cowan to Charles Savage Jr., Bombay, 25 Sept. 1728, (f. 34); Cowan to Sir Matthew Decker, Bombay, 10 Jan. 1730, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2B, f. 26v).

<sup>79</sup> Cowan to Edward Harrison, Bombay, 3 Jan. 1729, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2A, f. 43v).

<sup>80</sup> Cowan to Sir Matthew Decker, Bombay, 10 Jan. 1730, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2B, f. 26v).

in western India but that it was, however, a sufficient amount to guarantee the supply each year.<sup>81</sup>

The difficulties encountered by Cowan in trade during this period were clearly linked to the state of affairs at Surat, and Gujarat at large. Again, Cowan saw the problems at Surat and the west coast as an element of Mughal decline in the region. As noted in chapter 2, however, the likely reality was something far more complicated. The political uncertainty and fluctuation in availability of goods described by Cowan rings true with Bayly's arguments on the changing economic and political society in the Mughal empire during the eighteenth century. This led to an increase in regionalization where new financial elites emerged, and the various actors at work sought to solidify their positions.<sup>82</sup> Ironically, the difficulties experienced by Cowan in procuring goods for the Company account seem not to have impacted his private trade to the same extent.<sup>83</sup> This is in line with Bayly and Subrahmanyam's arguments on the ability of English private traders to tap into local commercial networks over their rivals.<sup>84</sup> The ability of private traders such as Cowan to increase market share over native rivals also suggested that they were in a position to trade to their own private interest above the Company's,<sup>85</sup> as Cowan did at Mocha in the coffee trade. Thus, the regionalization of the Mughal empire presented yet another opportunity for privately interested traders to take advantage at

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<sup>81</sup> Cowan to Charles Savage Jr., Bombay, 2 Sept. 1729, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2A, f. 116).

<sup>82</sup> C.A. Bayly, *Imperial Meridian: The British Empire and the World, 1780-1830*, (New York, 1990), p. 32.

<sup>83</sup> This shall be examined more fully in chapter five.

<sup>84</sup> Sanjay Subrahmanyam & C.A. Bayly, 'Portfolio Capitalists and the Political Economy of Early Modern India', *The Indian Economic and Social Review*, 25, Vol. 4, (Dec. 1988), 421.

<sup>85</sup> Mentz, *The English Gentleman Merchant*, p. 72.

the expense of the Company's public interest, again also returning to the rational actor theory.<sup>86</sup>

Cowan's great concern for the Company's pepper supply was that the Dutch might have seized control over the island of Durmapatam from the king of Tellicherry, thereby gaining the means to dominate the west coast pepper trade.<sup>87</sup> The directors highlighted their concern about the Anjenjo pepper supply in February 1727, and hoped the chief there would supply a decent quantity and act in a manner to reduce costs.<sup>88</sup> As part of Cowan's retrenchments he sought to purge servants whom he felt had done a poor job. The most high profile of these was Mr. Adams, the chief of the Tellicherry factory.<sup>89</sup> Adams had, according to Cowan, racked up a large number of debts to native governments as he had continually drawn credit to bolster the ailing Company trade at Tellicherry. This concern had earlier been shared by the directors.<sup>90</sup>

In Adams' place Cowan appointed Mr. Braddyl<sup>91</sup> in 1729.<sup>92</sup> However, by 1730, Cowan concluded that Braddyl had not managed Tellicherry as well as Adams had.<sup>93</sup> This was despite the directors' report in February 1729 that they were pleased with the progress Braddyl had made there.<sup>94</sup> This was intriguing as it appears that Cowan went against the

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<sup>86</sup> Erikson, *Between Monopoly and Free Trade*, p. 108-9.

<sup>87</sup> Cowan to Edward Harrison, Bombay, 21 Oct. 1730, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2B, f. 56).

<sup>88</sup> Court of Directors to President and Council at Bombay, London, 28 Feb. 1727, (BL, India Office Records, IOR/E/3/104, ff. 109-114).

<sup>89</sup> Court of Directors to Governor and Council at Bombay, London, 27 Feb. 1729, (BL, India Office Records, IOR/E/3/104, f. 355v).

<sup>90</sup> Court of Directors to Governor and Council at Bombay, London, 7 Mar. 1729, (BL, India Office Records, IOR/E/3/104, f. 230v).

<sup>91</sup> 1718 - 8th in Council; 1719 - 6th in Council; 1721 - 2nd in Council/Accountant/Chief Justice; 1724, 1725, 1726, 1727, 1728, 1736, 1737 - 3rd in Council; 1734, 1735 - 4th in Council.

<sup>92</sup> Cowan to Edward Harrison, Bombay, 23 Sept. 1728, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2A, f. 15).

<sup>93</sup> Cowan to Edward Harrison, Bombay, 21 Oct. 1730, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2A, f. 56).

<sup>94</sup> Court of Directors to Governor and Council at Bombay, London, 27 Feb. 1729, (BL, India Office Records, IOR/E/3/104, f. 356).

grain of Company opinion. Whilst Cowan could point to his dissatisfaction with Braddyl's management, this was in contrast to the directors' views. From Cowan's behaviour regarding his straddling of both the horizontal and vertical networks structures, discussed above, it might be commented that Cowan was attempting to supplant the Company interest with his own private desires through the appointment of what he saw as a more favourable servant. However, based on Cowan's reaction to Braddyl's performance, it seems likely that this gambit failed. This represented a setback for Cowan as his shakeup had not only failed to retrench costs, but had also seen the supply of pepper at Tellicherry diminish still further. This was compounded by the directors' former high hopes for Tellicherry.<sup>95</sup> The alternative sourcing of pepper from the king of Travancore's land<sup>96</sup> was a boon for the directors. However, this was a supply which had doubts over its long-term viability due to the strong Dutch presence in the region,<sup>97</sup> and the many wars which were fought between them and Travancore.<sup>98</sup>

Anjenjo, having provided a poor supply of pepper, was also a cause for concern. As Stern has noted, Anjenjo was poorly regarded in the trading sense during the governorship of John Gayer and provided a sparse freighting of pepper even then.<sup>99</sup> The true value, according to Stern, was in its strategic location in putting pressure on the Dutch who claimed sovereign rights over south-eastern India.<sup>100</sup> Whilst the Dutch did not take Durmapatam, the concern showed the extent to which Cowan was aware of a possible

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> Kingdom of Travancore (1729-1949). Located in Tamil Nadu, South India. King Mathanda Varma (b. 1705, d. 7 Jul. 1758) ruled from his capital Padmanabhapuram between 1729 and 1758.

<sup>97</sup> Court of Directors to President and Council at Bombay, London, 12 Mar. 1730, (BL, India Office Records, IOR/E/3/105, f. 115v).

<sup>98</sup> Court of Directors to Governor and Council at Bombay, London, 7 Mar. 1729, (BL, India Office Records, IOR/E/3/104, f. 229).

<sup>99</sup> Stern, *The Company State*, p. 132.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

shift in trading influence through a strategic acquisition such as Durmapatam. This demonstrated that the pepper trade, like the coffee trade, was very vulnerable to outside stimuli and other market conditions. An example of this was when political unrest on the Malabar coast caused unease for traders. The response from rival ports was to drop their charges and prices in the hope of swaying trade away from the region, thereby taking advantage of the political situation for financial gain. This was a disappointment for the directors who had high hopes for both Anjenjo and Tellicherry during the years 1729-31.

However, on 3 March 1731 they expressed pleasure that their warehouses at Anjenjo and Tellicherry had been stocked so as to be able to command the market for the coming season.<sup>101</sup> Here it is important to note that merely having a great quantity of money and commodities to trade was not a guarantee of being able to purchase a great deal of goods, or to 'command the market' as the directors put it. The troubles at Surat were key to understanding Indian trade during this period where, as Bayly has highlighted, the financial landscape was evolving in favour of new regional politics.<sup>102</sup> The impact of the troubles there had knock-on effects for many other western Indian Ocean ports, including Anjenjo and Tellicherry. Surat was, after all, in an ideal position to serve as a midway station between the Middle East and the Far East, having also been able to put a great number of desirable commodities onto the market.<sup>103</sup> The Surat difficulties were also compounded by the political difficulties which were experienced

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<sup>101</sup> Court of Directors to President and Council at Bombay, London, 3 Mar. 1731, (BL, India Office Records, IOR/E/3/105, f. 241).

<sup>102</sup> Bayly, *Indian Society and the Making of the British Empire*, (Cambridge, 1988), p. 10.

<sup>103</sup> Prakash, 'English Private Trade', 215.

at Anjenjo and Tellicherry themselves, which in turn damaged both the stability of the region and the supply of goods.<sup>104</sup>

In terms of the cloth trade, it has been noted above that Cowan attested that the opening of the Persian market was an opportunity for sourcing Carmentia wool and potentially selling finished woollen products. However, it was in the supply of Indian cloth that a great deal of his time was taken up. This was conducted against the backdrop of the ongoing debate in England surrounding the implementation of the Calico Acts in 1700-1 and 1721 respectively.<sup>105</sup> As Jonathan Eacott has explained, the calico debates shifted the emphasis from using colonies as cultivators for raw materials to one of using them as re-export destinations for Asian manufactured goods.<sup>106</sup> Anjenjo was the Company's preferred location to source white patterned cloth and this was shipped back to England in large quantities, with Cowan having singled it out for specific praise.<sup>107</sup> Indeed, much of Cowan's correspondence on cloth was dedicated to the specific patterns and quantities ordered in response to instructions from London.<sup>108</sup>

The year 1729 saw a high demand in cloth as the directors instructed Cowan to enlarge the original investment outlay in providing a large variety of goods at Bombay.<sup>109</sup> As such, Anjenjo was likely a reliable source. A concern which was raised by Cowan,

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<sup>104</sup> Court of Directors to Governor and Council at Bombay, London, 7 Jun. 1732, (NL, India Office Records, IOR/E/3/105, f. 259).

<sup>105</sup> Audrey W. Douglas, 'Cotton Textiles in England: The East India Company's Attempt to Exploit Developments in Fashion 1660-1721', *Journal of British Studies*, 8, No. 2 (May, 1969), 28.

<sup>106</sup> Jonathan Eacott, 'Making an Imperial Compromise: The Calico Acts, the Atlantic Colonies, and the Structure of the British Empire', *William and Mary Quarterly*, 69, No. 4 (October 2012), 734.

<sup>107</sup> Cowan to Henry Lyall, Bombay, 6 Jan. 1729, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2A, f. 51).

<sup>108</sup> Court of Directors to President and Council at Bombay, London, 28 Feb. 1727, (BL, India Office Records, IOR/E/3/104, f. 107v); Court of Directors to Governor and Council at Bombay, London, 7 Mar. 1729, (f. 229); Court of Directors to Governor and Council at Bombay, London, 27 Feb. 1729, (f. 353).

<sup>109</sup> Court of Directors to Governor and Council at Bombay, London, 27 Feb. 1729, (BL, India Office Records, IOR/E/3/104, ff. 364v-365v).

however, was that due to the great amounts of cloth which were being purchased at Anjenjo and brought to Bombay and Surat, it was highly likely that English woollens would perform badly during the 1731 season.<sup>110</sup> This kept cloth prices at a tolerable level at Surat on the one hand which was good for the Company profit margin, but on the other it meant that the English export of finished woollen goods was badly hit. This was a critical point for the Company as a great deal of pressure had been put on the India trade back in Britain after it became highly politicised in the 1690s. English weavers and dyers campaigned for a restriction on the amount of calicoes and silks which could be imported into Britain.<sup>111</sup> Numerous acts of legislation were introduced to raise customs on plain calicoes between 1701 and 1712, and a further act in 1721 put a total ban on the wearing of calico goods.<sup>112</sup> The solution was to increase the export margin on English produced woollens. The market at Surat proved to be a convenient outlet throughout the 1720s, with Loldas having taken approximately 1,000 bales each season.<sup>113</sup> However, with the economic slowdown at Surat, further markets were needed. This made Cowan's Carmentia link potentially lucrative.

The issue Cowan took with Anjenjo was that the government there was allegedly unstable, and as such the flow of commerce was often impeded by local politics. Again, this was likely linked to the transformation of ruling elites and the rise of local social groups to regional power.<sup>114</sup> This was the case in 1721 when the Company chief of Anjenjo was killed by native inhabitants after a row over the price of pepper.<sup>115</sup> A change

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<sup>110</sup> Cowan to William Phipps, Bombay, 6 Jan. 1730, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2B, f. 5v).

<sup>111</sup> Julian Hoppit, *A Land of Liberty? England: 1689-1727*, (Oxford, 2000), p. 275.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>113</sup> Cowan to Edward Harrison, Bombay, 24 Jan. 1731, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2B, f. 82).

<sup>114</sup> Bayly, *Indian Society*, p. 9.

<sup>115</sup> Stern, *The Company State*, p. 177.

in Anjenjo's government in 1728 gave Cowan hope that the new administration would allow for a more efficient trading mechanism.<sup>116</sup> Such expansion into the Indian cloth market also gave English weavers significant cause for complaint. In response they blamed the Company for such things as the collapse of the English economy, the moral downfall of Englishmen and the fall of Christendom in general. The purchase of these foreign goods was suggested to be part of a plot to subvert Christian society and ruin England.<sup>117</sup> During the period 1729-30 there were, however, also many problems with the supply of cloth for Cowan to deal with.

The first of these was with the native weavers who were viewed as stubborn and unwilling to adapt to new patterns which were ordered, thus causing a particular delay at Surat.<sup>118</sup> The weavers in question were those employed directly by the Company in their own factories, rather than those of a third-party vendor. This represented the change in approach of European companies in the seventeenth to eighteenth centuries, whereby attempts to cut wholesale brokers out of trade were made to increase the margin of profit.<sup>119</sup> However, the core issue was the death of the company chitty at Anjenjo which led to a severe delay in the supply of cloth. Though Cowan noted that the chitty's son had undertaken to fulfil the cloth order, something which the directors took a keen interest in,<sup>120</sup> there was already a significant delay and ultimately a failure of

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<sup>116</sup> Cowan to Edward Harrison, Bombay, 23 Sept. 1728, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2A, f. 15).

<sup>117</sup> Eacott, 'Making an Imperial Compromise', 739.

<sup>118</sup> Cowan to John Eccleston, Bombay, 2 Sept. 1729, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2A, f. 123v).

<sup>119</sup> Deepak Lal, *The Hindu Equilibrium Vol. 1: Cultural Stability and Economic Stagnation. India c. 1500 BC – AD 1980*, (Oxford, 1988), p. 92.

<sup>120</sup> Court of Directors to President and Council at Bombay, London, 12 Mar. 1730, (BL, India Office Records, IOR/E/3/105, f. 117v).



supply.<sup>121</sup> Cowan complained in his letter to Sir Matthew Decker that whilst the entirety of the western India trade was poor, that of Anjenjo was particularly bad.<sup>122</sup>

The picture painted has been one of disappointment for the Company. Though the directors maintained an optimistic correspondence with Bombay and issued renewed instructions for trade after many setbacks, the period 1728-31 fell short of expectations. Failures in Anjenjo and Tellicherry were accompanied by political uncertainty in Persia and the Mughal Empire which distorted the regular market mechanisms and made the purchase of goods increasingly difficult. The Company did have one asset which, perhaps unwittingly, kept the trade of the region moving along. This was the body of servants in India which engaged in their own private trade, in conjunction with the existing trade of native merchants. By operating private trading accounts and continually investing in voyages, as Cowan in particular did, they kept goods moving and allowed other areas of Company interest, such as the Far East market, to develop.

Bonaventure Swai has commented that one of the great strengths of the Company was its ability to adapt to changing circumstances in the attempt to control trade. This was what set them apart from their competitors, according to Swai.<sup>123</sup> This strength of private trade will be revisited in chapter five, when a consolidated account of Cowan's investments will be given.

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<sup>121</sup> Cowan to Court of Directors, Bombay, 2 Apr. 1730, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2B, ff. 48v-49).

<sup>122</sup> Cowan to Sir Matthew Decker, Bombay, 20 Jan. 1731, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2B, f. 127v).

<sup>123</sup> Bonaventure Swai, 'East India Company and Moplah Merchants of Tellicherry: 1694-1800', *Social Scientist*, 8, No. 1 (Aug., 1979), 61.

## II - The Bombay Military and Power Projection

The extent to which the Company was a military power in the western Indian Ocean during Cowan's time is a complicated topic. It has been highlighted above that the Bombay garrison was limited,<sup>124</sup> and that the town had a strong fort with eight bastioned walls.<sup>125</sup> Due to the long distance from Britain and the limited land area which was occupied by the Company, it was impossible to maintain a strong standing army. Put simply, the Company was no match for the native powers on land and had to be content with consolidating its position. Bombay was, according to Cowan, surrounded by false friends and should not, under any circumstances, make land incursions.<sup>126</sup> As a result of this, two distinct strategies for protecting Bombay were utilised. These were the use of naval vessels and land-based fortifications. Once again, this linked to Watson's arguments on the symbiosis of offence and defence.<sup>127</sup>

The Company did not see its primary role as having been a military one early on, in contrast to the Dutch and Portuguese.<sup>128</sup> This helps to explain the unwillingness of the Company to invest in military affairs over trade. However, despite this hesitancy, they ultimately committed to a programme of military spending. Bombay was well positioned to take advantage of trade routes in the western Indian Ocean, but having

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<sup>124</sup> The garrison contained one regiment of 700 men, of which 120 were European. This was supplemented by four companies of native sepoys.

<sup>125</sup> Cowan to Hugh Henry, Bombay, 30 Aug. 1728, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2A, f. 5).

<sup>126</sup> Cowan to Henry Lyall, Bombay, 25 Sept. 1728, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2A, f. 41v).

<sup>127</sup> I.B. Watson, 'Fortifications and the "Idea" of Force in Early East India Company Relations with India', *Past and Present*, No. 88 (Aug., 1980), 71.

<sup>128</sup> Erikson, *Between Monopoly and Free Trade*, p. 12.

been an island archipelago it was dependent on sea trade for basic needs.<sup>129</sup> This was sorely felt as Bombay was not only faced with a growing number of native threats, but also had to deal with weaknesses which had developed. All of which was framed against the increased uncertainty of political stability in the Mughal, Persian and Ottoman empires, which saw regional powers increasingly seeking dominance over each other.<sup>130</sup> All of these issues will be dealt with below, though the discussion of Bombay's position and relative strength is perhaps the most prudent place to begin as a way of providing greater context to the overall topic.

In response to early threats, Company strategy had been to secure stronghold positions and to fortify them. These were then used as defensive bastions and tools of politicised power projection against native powers. This was practical, but did not offer flexibility in both offence and defence. It was a static feature which could easily be avoided. Indeed, this was a point which Cowan highlighted and argued that no more fortifications should be planned or completed as the cost of maintenance was already great.<sup>131</sup> The solution was to create and maintain a maritime force which could be used to patrol the waters of western India as a defensive screen, whilst also being capable of interrupting native trade. This gave additional flexibility to Bombay by allowing the naval force to be deployed as and when it was required, thereby making the Company military deterrent more efficient in its application. Watson has noted that although the initial role of Company fortifications was that of an entirely defensive construct, the use of force was, however, inevitable due to the growing strains on relationships in the mercantilist

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<sup>129</sup> Amar Farooqui, 'Urban Development in a Colonial Situation: Early Nineteenth Century Bombay', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 31, No. 40 (Oct. 5, 1996), 2747.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, 2748.

<sup>131</sup> Cowan to Henry Lyall, Bombay, 25 Sept. 1728, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2A, f. 42).

age.<sup>132</sup> This tallies with Cowan's opinions which revolved on how the Company should project power as it moved further into the eighteenth century.

The distinction must be made here between the heavily built Indiamen vessels which were akin to floating fortresses, and the lighter galleys which were employed by the Company as cruisers. The large Indiamen vessels which travelled between Europe and India were costly to build and could not be constructed in India due to the lack of facilities and expertise. With this in mind, the Company had to rely on lighter vessels such as galleys and grabs for their Indian fleets. These vessels could be built at ports such as Surat, and Bombay when the new dockyard was completed, and thus provided a more convenient outlet for their needs. However, the cost of building vessels still needed approval. In September 1728, Cowan advised the directors that Bombay's marine force was badly in need of replenishment and that he desired permission for replacements to be built in India.<sup>133</sup> The directors' response suggested that building in India was simply not cost effective and that new builds were far cheaper to construct in Britain, and to then ship to India for assembly. This was the method ultimately adopted, and two new galleys were built in sections and shipped to Bombay for fitting out there.<sup>134</sup> The former practice was that galleys or grabs were often built in India due to the plentiful supply of teak in the historic Indian shipbuilding region on the Malabar

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<sup>132</sup> Watson, 'Fortifications and the "Idea" of Force', 70.

<sup>133</sup> Cowan to Edward Harrison, Bombay, 23 Sept. 1728, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2A, f. 16); Cowan to Josias Wordsworth, Bombay, 25 Sept. 1728, (f. 29v); Cowan to Henry Lyall, Bombay, 25 Sept. 1728, (f. 41v).

<sup>134</sup> Court of Directors to Governor and Council at Bombay, London, 27 Feb. 1729, (BL, India Office Records, IOR/E/3/104, f. 349v).

Coast.<sup>135</sup> However, by March 1730, the directors advised Bombay of their changed opinion.<sup>136</sup>

Despite the need for new galleys, Cowan described the Bombay marine as having 3 galleys, 2 grabs and 6 gallevats in August 1728.<sup>137</sup> He felt that this force was capable of holding back native pirates but would have been no match for a professional European force. This concern was highlighted numerous times by Cowan when he voiced concern that a potential war in Europe might lead to the French sending privateers east to plunder Indian trading routes.<sup>138</sup> At this point in time Britain was at war with Spain and there was a fear that France might have taken advantage of the situation in the colonies, thus exposing British overseas interests such as Bombay to French aggression.<sup>139</sup> This was in addition to the quarrelling which had gone on between Britain and the Holy Roman Empire, with the Treaty of Seville having latterly restored trading privileges to Britain which had been lost during the tension with the Empire.<sup>140</sup> However, the directors believed that the force was strong enough to defend Bombay.<sup>141</sup> This was despite the continued aggression of Angré and the disagreement of Cowan and his network. The difference of opinion between Cowan and the directors can be seen as a

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<sup>135</sup> Prakash, 'English Private Trade', 224.

<sup>136</sup> Court of Directors to President and Council at Bombay, London, 12 Mar. 1730, (BL, India Office Records, IOR/E/3/105, f. 116).

<sup>137</sup> Cowan to Hugh Henry, Bombay, 30 Aug. 1728, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2A, f. 5).

<sup>138</sup> Cowan to Edward Harrison, Bombay, 3 Jan. 1729, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2A, f. 43v); Cowan to John Gould Jr., Bombay, 6 Jan. 1729, (f. 60).

<sup>139</sup> Anglo-Spanish War (1727-29). Concluded with the Treaty of Seville, 9 Nov. 1729.

<sup>140</sup> Basil Williams, *The Oxford History of England: The Whig Supremacy, 1714-1760*, (Oxford, 1962), pp. 200-1.

<sup>141</sup> Court of Directors to Governor and Council at Bombay, London, 7 Mar. 1729, (BL, India Office Records, IOR/E/3/104, f. 228).

manifestation of the disconnect between Company authority and London and the actor on the ground in India, as articulated by Mentz.<sup>142</sup>

The Bombay marine was used in a number of different roles, depending on the needs of the Company at the time. There was the defensive or military aspect, but the Bombay marine also fulfilled a commercial function. European companies often sought to sell passes to merchants, with the consequences of not buying such a pass often having ended in the seizure of vessels or goods by Company shipping. Cowan, as part of his argument to the directors regarding the importance of maintaining an effective marine force at Bombay, reminded them that it was the Bombay marine which enforced the pass system on the west coast. Without a well-equipped force, he argued, it would have been much more difficult to ensure compliance from commercial shipping.<sup>143</sup> The Bombay marine also filled in for Company freighters on occasions when all of the available tonnage was used. In this way the marine force offered a great deal of utility to the Company, but also the potential for captains to make money through their own private trade. This was greater enabled through a commission-based allowance which was renegotiated by Cowan in the early years of his governorship.<sup>144</sup>

The cruisers were well employed during Cowan's tenure, with the blockade of Angré's island stronghold at Kolaba in 1728 a noteworthy action.<sup>145</sup> Despite Cowan's feeling that there was a weakness in the Bombay marine, he was confident that without the Bombay

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<sup>142</sup> Mentz, *The English Gentleman Merchant*, p. 71.

<sup>143</sup> Cowan to Henry Lyall, Bombay, 25 Sept. 1728, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2A, f. 41v).

<sup>144</sup> Cowan to Josias Wordsworth, Bombay, 10 Jan. 1730, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2B, f. 32); Cowan to Edward Harrison, Bombay, 24 Jan. 1731, (f. 77v).

<sup>145</sup> Cowan to Josias Wordsworth, Bombay, 25 Sept. 1728, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2A, f. 29v); Cowan to William Phipps, Bombay, Feb. 1730, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2B, f. 8).

marine Angré would have been unstoppable.<sup>146</sup> Such a fear might have come to fruition in 1729 as Angré was fitting out 15 galleevats, with each able to carry 100 men. This was against the backdrop of him sending probing missions to Bombay in January 1729.<sup>147</sup> In retaliation for this, Cowan ordered that three of Angré's vessels loading salt at Bombay should be impounded and sold off to the highest bidder. Cowan's action over the salt freighters was in line with his assertion that it was important to stand up to Angré lest he think that Bombay's defences were vulnerable.<sup>148</sup>

However, the seizing of these vessels was not without consequence as the Sidi of Rajapore demanded that they be handed over to him as they held his pass. This this was something which Cowan refused to do.<sup>149</sup> The fact that he alleged the vessels would sell for between 5,000 and 6,000 rupees was also a matter of serious consideration.<sup>150</sup> However, the reality of the sales was a great disappointment to the directors. They expressed surprise at the great disparity between the price estimated and the price received, which was 3,650 rupees.<sup>151</sup> This was an excellent example of how the vertical and horizontal patronage structures at play in the Company nexus could collide. Cowan had seen an opportunity for self-advancement, while claiming Company interest, in the seizing of the salt freighters through his own private information network. This returns to Mentz's arguments on the use of information sharing networks by private traders.<sup>152</sup> However, Cowan miscalculated both the value and political fallout from the

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<sup>146</sup> Cowan to Henry Lyall, Bombay, 25 Sept. 1728, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2A, f. 41v).

<sup>147</sup> Cowan to John Gould Jr., Bombay, 6 Jan. 1729, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2A, f. 65v).

<sup>148</sup> Cowan to John Gould Jr., Bombay, 6 Jan. 1729, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2A, ff. 66-66v).

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>150</sup> Cowan to John Gould Jr., Bombay, 6 Jan. 1729, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2A, f. 67).

<sup>151</sup> Court of Directors to President and Council at Bombay, London, 12 Mar. 1730, (BL, India Office Records, IOR/E/3/105, f. 115).

<sup>152</sup> Mentz, *The English Gentleman Merchant*, p. 81.

impounding. Thus, his private hopes for praise, and likely a cut of the proceeds, was dashed by the public censure of the Company.

The death of Angré in spring 1729 gave Cowan the hope that there would be a power struggle between his sons and thus give Bombay a respite, despite the directors' caution on this point.<sup>153</sup> However, this did not come about immediately as both continued fitting out vessels throughout January 1730.<sup>154</sup> Desai wrote that Angré's warlike legacy was continued by his descendants until their final defeat in 1755 by a combined English and Maratha force.<sup>155</sup> This was balanced by Cowan's report that both brothers were incredibly jealous of one another and had a mutual fear of the Sidi, who had recently moved his fleet further down the coast without warning.<sup>156</sup> This atmosphere of uncertainty was compounded by Souji Angré, Angré's eldest son, having written to Cowan to seek peace in January 1730. Cowan did not, however, take this offer seriously though and remarked that although it was unlikely anything would be agreed, it would keep Souji amused until the new galleys arrived from England.<sup>157</sup>

This was a practical step for Cowan. Angré's sons were rearming their fleet and the Company was in no position to openly challenge them. If Cowan refused Souji's approach it would have led to an escalation in hostility. This was something which Cowan's superiors in London would not have found acceptable. From the directors' perspective, they wrote on 3 March 1731 that they were greatly concerned by the

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<sup>153</sup> Court of Directors to President and Council at Bombay, London, 12 Mar. 1730, (BL, India Office Records, IOR/E/3/105, f. 119).

<sup>154</sup> Cowan to John Gould Jr., Bombay, 7 Jan. 1730, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2B, f. 17v).

<sup>155</sup> W.S. Desai, *Bombay and the Marathas up to 1774*, (New Delhi, 1970), pp. 47-8.

<sup>156</sup> Cowan to EIC Court of Directors, Bombay, 20 Jan. 1731, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2B, ff. 95v-96).

<sup>157</sup> Cowan to EIC Court of Directors, Bombay, 20 Jan. 1731, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2B, f. 100v).



growing piracies of Angré's sons, whose actions were thought to have been a continuation of their father's approach.<sup>158</sup> This concern was echoed in their letter of 7 June 1732.<sup>159</sup> Their hope for resolution was not from peace negotiations which may or may not have taken place, but rather from the hope that the new galleys sent would 'curb their insolence.'<sup>160</sup> Cowan also expressed his opinion that peace with the sons of Angré could never have been achieved due to the Company's desire to secure reparations for damages done to Company shipping and interests.<sup>161</sup> Again, the private opinion on the ground not quite aligning with the public desire of the Company.

In addition to the utilisation of the Bombay marine Cowan also showed that he could be flexible in his approach. Rather than abandoning the use of static fortifications entirely, Cowan advised that a series of strong houses should be made use of as opposed large scale fortifications.<sup>162</sup> These would, according to Cowan, have provided a defensible position for Company servants in case of attack and would have been much cheaper to maintain than a larger structure. Cowan's belief that both the Bombay marine and the usage of strong houses could have been used was interesting as it pointed towards a more fluid system of defence and power projection. In addition to this change in approach, Cowan also increased the military presence on Company shipping, and ordered Company soldiers to embark on all Company grabs until the threat had been

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<sup>158</sup> Court of Directors to President and Council at Bombay, London, 3 Mar. 1731, (BL, India Office Records, IOR/E/3/105, f. 235v).

<sup>159</sup> Court of Directors to Governor and Council at Bombay, London, 7 Jun. 1732, (BL, India Office Records, IOR/E/3/105, f. 256v).

<sup>160</sup> Court of Directors to President and Council at Bombay, London, 3 Mar. 1731, (BL, India Office Records, IOR/E/3/105, f. 236).

<sup>161</sup> Cowan to Court of Directors, Bombay, 20 Jan. 1731, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2B, f. 100v).

<sup>162</sup> Cowan to Henry Lyall, Bombay, 25 Sept. 1728, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2A, f. 42); Cowan to Edward Harrison, Bombay, 10 Jan. 1730, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2B, f. 22v).

dealt with.<sup>163</sup> Cowan suggested that he expected the level of aggression from Angré's sons to continue rising until the Company had managed to seize one of his grabs,<sup>164</sup> with the posting of soldiers on Company shipping a step towards accomplishing this goal. The difficulty in carrying this out was that Bombay suffered from a lack of European soldiers and sailors at this time, with even the drafts from England providing a poor showing due to the mortality rates on shipping to India.<sup>165</sup> Cowan's solution in the short term was to transfer European soldiers from the Company factory at Canton in order to bolster the Bombay garrison.<sup>166</sup>

The wear and tear which the vessels of the Bombay marine sustained in their almost continual active service, as well as the ongoing lack of European sailors to man them, was something which Cowan was keen to point out to his superiors and petition for assistance with.<sup>167</sup> The want of sailors also ran in tandem with the Royal Navy's demand for able-seamen during the Anglo-Spanish War, thus the majority of unemployed sailors were presented with navy employment rather than having to travel to India for work. The directors acknowledged this issue in February 1729 and pledged to annually send a body of soldiers who could also fulfil roles as sailors if needed.<sup>168</sup> Further, replacement galleys were sought, and eventually sent, from England.<sup>169</sup> The original galleys were not

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<sup>163</sup> Edward Harrison, Bombay, 10 Jan. 1730, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2B, f. 24).

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>165</sup> Cowan to Henry Lyall, Bombay, 25 Jul. 1729, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2A, f. 74).

<sup>166</sup> Edward Harrison, Bombay, 10 Jan. 1730, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2B, f. 24v).

<sup>167</sup> Cowan to Henry Lyall, Bombay, 25 Sept. 1728, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2A, f. 41v).

<sup>168</sup> Court of Directors to Governor and Council at Bombay, London, 27 Feb. 1729, (BL, India Office Records, IOR/E/3/104, f. 358).

<sup>169</sup> Cowan to Edward Harrison, Bombay, 23 Sept. 1728, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2A, f. 16); Cowan to Henry Lyall, Bombay, 25 Sept. 1728, (f. 41v); Court of Directors to President and Council at Bombay, London, 27 Feb. 1729, (BL India Office Records, IOR/E/3/104, ff. 349v-350).

built to last according to Cowan, and had begun to act 'crazy' as a result of constant use and damage.<sup>170</sup>

Cowan felt that if the native powers suspected a weakness on the part of the Company's maritime force, they would soon attempt to probe Bombay and try to assert dominance over the English. The Bombay marine was, as such, a prestige piece which could be used to intimidate.<sup>171</sup> The respect which had been hard won from the native powers was, as Cowan noted, far easier to maintain than to win back.<sup>172</sup> Indeed, Cowan alleged that the regaining of Company privileges in Persia to be partly due to the impression which English galleys at Gombroon made on the governor, Zabardas Caun.<sup>173</sup> Despite the great trust placed in the marine force to protect Company interests in the western Indian Ocean, the Bombay council was continually pressured by London to reduce marine charges.<sup>174</sup>

By 1733, Bombay's security situation had changed entirely. Cowan advised Captain Thomas Bronsden<sup>175</sup> on 6 January 1734 of the danger which Bombay faced due to the growing strength of Angré's youngest son. Cowan stated the need for two replacement galleys to be sent out from England to replace those already in service at Bombay.<sup>176</sup> Cowan asserted that he believed trade in the western Indian Ocean was simply not safe without effective cruiser escorts.<sup>177</sup> This was despite the role the Company played in

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<sup>170</sup> Cowan to Henry Lyall, Bombay, 25 Sept. 1728, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2A, f. 41v).

<sup>171</sup> Cowan to Sir Matthew Decker, Bombay, 3 Jan. 1729, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2A, f. 46).

<sup>172</sup> Cowan to Edward Harrison, Bombay, 25 Jul. 1729, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2A, f. 76).

<sup>173</sup> Cowan to Edward Harrison, Bombay, 3 Jan. 1729, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2A, f. 43).

<sup>174</sup> Court of Directors to Governor and Council at Bombay, London, 7 Mar. 1729, (BL, India Office Records, IOR/E/3/104, ff. 227v-228).

<sup>175</sup> 1724 – EIC Captain.

<sup>176</sup> Cowan to Captain Thomas Bronsden, Bombay, 6 Jan. 1734, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2D, f. 73v).

<sup>177</sup> Cowan to Captain Thomas Bronsden, Bombay, 6 Jan. 1734, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2D, f. 74).

selling passes.<sup>178</sup> If the native powers were not impressed by either Bombay's static fortifications or marine force, the Company was no longer a power to be feared. The growing strength of Angré and the uncertainty of affairs between the Sou Raja and the Sidi of Rajapore meant that the existing galleys at Bombay were placed under a growing strain. The flashpoint came in February 1734, when Cowan reported a naval engagement at Surat to Captain David Hunter.<sup>179</sup> In his report, Cowan mentioned that the Bombay bomb ketch was attacked by the Surat fleet but had managed to repulse the attack and had even taken prizes.<sup>180</sup> This was a solid victory, but the background to the incident meant that further danger was not far away.

By September 1734, Cowan confided in William Phipps that the Bombay marine was badly weakened and in need of reinforcement. Of the three serving galleys, Cowan noted that one had been sold, one broken up, and one was in urgent need of repairs.<sup>181</sup> The marine force, which had formerly been the cornerstone of Bombay's defensive policy, was thus reduced to a shadow of its former self. This weakened state was partially what led Cowan to issue instructions for the building of additional static defences in the Bombay harbour in August 1733.<sup>182</sup> This was, however, a policy which he was confident would not be approved of in London due to the costs involved.<sup>183</sup> Cowan was proven correct in this matter as the directors expressed concern in March

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<sup>178</sup> Stern, "'A Politie of Civill & Military Power': Political Thought and the Late Seventeenth-Century Foundations of the East India Company-State', *Journal of British Studies*, 47, No. 2 (Apr., 2008), 274.

<sup>179</sup> 1721 – EIC Captain.

<sup>180</sup> Cowan to Captain David Hunter, Bombay, 3 Feb. 1734, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2D, f. 116).

<sup>181</sup> Cowan to William Phipps, Parel, 4 Sept. 1734, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2D, f. 132v).

<sup>182</sup> Cowan to Sir Matthew Decker, Bombay, 12 Aug. 1733, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2D, ff. 20-20v); Cowan to Josias Wordsworth, Bombay, 18 Aug. 1733, (f. 28).

<sup>183</sup> Cowan to Edward Harrison, Bombay, 14 Apr. 1733, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2D, f. 17v).

1733 that the military costs at Bombay were far too high.<sup>184</sup> This was an interesting scenario as Cowan can be seen to have acted at least partially in the public interest by providing greater static security at Bombay, though his own private trading interests and personal safety also likely factored into his decisions. However, his actions were seen by the Company as not in the 'public' interest due to the high costs involved. This highlighted the difference between the interest of public security at Bombay and the specific Company interest where the balance sheet was all important. It also highlights the interesting dynamic surrounding the need to balance local autonomy and dependence on the metropolis with regard to authority, politics and capital.<sup>185</sup>

The discussion regarding the merits, or cost-effectiveness, of either static fortifications or a fluid naval force was an interesting one that reflected a great deal on what manner of power the English at Bombay saw themselves as. The shift towards static fortifications was a more defensive action, and was thus a step away from the aggressive tactics of naval interdiction through use of the Bombay marine. It was also likely that Cowan and his council at Bombay realised that naval power was potentially one dimensional, despite its flexibility. A naval force could defend possessions, but could not necessarily intimidate land powers such as the Mughals. This ties in with J.R. Jones' argument that whilst naval supremacy could not necessarily bring victory, it could prevent ultimate defeat.<sup>186</sup> As such, the decision by Cowan might be viewed as an acknowledgement of Bombay's vulnerability in the face of increased Maratha and Mughal threats.

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<sup>184</sup> Court of Directors to President and Council at Bombay, London, 1 Mar. 1733, (BL, India Office Records, IOR/E/3/105, f. 361v).

<sup>185</sup> Mentz, *The English Gentleman Merchant*, p. 87.

<sup>186</sup> J.R. Jones, *Britain and the World: 1649-1815*, (Glasgow, 1980), pp. 18-9.

The increased static fortifications thus acted as both a defensive screen against assault as well as a means of power projection in line with Watson's arguments on early Company strategy in India.<sup>187</sup> The growing boldness of Angré's sons during this period was partly to do with the death of the Sidi of Rajapore and the subsequent civil war which emerged in his former territories. The Sidi's eldest son was supplanted by the regional nobility in favour of his seven year old brother who was easier to control.<sup>188</sup> The resulting civil war benefitted Angré's sons by removing the threat of the Sidi acting as a check on Maratha power, as had always been the case previously.<sup>189</sup> The death of the Sidi was immediately seized upon by them as it was reported that they attacked Rajapore in May, barely a month after Cowan first reported the Sidi's death.<sup>190</sup> Such an attack could not have happened previously due to Angré's recognition of the Sidi as his liege-lord, according to Cowan.<sup>191</sup> Even still, this was believed by Cowan to be more out of fear than loyalty. The breakdown of the regional power structure in which the Sidi kept Angré and his sons in line to balance Maratha-Mughal power locally led Cowan to believe in August 1733 that a Mughal civil war was likely.<sup>192</sup> This was likely also part of the wider regionalized changes taking place in the Mughal empire, tying in with Bayly's arguments.<sup>193</sup>

The attack on Rajapore also led to concerns at Bombay and in the Sidi's former territories that Angré's sons were planning a more aggressive strategy. This threat was increased due to the fact that they had, by August 1733, gained control of the Sidi's

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<sup>187</sup> Watson, 'Fortifications and the "Idea" of Force,' 73.

<sup>188</sup> Cowan to Sir William Phipps, Parel, 14 Apr. 1733, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2D, f. 9).

<sup>189</sup> Cowan to Edward Harrison, Bombay, Aug. 1733, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2D, f. 15).

<sup>190</sup> Cowan to Sir William Phipps, Parel, 14 Apr. 1733, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2D, f. 9).

<sup>191</sup> Cowan to Edward Harrison, Bombay, Aug. 1733, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2D, f. 15).

<sup>192</sup> Ibid.

<sup>193</sup> Bayly, *Imperial Meridian*, p. 32.

former fleet.<sup>194</sup> In response to the renewed threat, the former Sidi's council and Surat government sought an increase in direct military cooperation with Bombay. The former Sidi's servants reasoned that Angré's sons would have been in a strong position to seize a large number of Sidi garrisons in Maharashtra, thus potentially being a strong threat on land as well as at sea. The solution was to offer the Company sovereignty over a number of forts, rather than simply allow Angré's sons to seize them without challenge.<sup>195</sup> This was a sensible approach to have taken, though Cowan concluded that if the Company took up the garrisons they would be an expensive burden to support when Bombay itself was still lacking provisions.<sup>196</sup> The response from Surat was more intriguing. In August 1733, the Surat government suggested that Bombay enter negotiations with the Mughal court to take up a tanka<sup>197</sup> of the emperor.<sup>198</sup>

The basis of these negotiations was that Bombay would take a jagir payment of Surat in exchange for protecting the port from Maratha attacks.<sup>199</sup> On the face of things, this was a sensible arrangement as it would have given the Company both funds and favour with the Mughal Emperor. Cowan estimated that for twenty years the Company had stood alone against Angré, and that this tanka agreement represented a level of military cooperation which had never been possible until then, despite many predecessors having desired it.<sup>200</sup> The predecessor(s) in question was likely a reference to Samuel Annesley who, according to Stern, had previously considered taking a Mughal jagir and

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<sup>194</sup> Cowan to Edward Harrison, Bombay, Aug. 1733, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2D, f. 16).

<sup>195</sup> Cowan to Edward Harrison, Bombay, Aug. 1733, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2D, f. 15).

<sup>196</sup> Cowan to William Phipps, Bombay, 18 Aug. 1733, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2D, f. 37).

<sup>197</sup> A payment made to an individual, military authority, or econo-politic being in return for services to be provided. Also represented as a 'jagir' arrangement. In the case of Surat, this was to be the defence of Surat against outside attack.

<sup>198</sup> Cowan to Edward Harrison, Bombay, Aug. 1733, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2D, f. 15v).

<sup>199</sup> Cowan to Edward Harrison, Bombay, Aug. 1733, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2D, ff. 15v-16).

<sup>200</sup> Ibid.

using Company vessels as a pseudo navy for the Mughals.<sup>201</sup> The negotiations must also be framed against the former demand of the Mughal Emperor for convoy protection of his vessels from the Company when faced with English pirates and Maratha raiders.<sup>202</sup> This pointed to a recognition of the Company as having been a regional naval power.

In August 1733, Henry Lowther was instructed by Cowan to negotiate with the Surat government representative, Telly Beg Caun,<sup>203</sup> for the proposed Tanka.<sup>204</sup> This was despite Lowther's initial surprise at Cowan's instruction to negotiate.<sup>205</sup> Lowther's surprise was perhaps based in an understanding that the Company hierarchy would not have approved of such a venture, despite the seemingly positive opportunity for Company affairs locally. If this is viewed as another example of the vertical versus horizontal network dichotomy, Cowan's decision to negotiate becomes clearer. A tanka agreement would have led to a considerable cash payment coming into the Bombay presidency, though it is unclear if this would have been retained by the Bombay council or repatriated to London. However, the dual benefits of financial gain and increased safety for local sea traffic were factors which would have benefitted prominent private traders within the Company establishment in the western presidency such as Cowan and Lowther. Whilst the tanka negotiations may have benefitted the Company hierarchy's interests, Cowan's desire for it was likely grounded in the benefits which could be gleaned by his own cadre of network connections. In this way, he was likely engaging the Company's corporate sovereignty over Indian affairs to benefit his own interests. As such, his actions might again be considered a good example of a rational

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<sup>201</sup> Stern, "A Politie of Civill & Military Power", 254.

<sup>202</sup> Ibid., 253.

<sup>203</sup> Teg Bakht Khan was the nephew of the kellerdar of Surat, and a likely associate of Mahmud Ally.

<sup>204</sup> Cowan to Josias Wordsworth, Bombay, 18 Aug. 1733, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2D, f. 29).

<sup>205</sup> Ibid.



actor operating within a horizontal network structure.<sup>206</sup> The key point, however, was that it was the vertical hierarchical aspect of corporate sovereignty which gave him the opportunity.<sup>207</sup> This is further evidence of the alignment of Stern and Erikson's arguments regarding Company network structures.

The negotiations themselves took until January 1734 to resolve, with the first acknowledgement of a signed agreement being in February 1734.<sup>208</sup> The agreement was essentially a contract for protection. This was a natural development from the Company's selling of shipping passes, with the sale of protection having moved from an individual basis to one of contracted protection on a governmental scale. In terms of the financial benefits for the Company, an annual allowance of two lakh was payable at Surat in exchange for their protection.<sup>209</sup> Cowan confided in Phipps that he was disappointed with only receiving two lakh, and went on to suggest that the broker Nowroji Rustum was likely to blame due to his conspiring at Surat.<sup>210</sup> Nowroji was suspected of damaging the Company's firman and tanka positions out of spite since he wished to become the sole Company broker at Surat.<sup>211</sup> Cowan, in his correspondence to Company directors, referred to Nowroji as a 'villain' for his interference in Company affairs.<sup>212</sup> The tanka disappointment perhaps should have been expected, or at least tempered, due to what Tirthankar Roy has described as the comparator terms involved

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<sup>206</sup> Erikson, *Between Monopoly and Free Trade*, pp. 19-20; 108-9.

<sup>207</sup> Stern, *The Company State*, pp. 8-10.

<sup>208</sup> Cowan to William Phipps, Bombay, 1 Feb. 1734, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2D, f. 88).

<sup>209</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>210</sup> Cowan to William Phipps, Bombay, 1 Feb. 1734, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2D, f. 88v).

<sup>211</sup> Cowan to Josias Wordsworth, Bombay, 10 Jan. 1734, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2D, f. 65); Cowan to William Phipps, Bombay, 1 Feb. 1734, (f. 88v).

<sup>212</sup> Cowan to 'Sir', Bombay, 10 Feb. 1734, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2D, f. 117v); Cowan to Josias Wordsworth, Bombay, 10 Feb. 1734, (f. 119v).

in negotiations such as these.<sup>213</sup> This meant that one party set the terms and the other had to take it or leave it.

However, despite the successful conclusion of negotiations there was a degree of scepticism as to the integrity of the agreement itself. Cowan suggested that the growing strength of a local naval commander called Sidi Murat<sup>214</sup> meant that Surat was likely to renege on the agreement.<sup>215</sup> This was deemed possible as there would have been a Mughal aligned naval power in the region to counter the power of Angré's sons. Additionally, Cowan noted that local sidis were unhappy with the prospect of a Company tanka as it would have deprived them of funds which would otherwise have been directed to them.<sup>216</sup> The time between Cowan's report of the tanka allowance on 1 February 1734 and the anticipated breach of contract was very short. Cowan wrote to Sir Matthew Decker on 2 February 1734 to advise that Telly Beg Caun had reneged on the agreement.<sup>217</sup> A breach of contract was a serious consideration for those involved in Indo-European trade, and so the party at fault would have been unwise to break a contract without good reason.<sup>218</sup>

Whilst it might be argued that the breach was expected, the relative speed in which affairs developed was curious. In response to the breach of contract, the Company blockaded the Surat bar in order to put pressure on the government.<sup>219</sup> The earlier

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<sup>213</sup> Tirthankar Roy, *Company of Kinsmen: Enterprise and Community in South Asian History 1700-1940*, (Oxford, 2011), p. 101.

<sup>214</sup> No further relevant evidence was found for Sidi Murat, or alternative names such as Murad or Mubarak.

<sup>215</sup> Cowan to John Gould Jr., Bombay, 1 Feb. 1734, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2D, f. 105v).

<sup>216</sup> Cowan to William Phipps, Bombay, Parel, 4 Sept. 1734, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2D, f. 134).

<sup>217</sup> Cowan to Sir Matthew Decker, Bombay, 2 Feb. 1734, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2D, f. 110).

<sup>218</sup> Roy, *Company of Kinsmen*, p. 101.

<sup>219</sup> Cowan to Captain David Hunter, Bombay, 3 Feb. 1734, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2D, ff. 115v-116).

mentioned attack on the Bombay bomb ketch off Surat was a direct consequence of this blockade.<sup>220</sup> The use of naval blockade and the prevention of free mercantile movement was a demonstration of the effective use of sea power.<sup>221</sup> Ironically, this was the same sea power that Surat had contracted Bombay to provide for them. It was also interesting that the Bombay marine was seemingly able to enforce such a blockade when Cowan had written in such damning terms of its readiness.<sup>222</sup> It was likely that Cowan was using the question of the fleet's readiness as a gambit in his relationship with the Company directors, with his control of sensitive information potentially useful in Company networks. This again returns to Mentz's arguments on private mercantile networks.<sup>223</sup> Despite the military standoff at Surat in February 1734, Cowan wrote to several correspondents between 13 and 15 February to advise that the issues at Surat had been resolved.<sup>224</sup> The resolution of the issues did not lead to a resumption of the tanka agreement, but instead was settled by a payment of 70,000 rupees from the sons of Telly Beg Caun to the Company.<sup>225</sup>

The settling of the tanka issue was not, however, the end of security concerns involving Surat. In September 1734 Cowan reported that the long serving governor of Surat, Sorab Ally Caun, had been replaced by Zadela Caun. Many of the troubles at Surat were related to the standoff between Sorab Ally Caun and the Raja of Gujarat.<sup>226</sup> As a sweetener for

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<sup>220</sup> Ibid.

<sup>221</sup> Jones, *Britain and the World*, p. 18.

<sup>222</sup> Cowan to William Phipps, Parel, 4 Sept. 1734, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2D, f. 132v).

<sup>223</sup> Mentz, *The English Gentleman Merchant*, p. 81.

<sup>224</sup> Cowan to Harry Gough, Bombay, 13 Feb. 1734, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2D, f. 120); Cowan to John Gould Jr., Bombay, 13 Feb. 1734, (f. 121); Cowan to John Drummond, Bombay, 15 Feb. 1734, (f. 124).

<sup>225</sup> Cowan to Josias Wordsworth, Bombay, 26 Aug. 1734, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2D, f. 150v); Cowan to Sir Matthew Decker, Bombay, 27 Aug. 1734, (f. 151v); Cowan to Harry Gough, Bombay, 30 Aug. 1734, (f. 156v).

<sup>226</sup> Cowan to Hugh Henry, Bombay, 30 Aug. 1728, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2A, ff. 5-7); Cowan to Charles Savage Jr., Bombay, 25 Sept. 1728, (f. 34).

his departure, Sorab Ally Caun was given a jagir in Gujarat to placate him. However, not long after his departure from office he raised an army in opposition to Surat.<sup>227</sup> Whilst this army was not a direct threat to Bombay, the affair was complicated by Sidi Murat's decision to anchor his fleet off Bombay in August-September 1734.<sup>228</sup> Cowan's concern was that Sidi Murat may have been planning to join Sorab Ally Caun's uprising against Surat.<sup>229</sup> The potentially hostile fleet anchored off Bombay, in conjunction with Sorab Ally Caun's previous hostility to the English, meant that Bombay was faced with a considerable threat. During this period Cowan once again highlighted that the Bombay marine was in a weakened state and would have been in no position to repulse an attack.<sup>230</sup> Though an attack did not occur, Cowan was clearly sufficiently concerned about the prospect, especially given the recent attacks by Angré's sons.<sup>231</sup> All of the above factors then combined to ensure that Bombay was not in so secure a position in 1734 as it had been prior to 1732. Cowan, for his part, stated that he was determined to leave Bombay in a prosperous condition before he returned to England.<sup>232</sup>

The topic of security was one which was closely tied to Cowan's performance as governor of Bombay. During his tenure he had to face multiple threats from native and European powers amidst the changing political reality in the western Indian Ocean. The fracturing of the Mughal power base and the increase in Maratha aggression were key

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<sup>227</sup> Cowan to William Phipps, Bombay, Parel, 4 Sept. 1734, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2D, f. 135).

<sup>228</sup> Cowan to William Phipps, Bombay, Parel, 4 Sept. 1734, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2D, f. 135v).

<sup>229</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>230</sup> Cowan to William Phipps, Bombay, Parel, 4 Sept. 1734, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2D, ff. 132-136v).

<sup>231</sup> Cowan to Sir Matthew Decker, Bombay, 12 Aug. 1733, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2D, f. 20); Cowan to Josias Wordsworth, Bombay, 18 Aug. 1733, (ff. 27v-28).

<sup>232</sup> Cowan to William Sterling, Bombay, 6 Jan. 1734, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2D, f. 66v); Cowan to James Macrae, Bombay, 6 Jan. 1734, (f. 68).

factors of this. Cowan, for his part, was responsible for both the military forces of Bombay, and in defining the Company's security policy for the region. Cowan clearly did his best to ensure that the Bombay marine was maintained as a viable force, despite the inevitable wear and tear which came about due to constant deployment. It can also be argued that Cowan's flexible usage of the force for a number of roles greatly contributed to Bombay's security. This adaptive approach tied in closely with the Company's ability to portray itself as a military power on the west coast of India. Although the reality of Bombay's strength was buffed by prestige and a supposed superiority, this strategy was effective as long as the marine force was in good condition.

The decline of the Bombay marine after 1732 pointed to a change in strategy for security at Bombay. The marine force had worked in tandem with the existing fortifications at Bombay to act as a deterrent, but with it side-lined it was necessary to put additional resources into static defences. This was a brave decision for Cowan to have taken due to the directors' disapproval of capital investments.<sup>233</sup> Whether or not the increase in static fortifications had a bearing on Bombay's long-term security, Cowan must be given credit for acting in what he deemed were the best interests of the settlement.

Cowan also took brave, and possibly unorthodox, steps in his handling of native politics. However, many of these were likely tied in to his own desire to manage the Bombay presidency along the lines of his private preference as opposed the public desires of the Company. In this, he was having to balance dependence on the metropolis with local autonomy.<sup>234</sup> He clearly saw the need to keep Angré and the Marathas at bay until

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<sup>233</sup> Cowan to Edward Harrison, Bombay, 14 Apr. 1733, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2D, f. 17v); Court of Directors to President and Council at Bombay, London, 1 Mar. 1733, (BL, India Office Records, IOR/E/3/105, f. 361v).

<sup>234</sup> Mentz, *The English Gentleman Merchant*, p. 87.

Bombay could be reinforced, and so his delaying tactics with the peace negotiations likely bought him some time in this regard. The centrepiece, however, was undoubtedly the Surat tanka negotiations. Despite the fact that this venture was ultimately unsuccessful, it represented a willingness to adapt to the changing situation. It must also be acknowledged that it was the first time that the Company was in a position to negotiate for such an agreement in Gujarat. This pointed to both effective management and diplomacy, and indeed suggested that Bombay was viewed as a military power during Cowan's time.

### **III - Cowan and Anglo-Portuguese Relations**

Following his promotion to governor, Cowan took an increased interest in the actions and fortunes of the Portuguese.<sup>235</sup> Of this, it must be commented that he had a clear agenda in seeing the Portuguese position weaken to benefit the English. Cowan particularly noted that the power of the Dutch in India rose as that of the Portuguese waned. The Portuguese were, according to Cowan, in decline in India and were viewed as very poor merchants.<sup>236</sup> The only area in which Cowan stated that the Portuguese had met the challenge of their empire was in the propagation of Christianity. This, Cowan hinted, was due largely to the power of the Jesuit order in India.<sup>237</sup> Ines Zupanov has described how the Jesuit order in Asia appears to have gone from strength to

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<sup>235</sup> Cowan to Arthur Stert, Bombay, 2 Sept. 1729, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2A, f. 126v).

<sup>236</sup> Cowan to Hugh Henry, Bombay, 30 Aug. 1728, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2A, ff. 5-6).

<sup>237</sup> Cowan to Hugh Henry, Bombay, 30 Aug. 1728, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2A, f. 6v); Cowan to Arthur Stert, Bombay, 2 Sept. 1729, (f. 126v).

strength in the seventeenth century and into the early part of the eighteenth century.<sup>238</sup> The assertion that members of the Jesuit order may have acted in a dual role as both missionaries and spies perhaps contributed to this success,<sup>239</sup> along with what Cowan described as a large commercial investment on the part of the Jesuits in India as well.<sup>240</sup> However, Cowan's primary interest was that of Portuguese trade. Cowan identified a ship from Lisbon which was due to call at ports on the west coast of India, and which would have presented a keen investment opportunity for him personally.<sup>241</sup> Cowan acknowledged this opportunity to Sir Alexander Cairnes, but also concluded that his covenant with the Company prevented him from trading to Europe with the Portuguese ship.<sup>242</sup> Whilst Cowan publicly distanced himself from the inbound Portuguese vessel, he caused difficulties with his employers over the ship as he allowed it to put in at Bombay. The ship in question was the *Europa*, a vessel which has been briefly mentioned in chapter three.<sup>243</sup> Cowan's willingness to allow the *Europa* to call at Bombay was a curious instance when one considers the poor reception such an action would likely have received. It was possible he may have seen facilitating the *Europa* as a gesture of goodwill towards the Portuguese at Goa. Cowan noted on several occasions throughout the period 1729-31 that Bombay and the Portuguese at Goa were on friendly terms, and that he would endeavour to maintain the relationship.<sup>244</sup> The layover

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<sup>238</sup> Ines Zupanov, *Missionary Tropics: The Catholic Frontier in India*, (Chicago, 2005), p. 172.

<sup>239</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 175-6.

<sup>240</sup> Cowan to Hugh Henry, Bombay, 30 Aug. 1728, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2A, f. 6).

<sup>241</sup> Cowan to John Sherman, Bombay, 30 Aug. 1728, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2A, ff. 14-14v).

<sup>242</sup> Cowan to Sir Alexander Cairnes, Bombay, 30 Aug. 1728, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2A, f. 13v).

<sup>243</sup> Cowan to William Phipps, Parel, 4 Sept. 1734, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2D, ff. 131-131v);

Cowan to Josias Wordsworth, Bombay, 31 Aug. 1734, (ff. 142v-143).

<sup>244</sup> Cowan to Edward Harrison, Bombay, 25 Jul. 1729, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2A, f. 77v).

of the *Europa* at Bombay, and the suspicion which the circumstance caused, proved to be the key factor in Cowan's removal from Company service in 1734.<sup>245</sup>

In terms of the Portuguese trade, Cowan recognised that the Portuguese had identified a growing market for Goan arak in the Portuguese colonies in Brazil. This demonstrated that the Portuguese were aware of the benefits of a global approach to empire by linking up their networks in Asia and South America. Cowan followed this up, however, by commenting that the Portuguese were regarded as particularly poor paymasters and that the native distillers of Goa had refused to make any more arak until they had been paid.<sup>246</sup> Whilst the Portuguese identified the potential for exploiting their global empire through the connecting of these regions through trade, it would seem that their resources and organisation were unable to meet the challenge. The reputation for being very sharp with debts was also a cause of tension between the Company and the Portuguese viceroy as he had refused to discharge a debt which he owed to a Company servant called Mr. Hardwicke. Cowan undertook to pursue the viceroy for this debt and reasoned that since the personal revenues of the viceroy matched his station, he would have been more than able to discharge the debt.<sup>247</sup> However, Cowan did not report on his success in this affair.

Whilst the Portuguese turned westwards in the hopes of an improved trading fortune, they chose an entirely different line of accumulation in India. Cowan alleged that the Portuguese had, by 1730, taken to using aggression against Moorish ships, particularly in the Red Sea, in order to extract protection money through the sale of passes or the

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<sup>245</sup> Cowan to William Phipps, Parel, 4 Sept. 1734, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2D, ff. 131-131v); Cowan to Josias Wordsworth, Bombay, 31 Aug. 1734, (ff. 142v-143).

<sup>246</sup> Cowan to Edward Harrison, Bombay, 25 Jul. 1729, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2A, f. 77v).

<sup>247</sup> Cowan to Arthur Stert, Bombay, 2 Sept. 1729, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2A, f. 126v).



demanding of ransoms.<sup>248</sup> If the ships refused to give in to the Portuguese demands, they seized them. The Portuguese were, according to Cowan, preparing for another venture to the Red Sea in 1731.<sup>249</sup> It must be noted here that the English, and indeed other European powers, often followed a similar tactic through the sale of protection. Increased aggression from the Portuguese at sea also had an impact on the commerce of the Company and Cowan personally. Company servants often contracted native shipping to carry goods from one port to another when European ships were unavailable. In this way it was possible that a native vessel carrying Company goods might to be stopped and plundered by Portuguese cruisers. If this happened the Company would have been at a loss. This in turn would have increased shipping costs, and by extension may have further driven up commodity prices if reliable shipping was not available. Cowan acknowledged that the reason he had decided to purchase the large ship *Nassau* was in response to the aggression of the Portuguese at sea, and particularly against Moorish shipping.<sup>250</sup>

The sale of protection in this way was, as argued by Stern, a form of sophisticated protection racket which enabled European powers to collect tribute from native governments and merchants as a side line to their own trading activities.<sup>251</sup> The ability to project power and give the impression of prestige was a key element in politics between Europeans and native powers. If weakness was sensed on the part of a European power it would not have taken native powers long to realise this and to have taken advantage of it. The case of the Portuguese in India was a good example of this.

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<sup>248</sup> Cowan to William Phipps, Bombay, 6 Jan. 1730, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2B, f. 4v).

<sup>249</sup> Cowan to Edward Harrison, Bombay, 10 Jan. 1730, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2B, ff. 19-19v).

<sup>250</sup> Cowan to William Phipps, Bombay, 6 Jan. 1730, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2B, f. 4v).

<sup>251</sup> Stern, *The Company State*, pp. 42-3.

As J.R. Jones has noted, sea power comprised the ability to stage or prevent invasions and enable free mercantile movement.<sup>252</sup> If the Portuguese could not have ensured this by their use of naval force, they would have been ready targets for assault. As mentioned above, the Portuguese power and prestige had declined over the seventeenth to eighteenth centuries and as such they were poorly regarded by both the English and native powers. This was demonstrated by the increased number of Maratha incursions into Portuguese territory in India, particularly around Salsette, and tied in with their desire for closer relations with the English in terms of defensive support.<sup>253</sup>

Despite the critical tone in Cowan's letters regarding the Portuguese, he offered them aid against Maratha incursions into Bassein and Salsette.<sup>254</sup> It is questionable whether Cowan had the authority to promise this, and so it must instead be viewed as a private initiative without official Company backing. This was another example of how the Company management, through its vertical hierarchy, failed to control activities on the ground in India.<sup>255</sup> Cowan likely offered support due to the need for collective security against the Maratha threat and his own calculation that such a gesture would tie the viceroy into a personal tie of gratitude to him. In return for this, the viceroy promised that the Portuguese would assist the English if Bombay came under attack.<sup>256</sup> This was reminiscent of the defensive alliance which the English and Portuguese entered into in 1721. The English had reason to doubt the Portuguese commitment to this due to their

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<sup>252</sup> Jones, *Britain and the World*, p. 18.

<sup>253</sup> Cowan to Edward Harrison, Bombay, 24 Jan. 1731, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2B, f. 89v); Cowan to Charles Savage, Bombay, 20 Jan. 1731, (ff. 126-126v).

<sup>254</sup> Cowan to Hugh Henry, Bombay, 20 Jan. 1731, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2B, f. 108v).

<sup>255</sup> Mentz, *The English Gentleman Merchant*, p. 71.

<sup>256</sup> Cowan to Charles Savage, Bombay, 20 Jan. 1731, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2B, ff. 126-126v).

failing strength and the 'cowardly' peace which they had made with Angré in 1721.<sup>257</sup> The weakness and lack of prestige attached to the Portuguese was also highlighted to the directors.<sup>258</sup> The Portuguese were in a precarious position at this time, and it was thought unlikely that they would have been able to hold out against the Marathas if a determined attack was made on Bassein or Salsette.<sup>259</sup> Indeed, Cowan reported on several occasions that the Portuguese were in a very poor condition at Goa and that their means did not match their ambitions.<sup>260</sup>

Cowan was aware that there was a possibility of the Portuguese losing control of Salsette and sought advice from the directors what to do if this came about. This request for advice was also tempered by his suggestion that Salsette would be worth possessing if the opportunity arose.<sup>261</sup> The directors' approach was one of both apathy and practicality. They did not see the problem if the Sidi had quarrelled with the Portuguese, and felt it would have been beneficial to the Company if the Sidi managed to capture Salsette.<sup>262</sup> However, Cowan concluded that if any action were taken to support the Portuguese against the Marathas, it would likely have been approved anyway.<sup>263</sup> The Company were at this time still in a state of war with the Marathas, and had clashed

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<sup>257</sup> Cowan to William Dawsonne, Bombay, 6 Jan. 1722, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1AA, f. 106v); Cowan to Mr. Bronson, Bombay, 6 Jan. 1722, (f. 108); Cowan to Henry Cairnes, 6 Jan. 1722, (f. 110); Cowan to Hugh Henry, Bombay, 6 Jan. 1722, (f. 113).

<sup>258</sup> Cowan to Court of Directors, Bombay, 20 Jan. 1731, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2B, ff. 93-94v).

<sup>259</sup> Cowan to Edward Harrison, Bombay, 24 Jan. 1731, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2B, f. 89v).

<sup>260</sup> Cowan to Arthur Stert, Bombay, 2 Sept. 1729, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2A, f. 126v); Cowan to Arthur Stert, Bombay, 20 Jan. 1731, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2B, f. 71); Cowan to Court of Directors, Bombay, 20 Jan. 1731, (ff. 94-94v).

<sup>261</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>262</sup> Court of Directors to Governor and Council at Bombay, London, 27 Feb. 1729, (BL, India Office Records, IOR/E/3/104, f. 356).

<sup>263</sup> Cowan to Edward Harrison, Bombay, 24 Jan. 1731, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2B, f. 89).

with Angré throughout the 1720s. As such, it was sensible to seek an alliance with the Portuguese even if they were a power in decline.

The practical approach to Anglo-Portuguese relations during Cowan's time in India was an interesting concept to consider. So too was the unique role that Cowan played due to his ability to speak Portuguese fluently and the support which he received from his patrons in London. As Stern has noted, it is important to view Company actions in India through the lens of the politics of Asian trade.<sup>264</sup> This was, according to Stern, a necessary evil in which the Company did not act as a commercial body or arm of the Anglo-British state, but as an independent econo-political body.<sup>265</sup> This was evidenced in Cowan's career by the fact that he acted on behalf of the Company, and not the crown, in his dealings with the Portuguese.

As noted in chapter two, the Company entered into an alliance with the Portuguese in India in 1721, only to have seen their diplomatic relationship sour for several years over the failed expedition and the long-running dispute over the Tannah-Carinjah pass.<sup>266</sup> The resumption of cordial relations in the face of Maratha aggression towards the end of the 1720s meant that it was in the interests of both parties to consider cooperation once again. Whilst both parties acted out of necessity, it was clear by this time that the English were the stronger party and approached their correspondence as such. Despite the shift in power from the Portuguese to the English over the long seventeenth century, however, it is intriguing to note that European cooperation in the face of native

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<sup>264</sup> Stern, "A Politie of Civill & Military Power", 255.

<sup>265</sup> *Ibid.*, 257.

<sup>266</sup> Cowan to John Courtney, Goa, 6 May, 1721 (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1AA, f. 32v); Cowan to Walter Brown, Goa, 13 May 1721, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1AA, f. 34).

aggression was still considered viable despite the hints that it might have been beneficial to allow the Portuguese to suffer retreats at Salsette.<sup>267</sup>

However, by 1733 Cowan's opinion was that it would have been in the Company's interest to acquire Salsette to act as a buffer zone against any Maratha incursions.<sup>268</sup>

The Portuguese were unlikely to have wanted to sell Salsette owing to its strategic importance and the role in which it could have been used to put pressure on them over the Tannah-Carinjah pass. Cowan, however, concluded that the Portuguese were unlikely to want to sell it for two separate reasons. First, that the powerful Jesuit order in India which was headquartered there would have opposed on religious grounds.<sup>269</sup>

Second, that the directors would not have been willing to pay a great deal for Salsette.<sup>270</sup>

The importance of the Jesuit order in contextualising the outlook of the Portuguese in India cannot be ignored. As Zupanov has argued, the Christianisation of the orient was perhaps the most comprehensive intentional action towards globalization by the Portuguese Estado da India and the Catholic Portuguese monarchy.<sup>271</sup> The strength of Jesuit opinion and involvement in the colonial venture made it unlikely that their opinions, or even demands, would not have been heard. Despite the strategic value of Salsette and Cowan's keenness for the Company to acquire it, Salsette did not become part of the Company's territory until it was seized from the Marathas in 1774. It was subsequently awarded to the Company by the Treaty of Salbai in May 1782.<sup>272</sup>

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<sup>267</sup> Court of Directors to Governor and Council at Bombay, London, 27 Feb. 1729, (BL, India Office Records, IOR/E/3/104, f. 356).

<sup>268</sup> Cowan to Arthur Stert, Bombay, 18 Aug. 1733, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2D, ff. 44-44v).

<sup>269</sup> Zupanov, *Missionary Tropics*, p. 172.

<sup>270</sup> Cowan to Arthur Stert, Bombay, 18 Aug. 1733, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2D, ff. 44-44v).

<sup>271</sup> Zupanov, *Missionary Tropics*, pp. 21-2.

<sup>272</sup> The Treaty of Salbai was signed on 17 May 1782 by the Company and the Marathas to bring about peace. Under its terms the Company retained control of Salsette and Broach in exchange for recognition of Madhavrao II as Peshwa of the Maratha Empire.

Though Cowan was unwilling to entertain another Anglo-Portuguese alliance, there was evidence to suggest that he did his best to keep relations between the two powers cordial. The basis for this was his willingness to assist the Portuguese viceroy at Goa, and to have maintained friendly correspondence with him.<sup>273</sup> Cowan did not, however, believe that this assistance and friendship would have been useful in the long term. This was despite the directors having acknowledged in March 1733 that a Portuguese warship was actively patrolling against Angré.<sup>274</sup> Upon the viceroy's decision to return to Portugal in December 1733, Cowan lamented that all of the assistance he had given to the viceroy would unlikely have been remembered in Lisbon.<sup>275</sup> This was due to the fickle nature of political relationships, and the divergence of their spheres of interest. In personal terms this might have been a failure for Cowan, though he can be said to have succeeded in cultivating a positive relationship with the three viceroys whose service in India overlapped with his own.<sup>276</sup> The extent to which Cowan benefitted personally from incorporating these viceroys into his personal network is unclear, though it was certainly a positive point for him as regards his role in the Company hierarchy. Cowan's role in seeking a private advantage from public service once again returns to the relationship between vertical and horizontal networks, and the rational actor theory.<sup>277</sup>

However, the relationship between Cowan and the viceroy was not always straightforward as both men worked in the interests of their respective powers, as well as to their own personal ends as well. The viceroy complained to Cowan in January 1734

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<sup>273</sup> Cowan to Charles Boone, Bombay, 31 Jan. 1734, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2D, f. 83v).

<sup>274</sup> Court of Directors to President and Council at Bombay, London, 1 Mar. 1733, (BL India Office Records, IOR/E/3/105, f. 350).

<sup>275</sup> Cowan to Richard Legrond, Bombay, 20 Dec. 1733, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2D, f. 59v).

<sup>276</sup> Francisco José de Sampaio e Castro (1720-23); Joao de Saladanha da Gama (1725-32); Pedro de Mascarenhas, Count of Sandomil (1732-40).

<sup>277</sup> Erikson, *Between Monopoly and Free Trade*, pp. 108-9.

that the Portuguese being banned from trading to Madras was an unfair imposition and desired the limitation be lifted.<sup>278</sup> Cowan did not specify whether it was the viceroy personally who wished to trade to Madras, or if it was on behalf of the Portuguese nation that he complained. It was possible that the viceroy wished for an additional trading outlet for himself, and access to Madras would have opened up trade on the east coast of India to a greater extent. Cowan was unmoved by this petition, though he did admit in the same letter to James Macrae that he was concerned the Portuguese may make use of their warships to force the issue.<sup>279</sup> The Portuguese had done so at Surat the previous year and so the idea of commercial piracy, as discussed above, was a key factor in Cowan's considerations for Anglo-Portuguese affairs. This was particularly so given the weakness of the Bombay marine in 1733-4. It was this willingness to resort to commercial violence that led to the English and Portuguese being viewed by native powers as nations of pirates.<sup>280</sup>

Piracy to some extent was necessary for Europeans, according to Swai, in order to exert control over sources of goods. However, this involved some degree of tampering with native society.<sup>281</sup> This tampering eventually led to widespread colonisation and the growth of empire. The notion of commercial piracy on the part of Europeans, directed at natives or other European powers, dovetails with Cowan's desire to see the Company acquire the Salsette peninsula. Due to Salsette's proximity to the Tannah-Carinjah passage, the owner of Salsette was in a strong position over the river tolls. Cowan realised this and pressured Edward Harrison to propose to Arthur Stert that he lobby

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<sup>278</sup> Cowan to James Macrae, Bombay, 6 Jan. 1734, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2D, f. 69).

<sup>279</sup> Cowan to James Macrae, Bombay, 6 Jan. 1734, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2D, f. 69v).

<sup>280</sup> G.V. Scammell, 'European Exiles, Renegades and Outlaws and the Maritime Economy of Asia c.1500-1750,' *Modern Asian Studies*, 26, No. 4 (Oct., 1992), 649.

<sup>281</sup> Swai, 'East India Company and Moplah Merchants of Tellicherry', 61.

the Portuguese court over the Tannah-Carinjah passage.<sup>282</sup> Making use of a seasoned diplomat in the region was a sensible decision by Cowan as he had already concluded that there was no point in him negotiating with the viceroy for Tannah-Carinjah without leave from Lisbon.<sup>283</sup> The directors' position was that the suggestion of military assistance against Angré, in conjunction with an annual present to the viceroy, might have been used as an incentive to bring the Portuguese to the table over Tannah-Carinjah.<sup>284</sup>

Whilst an accommodation on the ground in India may have been a practical solution to the two sides' differences, the king of Portugal was removed by geographical distance and so could only comprehend the issue in terms of revenue and prestige. This idea of Portuguese prestige was important as the king of Portugal had for many years styled himself as 'Lord of the Indian Seas.'<sup>285</sup> This claim was based on the Portuguese predominance in the eastern trading routes until the late sixteenth century and their continued presence there over the years that followed.<sup>286</sup> The strength of the Portuguese claim to sovereignty was dependent on their ability to command the sea lanes surrounding the Mughal and Maratha dominions.<sup>287</sup> If this was challenged, the already crumbling reputation of the Portuguese in India would have suffered a massive blow. Any concessions made on the Portuguese king's part in India would therefore have damaged his political standing both at home and abroad. As part of this so-called

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<sup>282</sup> Cowan to John Sherman, Bombay, 14 Dec. 1733, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2D, f. 57v).

<sup>283</sup> Cowan to William Phipps, Parel, 4 Sept. 1734, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2D, f. 133v).

<sup>284</sup> Court of Directors to President and Council at Bombay, 15 Mar. 1733, (BL India Office Records, IOR/E/3/106, f. 110).

<sup>285</sup> Cowan to John Gould, Bombay, 25 Aug. 1734, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2D, f. 149v); Cowan to Harry Gough, Bombay, 30 Aug. 1734, (f. 155v).

<sup>286</sup> A.D. Innes, *The Maritime and Colonial Expansion of England under the Stuarts*, (London, 1931), p. 41.

<sup>287</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 173.



sovereign mandate, the Portuguese obliged any native vessels operating in their waters to purchase a Goa pass, as discussed above. Failure to do so meant that they would have been hunted by Portuguese warships.<sup>288</sup> This was an aspect which has been built upon by Erikson in which she has highlighted that vessels were obliged to dock at Portuguese ports in order to purchase these passes, and were also then required to pay duties on their cargo.<sup>289</sup> As a result of this the commercial piracy of the Portuguese was felt even more keenly by the victims.

Whilst other European powers in India made use of the same system of selling passes as a form of sophisticated protection racket, the aggression with which the Portuguese prosecuted this system was highlighted by Cowan throughout the years 1730-4. This behaviour may have reflected the Portuguese desire to portray themselves as a dominant power in India. Whilst aggression in the face of vulnerability was understandable, the Portuguese did not appear to have a viable solution for dealing with the Maratha threat. The only tangible option was to seek another alliance with the English. Whilst this was a sensible solution for both sides, the English distrust for the Portuguese after the failed expedition of 1721 made this near impossible. The English position, whilst not openly hostile, was certainly cool. This hostility in the face of shared threats was reflective of Scammell's argument regarding European trading companies in India giving each other rough treatment outside of Europe.<sup>290</sup>

Though Cowan succeeded in maintaining good Anglo-Portuguese relations during his career in India, it is fair to comment that his task was hindered by many issues from

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<sup>288</sup> Cowan to John Gould, Bombay, 25 Aug. 1734, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2D, f. 149v).

<sup>289</sup> Erikson, *Between Monopoly and Free Trade*, p. 69.

<sup>290</sup> Scammell, 'European Exiles', 651.

distrust to military weakness. The Portuguese decline and their unwillingness to acknowledge their vulnerabilities, however, appeared to have been the critical problem. This decline continued gradually throughout the eighteenth century, with most of their northern territories having been lost to the Marathas in 1739. In terms of the Portuguese Estado da India compared to the English East India Company, Erikson has commented that the Estado was a commercial failure when compared to the likes of the East India Company and the Dutch Vereenigde Oostendische Compagnie.<sup>291</sup> This feeds in to the Company, through Cowan as their agent, having successfully managed the Anglo-Portuguese relationship in India to their benefit during the years 1728-35.

This chapter has charted three of the most pressing macro issues which faced Cowan and Bombay during the years 1728-35. These were trade, security and Anglo-Portuguese relations. The common thread which has been picked up throughout has been the many difficulties which were presented in each topic. However, in each case Cowan adapted and developed strategies for dealing with the problems. Whilst it was Cowan's responsibility as governor to remedy the many problems which he and his presidency faced there was no set of procedures for how he was to do this, despite an apparent Company expectation for him to act in the public interest. In this way, Cowan had to rely on his own judgement and experience for many of his decisions. This was not helped by the great distance between Bombay and London, and the time delay which came with seeking advice from the directors.<sup>292</sup> With this in mind, there was a

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<sup>291</sup> Erikson, *Between Monopoly and Free Trade*, p. 11.

<sup>292</sup> Mentz, *The English Gentleman Merchant*, p. 71.

danger that Cowan may have acted with arbitrary power to accomplish his aims and favour his own horizontal patronage network over the vertical Company hierarchy.

Although the public awareness of such a danger in the colonies was more closely associated with the late eighteenth century impeachment of Warren Hastings,<sup>293</sup> the risk was still present. This dovetails with the recurring argument regarding the rational actor theory. To revisit this, it holds that in the absence of supervision the individual may seek to put personal good over public.<sup>294</sup> Despite this, Cowan appears to have presented his service as having been in reasonably good faith regarding his official duties at Bombay. The idea of outward good faith potentially masking an entirely different reality ties in to Mentz's arguments regarding both the disconnect from London and the method of information sharing amongst private networks.<sup>295</sup> Whilst Cowan certainly highlighted his need to consult London in his letters, there is also significant evidence that he was willing, and able, to make weighty decisions in India. This suggests that the level of local autonomy enjoyed by Cowan was capable of outweighing his, or Bombay's, dependence on the metropolis. The possibility of his private interests overarching into specific public-orientated decisions has been highlighted above. However, this chapter has not taken into consideration his private dealings during this period. These shall be elaborated upon in the following chapter and the conclusion of Cowan's governance shall then be revisited.

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<sup>293</sup> Warren Hastings (6 Dec. 1732 – 22 Aug. 1818). Governor-General of India 1773-85. Impeached in the House of Lords by Edmund Burke for high crimes and misdemeanours, 1787-95. Subsequently acquitted on all charges.

<sup>294</sup> Erikson, *Between Monopoly and Free Trade*, pp. 108-9.

<sup>295</sup> Mentz, *The English Gentleman Merchant*, pp. 71; 81.

## **Chapter Five: Bombay, 1728-35, Part II**

### **I - Cowan's Private Trade and Remittances**

The earning potential for Company servants in private trade was far greater than the ordinary salary which they would have received.<sup>1</sup> Prakash has written a great deal on this topic, and particularly for the period 1720-40 which covers Cowan's time in India. As Prakash has noted, there were differing opinions held by the various trading companies about the use of private trading accounts. The Dutch were very much against the practice, whereas the English were more tolerant of its usage.<sup>2</sup> The Dutch approach from the beginning of the seventeenth century had been to adopt the policy of management incentivisation to maintain profitability and to give senior servants no cause to seek to trade illegally on their own accounts.<sup>3</sup>

There was, according to Hejeebu, efficiency in linking servants' pay to the financial performance of the wider company, otherwise an increasing degree of private trade would have been sought.<sup>4</sup> The English, in contrast, allowed for a limited form of private trade so that servants could supplement their incomes. This was decided upon as it was

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<sup>1</sup> Om Prakash, 'English Private Trade in the Western Indian Ocean, 1720-1740', *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, 50, No. 2/3, Spatial and Temporal Continuities of Merchant Networks in South Asia and the Indian Ocean (2007), 217.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Douglas A. Irwin, 'Mercantilism as Strategic Trade Policy: The Anglo-Dutch Rivalry for the East India Trade', *Journal of Political Economy*, 99, No. 6 (Dec., 1991), 1298.

<sup>4</sup> Santhi Hejeebu, 'Contract Enforcement in the English East India Company', *Journal of Economic History*, 65, No. 2 (Jun., 2005), 498.

accepted that the misappropriation of funds and illicit trading was difficult to prove,<sup>5</sup> and that a certain amount of private trading was bound to be carried out regardless.<sup>6</sup> The suggestion made in chapter three that Cowan's excessive trade at Mocha brought suspicion upon him will be further investigated in this chapter. After all, his governorship of Bombay gave him great access to private trade and the opportunity to orchestrate his own voyages. However, there was a benefit for the Company in that private trade to smaller ports likely kept these less visited ports and trading enclaves open.<sup>7</sup> This is what Hejeebu has described as the synergy between public and private trade.<sup>8</sup> The differences between public and private trade also draw comparisons with the arguments made in chapter four regarding the rival interests at work between Cowan's horizontal patronage network and the vertical hierarchical structure of the Company. A good example of how these interests clashed for Cowan was his investment in a higher outlay of coffee than the Company.<sup>9</sup>

If, as the well-known adage highlighted, that 'two monsoons are the age of man' at Bombay, it stood to reason that a servant fearing his own mortality might have sought to make as much money quickly as he possibly could. In this sense, business outlooks and focus might have become much shorter, leading to speculative trades.<sup>10</sup> Though a great deal of money stood to be made through the trade of gemstones, the complications in the Indian diamond trade made this difficult by 1729-30. There was also the fact that, as well as trading in gemstones back to England, Company servants

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<sup>5</sup> Prakash, 'English Private Trade', 222.

<sup>6</sup> Hejeebu, 'Contract Enforcement in the English East India Company', 499.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 503.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 499.

<sup>9</sup> Timothy Davies, 'British Private Trade Networks in the Arabian Seas, c. 1680 – c. 1760', PhD Thesis, University of Warwick, (2012), pp. 212-3.

<sup>10</sup> Hejeebu, 'Contract Enforcement in the English East India Company', 499.

were also heavily involved in the trade of rice and silk between the English presidencies in India.<sup>11</sup> This was true of Cowan, who invested in several voyages to Calcutta in conjunction with John Deane, the president there. The bulk of Cowan's trade with Deane was in cotton, with Cowan having acted as a broker for Deane in sourcing it at Surat.<sup>12</sup> This was not an uncommon occurrence as it was possible for Company servants to act as private agents for other traders or servants.<sup>13</sup>

The difficulties experienced at Surat during this period would appear to have impacted the trading arrangements between Cowan and Deane as well, however. As such, there were significant delays in providing cotton for Deane.<sup>14</sup> Cowan held a private account with Deane through which his investments in Calcutta were processed,<sup>15</sup> though Deane complained about the great deal of money which had been drawn on him by Cowan.<sup>16</sup> Whilst Cowan would have been entitled to draw a certain amount on this account, it was surprising that Deane complained about it. It was possible that Deane may not have had a great deal of secure credit to offer, or even that Cowan had chosen to engage in private trade to a greater degree than had been anticipated. The great amount of Cowan's correspondence which dealt with his private trading interests suggested that the latter was the case. This is something which shall be expanded upon below, along with a greater examination of his trading accounts. The trading periods 1729-32 and

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<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 503.

<sup>12</sup> Cowan to John Deane, Bombay, 30 Dec. 1730, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1G, f. 14v); Cowan to John Deane, Bombay, 30 Dec. 1730, (f. 17); Cowan to John Deane, Bombay, 22 Feb. 1731, (f. 48v).

<sup>13</sup> Prakash, 'English Private Trade', 220.

<sup>14</sup> Cowan to John Deane, Bombay, 30 Dec. 1730, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1G, f. 14v); Cowan to John Deane, Bombay, 30 Dec. 1730, (f. 17); Cowan to John Deane, Bombay, 24 Mar. 1731, (f. 71).

<sup>15</sup> Cowan to John Deane, Bombay, 30 Dec. 1730, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1G f. 16v); Cowan to John Deane, Bombay, 22 Feb. 1731, (f. 49); Cowan to John Deane, Bombay, 25 Apr. 1731, (f. 99v).

<sup>16</sup> Cowan to Henry Lowther, Parel, 18 Mar. 1731, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1G, f. 65).

1732-5 have been split in order to demonstrate Cowan's differing approaches to trade before and after 1732.<sup>17</sup>

In total, Cowan was involved in 30 voyages between 1729 and 1732. Of these, Cowan was the sole investor for 13 voyages. The primary shipping period which was observed was that between January and April. This tallied with the expected trend due to the Indian monsoon season happening between July and September, with rains typically starting in late May and ending in early October.<sup>18</sup> In Cowan's case, no voyages were ordered for June, July or September, though there were two voyages each for August and October. This may have represented an unpredictable rainfall pattern for these months, or the use of long-term planning for voyages which would have gone ahead regardless of late monsoon weather. Trade aside, the practicalities of navigating during the monsoon season were serious considerations. As Patterson has noted, travel around the coast of India was dependent on the monsoon season. During favourable conditions, for example, Madras could have been reached from Calcutta in a week, whereas in unfavourable conditions this same passage could have taken up to three months.<sup>19</sup> The possibility of navigation was a key consideration for Cowan and his peers when trading privately as the duration of the voyage, and potential risk involved, was at the core of decisions to trade. With this in mind, the destinations chosen for investment by Cowan shall now be elaborated upon.

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<sup>17</sup> Prior to 1732 Cowan focused on trade within the western Indian Ocean, whereas after 1732 he increasingly sought to invest in voyages to the Far East and South East Asia.

<sup>18</sup> Of this, the south of India generally receives a larger rainfall than the north.

<sup>19</sup> T.J.S. Patterson, *The East India Company and Medicine in India*, (Darlington, 2007), p. 131.

Mocha was one of the most popular destinations for Cowan, with 7 voyages recorded. Most of these occurred in 1729 and 1730.<sup>20</sup> This great interest in trading to Mocha was in line with expectations on trading coffee from Mocha to Surat or Bombay at the time. However, to generalise these voyages as having been solely for the purpose of sourcing coffee would be a mistake. Cowan's voyages shipped a great variety of goods into Mocha. This integration of import and export saw Cowan tap into the Mocha-Surat trading paradigm laid out by Prakash.<sup>21</sup> Of Cowan's voyages to Mocha in 1729, he shipped quality goods such as china dishes, coffee cups, tobacco and agala wood. This was in addition to staple commodities such as cotton and wheat.<sup>22</sup> It is interesting to note that there was a wider context to the Mocha-Surat trade than the generalised textile and precious metal mechanism which has been described by Prakash.<sup>23</sup>

The quality goods which were imported into Mocha were noteworthy as it showed that items such as china-ware and agala wood, which would have been sourced in the Far East, had travelled from the Far East to India for re-export to the Middle East. This was evidence that the Middle East and Far East were connected, much like Europe, to these regions through the fulcrum of the Indian sub-continent. This supported Stern's arguments regarding the interconnectivity of the early modern world.<sup>24</sup> Indeed, Cowan's later voyages to Mocha in 1731 and 1732 were conducted on a similar basis with Far Eastern luxuries again having featured prominently. However, the most

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<sup>20</sup> Two and three voyages respectively.

<sup>21</sup> Prakash, 'English Private Trade', 219.

<sup>22</sup> Invoice of Agala Wood Laden on the *Bengal Galley*, Bombay, 14 Mar. 1729, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/10A, f. 15).

<sup>23</sup> Prakash, 'English Private Trade', 219.

<sup>24</sup> Philip Stern, 'British Asia and British Atlantic: Comparisons and Connections', *William and Mary Quarterly*, Third Series, 63, No. 4 (Oct., 2006), 694-5.



interesting element was that the decrease in number of Cowan's voyages to Mocha after 1730 also coincided with his increased interest in trade to the Far East.

China became a popular trading destination for Cowan towards the latter end of his tenure in India. As such, he doubled his voyage schedule to China from one per annum to two between 1730 and 1731. It has already been noted how small quality items played an interesting role in the linking up of geo-political regions, but it was bulk bought sugar which was the key element of Cowan's Chinese interests.<sup>25</sup> This was largely conducted through Cowan's ship, *Nassau*. The *Nassau* was a very large and expensive ship which was the centrepiece of Cowan's trades, and served as a prestige vessel for attracting outside investment. Sugar from China was viewed as being of a superior quality to that which was sourced in South East Asia, and Cowan consistently recorded cargoes with the differentiation of either sugar or China sugar. However, the only discernible difference from his accounts was that China sugar commanded a higher price. Sugar had been introduced to China from India in the seventh century, and latterly became a staple part of Chinese cuisine.<sup>26</sup> Cowan also used his ventures to China to despatch a great deal of bullion for investment there. For example, in April 1730 Cowan invoiced that 77,308 rupees were loaded onto the *Balls* for investment at Canton. This is shown in figure 5.1, below. The gross return on investment for this voyage, shown in figure 5.2, can be seen to have produced a return of 114,031 rupees at Surat and 14,851

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<sup>25</sup> Invoice of Merchandise Laden on the *Nassau*, Bombay, 5 Apr. 1731, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/10A, f. 41); Invoice of Goods and Treasure Laden on the *Nassau*, Bombay, 8 Apr. 1732, (f. 57).

<sup>26</sup> John Kieschnick, *The Impact of Buddhism on Chinese Material Culture*, (Princeton, 2003), p. 258.

rupees at Bombay when the sales accounts of the *Balls* from China to Surat and Bombay are examined.<sup>27</sup>

Goods Invoiced on the <i>Balls</i> for Canton. Bombay, 16 April 1730. <sup>28</sup>				
<u>Commodity</u>	<u>Quantity</u>	<u>Cost</u>	<u>Sub-Total</u>	<u>Net-Total</u>
Putchuck	770	10,675		
Olibanum	224	840		
Charges at Surat	N/A	835:2:50	12,350:2:50	
Olibanum	105	305:3:66		
Customs	N/A	54:0:81	360:0:47	
Treasure	N/A	77,308:0:20	77,308:0:20	
Shipping	N/A	1:0:83	1:0:83	<b>90,020:0:0</b>

Fig. 5.1 Invoice of the *Balls* for Canton.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>27</sup> Invoice of Goods Shipped on the *Balls*, Bombay, 16 Apr. 1730, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/10A, f. 28); Sales of Goods on the *Balls* from China, Bombay, 30 Jun. 1731, (f. 50).

<sup>28</sup> Invoice of Goods Shipped on the *Balls*, Bombay, 16 Apr. 1730, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/10A, f. 28).

<sup>29</sup> Invoice of Goods Shipped on the *Balls*, Bombay, 16 Apr. 1730, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/10A, f. 28).

Sales of the <i>Balls</i> from China for Account of her Owners at Surat. Bombay, 30 Jun.				
1731 <sup>30</sup>				
<u>Commodity</u>	<u>Quantity</u>	<u>Cost</u>	<u>Sub-Total</u>	<u>Net-Total</u>
Camphire	64	6,171:16:0		
China Sugar	1,150	15,478:22:0	21,649:38:0	
Charges	N/A	(2,173:48:0)	19,475:54:0	
Toothenaque	9,638	96,998:2:0		
Charges	N/A	(4,403:8:0)	92,594:58:0	
Interest on Rupees	N/A	1,961:04:0	1,961:04:0	<b>114,031:3:25</b>
Sales of the <i>Balls</i> from China a for Account of her Owners at Bombay. Bombay, 30 Jun. 1731. <sup>31</sup>				
China Sugar	752	10,014:2:60		
Sugar Candy	84	3,058:3:83		
Toothenaque	54.5	672:2:35		
Hollands Duck <sup>32</sup>	48	1,440:0:0	15,186:0:78	
Charges	N/A	(561:2:15)	14,624:2:63	

<sup>30</sup> Sales of Goods on the *Balls*, from China, Bombay, 30 Jun. 1731, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/10A, f. 50).

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> It is unclear what this commodity was, though it is suggested that it likely referred to the middle-Dutch term 'doek' meaning cloth, linen, linen cloth.

Interest on Rupees	N/A	226:2:72	14,851:1:35	14,851:1:35
				<b>128,883:0:60</b>

Fig. 5.2 Sales of the *Balls* from Canton.<sup>33</sup>

Cowan’s involvement in the trade to Bengal appears to have bucked the suggested trend put forward by Hejeebu, of Company servants trading in silks and rice between presidencies.<sup>34</sup> Indeed, Cowan only invested in two voyages to Bengal during this period. The first of these was in 1731,<sup>35</sup> and the second in 1732.<sup>36</sup> This reflected Cowan’s main trading interests having previously been in the Middle East, and then having shifted to the Far East. Essentially, this reduced Bengal to the status of a stopover port for Cowan’s trade. The central power of the Mughal state was changing at this time, with the emergence of regional power structures, and there was a great degree of instability in the sub-continent, particularly at hub ports such as Surat.<sup>37</sup> This returns to Bayly’s work on the changing state of Mughal politics in the eighteenth century.<sup>38</sup> With this in mind, it was hardly surprising Cowan sought investment opportunities outside of this sphere in order to lessen his risk. Particularly, Cowan became involved in two voyages to London. It was interesting that Cowan invested in voyages to London as servants’

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Hejeebu, ‘Contract Enforcement in the English East India Company’, 503.

<sup>35</sup> Invoice of Goods Laden on the *Balls* for Calcutta, Bombay, 24 Apr. 1731, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/10A, f. 49).

<sup>36</sup> Invoice of Treasure Laden on the *Carolina* for Cochin and Calcutta, Bombay, 9 Aug. 1732, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/10A, f. 62).

<sup>37</sup> Cowan to James Macrae, Bombay, 20 Jan. 1731, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2B, f. 121).

<sup>38</sup> C.A. Bayly, *Imperial Meridian: The British Empire and the World, 1780-1830*, (New York, 1990), p. 16.

covenants specifically forbade trade between the east and Europe, with the penalty for such trade having amounted to dismissal and a fine.<sup>39</sup> This reflected the prohibitive nature of trade between the two spheres, with it simply not having been worth the risk of being convicted of interloping. However, it is important to note that on both occasions Cowan went through the proper channels and declared the voyages to the Company authorities, with the relevant charges and levies having been paid. This was because Cowan had remitted goods via two well connected figures within the East India Company network. These were William Phipps, Cowan's predecessor as governor of Bombay, and the Anglo-Jewish merchant Philip Mendes da Costa.<sup>40</sup>

The goods consigned to these men were Cambay beads<sup>41</sup> and diamonds respectively. Whilst the value of goods remitted to Mendes da Costa was approximately 9,730 rupees, the value of goods remitted on Cowan's account was a more modest 1,225 rupees. This may have reflected the relative availability of gemstones in India, Cowan's covenanted allowance, or even the amount to which Cowan was willing to risk when he was not in a position to oversee sales directly. Summaries of these invoices are shown below in figures 5.3 and 5.4. Cowan, as far as can be discerned for his own part, maintained his trading presence mostly in the intra-Asian sphere and did not risk the anger of Company authorities with illicit trade to Europe. However, he did remit the above-mentioned beads to London in 1732 as well as having made regular remittances

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<sup>39</sup> Hejeebu, 'Contract Enforcement in the English East India Company', 502.

<sup>40</sup> Philip Jacob Mendes da Costa (1708-1780). London merchant and eldest surviving son of the prominent Anglo-Jewish merchant John Abraham Mendes da Costa (1683-1763).

<sup>41</sup> Cambay was a traditional centre for the precious gemstone and bead trade. The type of beads likely remitted were agate beads. These are a multi-coloured form of quartz stone.

through bills of exchange to his father in Londonderry.<sup>42</sup> This, as well as having made gifts of precious stones, spirits and luxury items to his friends and family in Britain.<sup>43</sup>

Invoice of diamonds laden on the <i>Prince William</i> for the port of London. <sup>44</sup>				
<u>Commodity</u>	<u>Quantity</u>	<u>Cost</u>	<u>Sub-Total</u>	<u>Net-Total</u>
Diamonds	13	2,500:0:0		
Diamonds	9	3,712:2:0		
Diamonds	9	2,460:0:0		
Diamonds	4	198:3:0		
Diamonds	30	151:0:37		
Diamonds	75	88:0:50		
Diamonds	19	60:3:0		
Diamonds	9	95:0:0	9,266:2:87	
Commission	5%	463:1:34	463:1:34	<b>9,730:0:21</b>

Fig. 5.3 Invoice of diamonds on the *Prince William*.<sup>45</sup>

<sup>42</sup> Cowan to Henry Cairnes, Bombay, 25 Dec. 1725, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1C, f. 127v); Cowan to Henry Cairnes, Surat, 11 Jan. 1726, (f. 143).

<sup>43</sup> Cowan to Sir Matthew Decker, Mocha, 8 Jun. 1726, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1C, f. 161v); Cowan to Henry Cairnes, Mocha, 2 Jun. 1726, (f. 165v); Cowan to Edward Harrison, Mocha, 2 Jun. 1726, (f. 171v).

<sup>44</sup> Invoice of Diamonds Laden on the *Prince William*, Bombay, 20 Jan. 1731, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/10A, f. 37).

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

Invoice of Cambay beads and green stones laden on the <i>Oakham</i> . <sup>46</sup>				
<u>Commodity</u>	<u>Quantity</u>	<u>Cost</u>	<u>Sub-Total</u>	<u>Net-Total</u>
Strings of Red Beads	975	499:0:32		
Strings of Red Beads	992	510:56:0		
Strings of White	580	205:8:0		
Loose Green Stones	N/A	9:32:0	1225:0:0	<b>1225:0:0</b>

Fig. 5.4 Invoice of Cambay beads on the *Oakham*.<sup>47</sup>

Voyages which carried bullion, treasure or specie were a regular occurrence for Cowan's private trade during this period, with a total of 9 having taken place between 1729 and 1732. The spread of these voyages was fairly even, with 1 voyage in 1729, 3 in 1730, 2 in 1731 and 3 in 1732. At first glance this did not reflect a consistent investment pattern in which precious metals were being shipped out of English hands for investment in places such as Persia and China. This was done out of practicality and displayed the willingness of Cowan and his co-investors to invest cash in trading regions where the demand for English goods, such as woollens in particular, was low. With voyages such as these it was common for a number of investors to pool their funds to provide for both the fitting out of the vessel, and indeed the trading capital itself. The bill of exchange money transfer system, introduced in 1680 and utilised by the Company, meant that

<sup>46</sup> Invoice of Cambay Beads Laden on the *Oakham*, Bombay, 29 Jan. 1731, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/10A, f. 54).

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

money for investment was readily available for those who wished to draw credit on a broker or colleague's account to do so.<sup>48</sup>

The export of bullion and the garnering of a large debt was, however, a contentious issue within English society for much of the eighteenth century. The Mercantilist system, critiqued by Adam Smith, held that the wellbeing of an economy without natural gold or silver deposits, such as England, could be measured by the amount of bullion reserves which it held.<sup>49</sup> Following this line of thought, concerted efforts were made to ensure that exports outweighed imports and that a favourable balance of trade was maintained.<sup>50</sup> For the Company, who often had to rely on the export of bullion to ensure trade with regions such as India and China, this posed a natural problem and frequently drew criticism from Parliament and economic pressure groups. The result of this, as well as the movement into more mercantilist policies, meant that British overseas trade became increasingly regulated by Parliament.<sup>51</sup>

Hejeebu's argument that the private trade of Company servants helped to keep smaller ports and trading enclaves open<sup>52</sup> would appear to be supported by the evidence of Cowan's private trade, with a number of voyages being recorded to locations that do not appear very often in Company correspondence. Malacca<sup>53</sup> and Goa,<sup>54</sup> shown in figures 5.5 and 5.6, have been identified as such. The voyage undertaken to Malacca on 19 August 1732 was an interesting one as it was the only such voyage recorded for this

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<sup>48</sup> Hejeebu, 'Contract Enforcement in the English East India Company', 503.

<sup>49</sup> Julian Hoppit, *A Land of Liberty? England: 1689-1727*, (Oxford, 2000), p. 192.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> C.P. Hill, *British Economic and Social History: 1700-1982*, (Bath, 1985), p. 54.

<sup>52</sup> Hejeebu, 'Contract Enforcement in the English East India Company', 503.

<sup>53</sup> Invoice of Treasure Laden on the *Edward*, Bombay, 19 Aug. 1732, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/10A, f. 62).

<sup>54</sup> Invoice of Treasure Laden on the *Rose Galley*, Bombay, 4 Oct. 1731, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/10A, f. 51).



period. This may be regarded as strange as the voyage which was fitted out was provided with a large amount of treasure to invest, amounting to 30,000 rupees. The opportunity of entering the trade for spices and pepper cannot have been wasted on Cowan and his colleagues, and yet this voyage was a standalone incident. There are two primary reasons to suggest why the trade to Malacca was not continued, and indeed had not been active prior to August 1732.

First, it would have represented a long-distance voyage which would have made it necessary for a greater investment into the vessel as a sturdier ship would have been needed, combined with the need for a greater amount of supplies. Put simply, the risk and outlay would have been higher than many other ports in the intra-Asian network such as Mocha, Tellicherry or Anjenjo. Second, Malacca had been under Dutch colonial control since 1641, having been taken from the Portuguese.<sup>55</sup> This meant that there was a strong Dutch presence at Malacca during Cowan's era and that a degree of hostility towards English interests was likely. The voyage to Goa on 4 October 1731 was another interesting one as it too was a lone instance, yet also carried a great deal of treasure. 35,000 rupees was shipped to Goa for investment, though no indication was given as to what the investment was to have been in or if there were to be subsequent investments. The Company relationship with the Portuguese at the time was rather cool owing to the long standing econo-political rivalry, the recent issues regarding the Tannah-Carinjah pass and the failed expedition against Angré in 1721. The difficult relationship between the two powers, combined with the Company's ongoing suspicion surrounding the

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<sup>55</sup> A.D. Innes, *The Maritime and Colonial Expansion of England under the Stuarts*, (London, 1931), p. 172.

possibility of servants interloping with other European vessels back to England, were perhaps reasons why this Goa voyage was a one off.

Invoice of treasure & merchandise laden on the <i>Edward</i> for Malacca. <sup>56</sup>				
<u>Commodity</u>	<u>Quantity</u>	<u>Cost</u>	<u>Sub-Total</u>	<u>Net-Total</u>
Treasure	N/A	30,000:0:0		
Salt & Rash	N/A	450:0:0		
Gunny Bags	3,000	1,760:2:72		
Piece Goods	Mixed	552:0:0	32,762:2:72	
Charges	N/A	178:1:08	178:1:08	32,940:3:80
				<b>32,940:3:80</b>

Fig. 5.5 Invoice of the *Edward* for Malacca.<sup>57</sup>

Invoice of treasure on the <i>Rose Galley</i> for Goa. Bombay Castle, 19 August 1732. <sup>58</sup>				
<u>Commodity</u>	<u>Quantity</u>	<u>Cost</u>	<u>Sub-Total</u>	<u>Net-Total</u>
Silver Rupees	3 Chests	30,000:0:0		
Silver Rupees	1 Chest	5,000:0:0	35,000:0:0	35,000:0:0
				<b>35,000:0:0</b>

Fig. 5.6 Invoice of the *Rose Galley* for Goa.<sup>59</sup>

<sup>56</sup> Invoice of Treasure Laden on the *Edward*, Bombay, 19 Aug. 1732, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/10A, f. 62).

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Invoice of Treasure Laden on the *Rose Galley*, Bombay, 4 Oct. 1731, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/10A, f. 51).

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

Of the commodities which were of particular interest to the Company for shipment back to England, namely pepper and cloth, it is important to note that Cowan largely avoided these goods and sought to diversify his interests into other areas. This was due to the limitations placed on servants by the Company. In total, Cowan invested in only 3 voyages which traded for pepper. These occurred in 1730 and 1731.<sup>60</sup> This lack of interest in dealing in pepper likely reflected Cowan's understanding that there was a specific Company interest in the sourcing of pepper for the British market. It would have been unwise for Cowan to have sought to take up a great deal of pepper for his own account as this would have driven up the price for his masters' account. This avoidance of the pepper trade might also be said to have been out of practicality owing to the great difficulty which was experienced in sourcing it from Company factories such as Anjenjo and Tellicherry.<sup>61</sup> In short, Cowan was well advised to have diversified into other trading avenues as he had done.

The case of cloth and textiles was more complicated due to textiles having been a core trading component of the Surat market in the long term.<sup>62</sup> Cowan invested in a total of 10 voyages which contained a variety of textiles for sale across the intra-Asian trading sphere. However, the distinction must be made here between the delicate silks and calicoes which formed the basis of British interests in the imported cloth market from India. This was part of the wider chinoiserie movement which sought to associate oriental stylings with quality consumption patterns, something which drew criticism

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<sup>60</sup> Invoice of Goods Laden on the *Nassau*, Bombay, 21 Jan. 1730, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/10A, f. 21); Invoice of Goods Laden on the *Sallamander Ketch*, Bombay, 5 May 1730, (f. 30); Invoice of Goods Laden on the *Sackaree Grab*, Bombay, 14 Feb. 1731, (f. 45).

<sup>61</sup> Cowan to Sir Matthew Decker, Bombay, 10 Jan. 1730, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2B, f. 26v); Cowan to Edward Harrison, Bombay, 21 Oct. 1730, (f. 56).

<sup>62</sup> Najaf Haider, 'Precious Metal Flows and Currency Circulation in the Mughal Empire', *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, 39, No. 3, Money in the Orient (1996), 299.

from native English weavers and dyers.<sup>63</sup> The bulk of textiles which Cowan dealt in were gurreahs<sup>64</sup> and baftas<sup>65</sup> which were made of a coarser and less fashionable fabric. The spread of Cowan's investment in textile cargoes was focused towards the year 1730, when 5 out of the 10 voyages took place. The remaining 5 were spread out, with 2 voyages each in 1729 and 1731, and 1 in 1732. On the face of things this might not appear out of the ordinary and suggested a consistent pattern of textile investment. This was certainly true, though the difficulties which were experienced at the port of Surat were likely also factors. The spike in 1730 occurred during a period when affairs at Surat were relatively sedate whereas the other years, when there was a lower uptake in textiles by Cowan, there were political issues at Surat.

Cowan's private trade for the period was characterised by two distinct factors. First, that despite his previous financial difficulties and protestations about having little chance of making his fortune in India,<sup>66</sup> he had a remarkable upswing in fortune and was able to begin largescale investments by 1730. A great number of these investments were of course in conjunction with other investors to spread the risk, and his elevation to the governorship of Bombay meant that he had access to a much greater pool of credit. It was in this way that, as Hejeebu has highlighted, the Company became the de facto guarantors of private trade through their provision of credit to servants and their having allowed private goods to be stored in Company warehouses.<sup>67</sup> Second, that Cowan's trading interests took a swing eastward following 1730. This was represented by his

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<sup>63</sup> Jonathan Eacott, 'Making an Imperial Compromise: The Calico Acts, the Atlantic Colonies, and the Structure of the British Empire', *William and Mary Quarterly*, 69, No. 4 (October 2012), 749-50.

<sup>64</sup> A type of coarse Indian muslin.

<sup>65</sup> A coarse fabric, typically made of cotton.

<sup>66</sup> Cowan to Mrs. Cairnes, Bombay, 20 Dec. 1725, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1C, ff. 135-135v).

<sup>67</sup> Hejeebu, 'Contract Enforcement in the English East India Company', 516.

increased investment in the Far East via the port of Canton in particular. The purchase of the ship *Nassau* was also a key factor in this as Cowan then had access to a large ocean-going vessel. The knowledge of profitability between China and the western Indian Ocean also meant that he was in a position to step away from the traditional Mocha-Surat trading paradigm and seek greater profits from voyages with greater risk. Figure 5.7, below, shows a clear voyage pattern for Cowan's interests during the period 1732-5. It should be noted that it has been suggested that a shift away from Middle East trade occurred in favour of the Far East. However, figure 5.7 contradicts that assumption as it can be seen that there was an even split of 4 voyages each for the Ports of Mocha and Canton, with a further 4 for the port of Bussorah. This can be explained by the regularisation of trade in the region following 1731-2, in conjunction with the settling of tensions between the Safavid and Hotaki empires. The net result having been that Persia was in a state of relative tranquillity for the period 1732-5. This saw an increased supply of coffee which was purchased by Cowan personally, and on behalf of the Company.<sup>68</sup> However, the Company was not keen that any private buyers should have bought coffee in 1733 owing to the difficulty in securing a supply.<sup>69</sup> In addition to coffee, the potential trade in Carmentia wool, which had been lauded by Cowan throughout 1730-2, had proven to be a success.<sup>70</sup> Cowan pushed for the expansion of the Carmentia wool trade

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<sup>68</sup> Cowan to William Phipps, Parel, 14 Apr. 1733, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2D, f. 7v); Cowan to Josias Wordsworth, Bombay, 18 Aug. 1733, (f. 29v); Court of Directors to President and Council at Bombay, 26 Oct. 1733, (BL, India Office Records, IOR/E/3/106, f. 6); Court of Directors to President and Council at Bombay, 15 Mar. 1733, (f. 105v).

<sup>69</sup> Court of Directors to President and Council at Bombay, 15 Mar. 1733, (BL, India Office Records, IOR/E/3/106, f. 105v).

<sup>70</sup> Court of Directors to President and Council at Bombay, 1 Mar. 1733, (BL, India Office Records, IOR/E/3/105, ff. 354-354v).

in 1733, with his main concern having been that a supply was only guaranteed if Persia remained settled.<sup>71</sup>

The success in Cowan’s private trade and that of the Company reflected Erikson’s suggestion that England’s fortune in the east was closely tied to that of private trade.<sup>72</sup>

Private trade tended to entangle the Company in colonial matters, but also gave increased access to native markets.<sup>73</sup> The success in coffee and Carmentia wool was

despite criticism for the poor performance of Martin French in supplying goods at Bussorah in March of 1733.<sup>74</sup> This was interesting as Bussorah was within the same geo-

political sphere as Mocha and Carmentia where there had been recent success. However, Cowan’s optimism was rewarded as on 18 August 1733 he wrote to Captain

Matthew Bookey that a large quantity of Carmentia wool had been despatched to England.<sup>75</sup>

Voyages invested in by Robert Cowan 1732-5		
<u>Type</u>	<u>Destination</u>	<u>Number</u>
Voyage	Surat	3
Voyage	China / Canton	4
Voyage	Bengal	6

<sup>71</sup> Cowan to Edward Harrison, Bombay, 12 Apr. 1733, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2D, f. 2v); Cowan to Sir Matthew Decker, Bombay, 14 Apr. 1733, (f. 4).

<sup>72</sup> Emily Erikson, *Between Monopoly and Free Trade: The English East India Company 1600-1757*, (Princeton, 2014), p. 13.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Court of Directors to President and Council at Bombay, 1 Mar. 1733, (BL, India Office Records, IOR/E/3/105, f. 353).

<sup>75</sup> Cowan to Captain Matthew Bookey, Bombay, 18 Aug. 1733, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2D, f. 43).

Voyage	Malacca	5
Voyage	Mocha	4
Voyage	Mangalore	1
Voyage	Malabar	1
Voyage	Bussorah	4
Voyage	Bombay	1
Total		<b>26</b>

Fig. 5.7 Cowan's voyages, 1732-5.<sup>76</sup>

Despite Cowan's interests in the Middle East being rekindled following the onset of peace in the region, figure 5.7 also highlights that he maintained, and enlarged, a steady interest in the Far East. This interest had grown from 2 voyages in the period 1729-32 to 4 voyages for 1732-5. Central to this interest was the trade for sugar, white allum and chinaware.<sup>77</sup> Whilst outward voyages to China largely involved the transit of silver, and latterly opium further into the eighteenth century, the return leg involved the transit of the above goods to Bombay and Surat for re-export. A cargo split of approximately 2:1 was expected, with the bulk of goods often discharged at Surat. The re-export of goods was divided between both the local markets at Bombay and Surat, as well as the long-haul remittance to Europe. Sugar brought from China to the west coast of India was particularly profitable when sold to the Surat markets. Cowan was largely concerned in

<sup>76</sup> Robert Cowan Investment Accounts, 1732-5, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/10B).

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

this trade from 1730 onwards, and had contracted a large number of boats to ferry his sugar investment down to Bombay from Surat for lading onto Europe bound ships.

However, Cowan's trading interests in the east were not confined to China. He became greatly interested in the trade to South East Asia, and in particular to Malacca from 1732-3 onwards. This was in contrast to 1729-32, when he had largely avoided the region due to the strong presence of the Dutch. Whilst Cowan's accounts did not refer to what goods were bought at Malacca, the region was famous for sugar and spices, particularly pepper, and so it is a reasonable assumption that this was the primary concern of the voyages. Cowan did provide answers as to the outward voyages in his bills of lading, however. The invoice of goods and funds sent to Malacca on 21 August 1733 listed salt, gunnies and piece goods.<sup>78</sup> In terms of the goods bought for one of the return voyages, a large consignment of sugar was the bulk of the *Edward's* cargo from Malacca.<sup>79</sup> The presence of sugar amongst the cargoes for both the Chinese and Malaccan voyages was of no surprise due to the increased demand for sugar products in Europe. This ran in tandem with the fashion of coffee drinking which was common in European circles. As Smith has discussed, the act of combining coffee with sugar to make the drink sweeter came into practice in the early eighteenth century.<sup>80</sup> This represented luxury commodities from two sides of the intra-Asian trading network being united in consumption back in Europe.

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<sup>78</sup> Invoice of Treasure and Merchandise laden on the 'Nassau' to Malacca, Bombay, 21 Aug. 1733, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/10B, f. 26).

<sup>79</sup> Sales Account for the 'Edward' to Malacca, Bombay, 31 Jul. 1733, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/10B, f. 38).

<sup>80</sup> S.D. Smith, 'Accounting for Taste: British Coffee Consumption in Historical Perspective', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 27, No. 2 (Autumn, 1996), 187.



Cowan engaged in a number of voyages to the ports of Bombay and Surat, and also traded to Bengal. This reflected the need for private traders in India to be able to link up with key commercial hubs such as Bombay, Surat and Calcutta. This also highlighted the traditional west to east trading paradigm used by native merchants, and subsequently copied by Europeans.<sup>81</sup> Further, it tied into the Company's shift in interest from the west to the east of India in the eighteenth century.<sup>82</sup> This trade involved less risk to investors than voyages further afield to places such as Mocha or Canton, and there was a ready trading apparatus to integrate with. Cowan made use of this network many times over the period 1729-32, but also noted the trading difficulties at Surat which complicated this end of the trade.<sup>83</sup> The increased usage of the Surat to Bengal route suggested that the level of profitability or regard for the route increased. The issue with Surat was reported on with greater detail, and Cowan began to report on Surat matters with more optimism by 1733.<sup>84</sup> The difficulty with the Surat tanka negotiations clearly impacted Company affairs for a time in late 1733, but by January 1734 regular business was resumed.<sup>85</sup> Whilst it was acknowledged that due to the troubles, Gujarati trade waxed and waned, the pattern of Indian exports remained constant.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Hejeebu, 'Contract Enforcement in the English East India Company', 503.

<sup>82</sup> Amar Farooqui, 'Urban Development in a Colonial Situation: Early Nineteenth Century Bombay', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 31, No. 40 (Oct. 5, 1996), 2748.

<sup>83</sup> Cowan to Edward Harrison, Bombay, 12 Apr. 1733, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2D, f. 2v); Cowan to William Phipps, Bombay, 1 Feb. 1734, (f. 102).

<sup>84</sup> Cowan to Edward Harrison, Bombay, Aug. 1733, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2D, f. 11v); Cowan to Josias Wordsworth, Bombay, 18 Aug. 1733, (f. 28); Cowan to Charles Boone, Bombay, 12 Aug. 1733, (f. 52).

<sup>85</sup> Cowan to John Courtney, Bombay, 6 Jan. 1734, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2D, f. 70v); Cowan to William Phipps, Bombay, 1 Feb. 1734, (f. 88).

<sup>86</sup> Ashin Das Gupta, 'Indian Merchants and the trade in the Indian Ocean, c. 1500-1750' in T. Raychaudhuri & I. Habib (Eds), *The Cambridge Economic History of India, Vol.1: c. 1200 - c. 1750*, (Cambridge, 1982), p. 416.

The investigation into the net returns on investment is an interesting one as it gives an insight into the frequency in which Cowan made a profit or a loss on his voyages. The object of engaging in private trade was of course to make as much profit as possible in order to offset the privations of living and working overseas, and to return to Europe with a fortune. The pay ranks for servants in India ranged from £5 a year for a writer, to £40 a year for a senior merchant.<sup>87</sup> When the risks of the voyage out to India, differences in climate and lifestyle, and illness were taken into account, the desire to make the optimum profit level possible was understandable. Figure 5.8, below, lists Cowan's voyages for the period 1732-5 in which he was an investor. In several cases he was the majority investor in the voyages, but in many he held a smaller part. In 4 of the listings below, a figure was given for both Cowan's concern in the voyage, as well as his dividend. In a further 4, figures are only given for either the concern or the dividend, whilst the remainder outline the total proceeds of the voyage. The natural split of 4 voyages with complete data makes for an interesting case study, and several points upon these shall now be elaborated upon.

Return on investment for Cowan's Voyages, 1732-5.					
<u>Destination</u>	<u>Vessel</u>	<u>Month</u>	<u>Concern</u>	<u>Dividend</u>	<u>Total</u>
Bengal	<i>Carolina</i>	Aug. 1732	-	21,650:1:83	44,867:1:10
Bengal	<i>Carolina</i>	May 1733	21,650:04:83	25,243:2:26	53,494:3:26
Bengal	<i>Edward</i>	Feb. 1734	-	-	7755:0:68
Bengal	<i>Edward</i>	Aug. 1734	-	-	69,889:2:62
Bengal & Mangalore	<i>Balls</i>	31 Oct. 1732	56,553:2:06	-	117,860:1:25

<sup>87</sup> Hejeebu, 'Contract Enforcement in the English East India Company', 502.

Bombay	<i>Royal Guardian</i>	Aug. 1734	-	-	1,142:0:96
Bussorah	<i>Bussorah Merchant</i>	Nov. 1733	-	-	1,749:2:90
Bussorah	<i>Peggy</i>	Feb. 1734	-	-	41,112:1:41
Bussorah	<i>Carolina</i>	Jan. 1735	-	-	831:1:16
Calcutta	<i>Edward</i>	Aug. 1733	-	-	25,370:0:71
China	<i>Balls</i>	Jul. 1732	-	11,341:0:72	36,574:1:58
China / Canton	<i>Nassau</i>	Mar. 1733	-	-	126,430:1:08
China / Canton	<i>Nassau</i>	May 1733	53,329:3:77	53,072:0:48	180,992:1:06
China / Canton	<i>Cowan Frigate</i>	Apr. 1734	-	-	120,000:0:0
Malabar	<i>Cowan Frigate</i>	Aug. 1734	-	-	149,475:1:74
Malacca	<i>Edward</i>	Aug. 1732	-	24,166:3:60	58,333:3:20
Malacca	<i>Edward</i>	Nov. 1732	-	-	10,905:0:47
Malacca	<i>Edward</i>	Jul. 1733	24,166:3:60	23,170:0:30	58,477:0:0
Malacca	<i>Nassau</i>	Jan. 1735	-	-	23,922:1:15
Mocha & Malabar	<i>Carolina</i>	Oct. 1732	17,610:0:35	17,095:0:50	46,696:3:99
Mocha	<i>Edward</i>	Oct. 1734	-	-	97,649:1:50
Mocha & Bussorah	<i>Carolina</i>	Sept. 1734	-	-	21,695:0:17
Surat	<i>Carolina</i>	Jan. 1733	-	-	14,622:0:0
Surat	<i>Nassau</i>	Oct. 1734	-	-	100,715:1:48
Surat	<i>Wilmington</i>	Oct. 1734	-	-	9,795:0:89

Fig. 5.8 Return on investment for Cowan's Voyages, 1732-5.<sup>88</sup>

<sup>88</sup> Chart Showing the Return(s) on Investment for Cowan's Voyages 1732-5, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/10B).

Cowan previously noted that although he was content with the fortune he had made, he felt it was his duty to invest in a number of schemes which would not normally have interested him.<sup>89</sup> His responsibility, he argued, was to his friends and colleagues who had not progressed as far as he had and who were still trying to make a fortune of their own. In doing this he suggested he often had to forgo any hope of profit for himself, and instead had to think of his involvement as a stimulus for investment.<sup>90</sup> This represented the shift in Cowan's standing over his years in India from the junior patronage partner to the senior in many of his relationships. This appeared to have been true for three out of four of the above-mentioned voyages. As can be seen above, voyages to Canton, Malacca and Mocha all resulted in a net loss on Cowan's initial investment. It is interesting that voyages to these destinations proved unprofitable for Cowan, as it might have been expected that they represented a greater chance of a higher return on investment. The three loss making voyages were, however, to places which were further afield and therefore represented a higher risk factor for investment. This potentially explained the dip in profitability. The voyage which bucked the trend and made a profitable return on investment was the voyage of the *Carolina* to Bengal in May 1733. This was interesting as it pointed to the suggestion that the west to east trading paradigm, outlined above, may have returned to both profitability and popularity by May 1733.

As can be seen from figure 5.8, voyage accounts were spread between the years 1732 and 1735. Entries for 1735 were included, despite the fact that Cowan had returned to England by then, as he still held outstanding investments which were administered in

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<sup>89</sup> Cowan to Richard Legrand, Bombay, 20 Dec. 1733, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2D, f. 60v).

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

India by his friends and colleagues. The most prominent of these were his successor at Bombay, John Horne, and Henry Lowther who was chief of the Surat factory. The most active periods from the above voyages were the years 1733-4. This was as expected as this was the time that Cowan had the most capital, or credit, to invest in schemes and represented the peak position of his term as governor. There was a general trend upwards in the number of concerns for Cowan from 1732 to 1734, with him being concerned in 6 voyages in 1732, 7 in 1733 and 10 in 1734. This reflected Cowan's growing influence and investment potential.

It is interesting to note that Cowan's risk level remained relatively constant for the years 1732-5. In all of these years Cowan invested in voyages to India, the Middle East and the Far East on a consistent basis. As such, there was no increase or decrease in his willingness to risk ventures further afield as his prominence increased at this point. The sharp decline in the number of voyages invested in during 1735 was unsurprising due to Cowan's return to England. This process had begun as far back as April 1733 when both Cowan and Lowther had started to dispose of their surplus investments.<sup>91</sup> Further, the voyages of 1735 also reflected a lower investment outlay. This was concurrent with the supposed winding down of his affairs in India. In contrast, the years 1733-5 was the period when the highest outlay was visible.

As recorded above, Cowan's financial affairs for the period 1729-35 were a very hectic and varied affair. Cowan's assertion that he had made a modest competency in India seems to be in order with his estimation that he would have had between £500 and

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<sup>91</sup> Cowan to William Phipps, Parel, 14 Apr. 1733, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2D, f. 7).

£600 a year to live on in England,<sup>92</sup> with a further £300-£400 from the estate of his father.<sup>93</sup> In terms of Cowan's financial success in India, this result must be viewed as a positive one since Cowan had secured a comfortable pension for himself to live on once he returned to England. However, the above has only described his private trade and not directly dealt with his ultimate wealth. This, in tandem with the assertion that he may not have fully disclosed the extent of his private trade. The result of this was to provoke suspicion of him within the Company court of directors. This is something which shall be discussed in greater detail in chapter six.

### **I - Cowan's Interpersonal Network**

With Cowan's promotion to governor of Bombay, there was a marked jump in the number of letters which he wrote to senior Company officials in a personal capacity. These personal letters were particularly aimed at ensuring a line of communication and goodwill was maintained between Cowan and directors such as Edward Harrison and Sir Matthew Decker. Due to the nature of advancement within the Company, it was necessary for servants to have secure patronage in London so as to both recommend the servant in India as well as to protect against criticism. Cowan, as discussed in chapter two, was very much aware of the value of having a patronage circle on which to draw. However, his letters also allow a window into the wider Company patronage network through his observations on individual cases. Of particular interest in this regard are the

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<sup>92</sup> Cowan to Arthur Stert, Bombay, 18 Aug. 1733, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2D, f. 44).

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

cases of John Lambton<sup>94</sup> and Richard Waters,<sup>95</sup> with both having caused ripples throughout the Company network.

Waters was the Company's chief of Persia, having been appointed in February 1727,<sup>96</sup> with all of the subordinate settlements there under his control.<sup>97</sup> The crux of the issue was that he was alleged to have misappropriated funds via the consulage<sup>98</sup> mechanisms at the settlement of Spahaun, in conjunction with shielding native merchants from consulage charges in exchange for favours or bribes.<sup>99</sup> As expected in such a system of fraud, it was necessary for there to have been an accomplice who was well placed to assist. This role was fulfilled by Alexander Orme,<sup>100</sup> the company Chief of Spahaun.<sup>101</sup> Orme's reason for defrauding the Company was, according to Cowan, his bankruptcy in August 1728.<sup>102</sup> Orme was found, thanks to evidence brought forward by fellow company servant Mr. Cordieux, to have diverted funds to Waters.<sup>103</sup> Cowan reported to Charles Boone on 25 July 1729 that Waters was found guilty in his trial before the Bombay mayor's court and dismissed from the company service.<sup>104</sup> Dismissal, in Cowan's opinion, was the correct decision as Waters had not only breached his

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<sup>94</sup> 1719, 1721 - Writer; 1722 - Writer/Deputy Secretary; 1723, 1724, 1725 - Factor; 1726, 1727, 1728 – Junior Merchant; 1732 - 6th in Council, 1733 - 5th/6th in Council; 1734, 1735 - 7th in Council; 1736, 1737 - 6th in Council; 1740, 1741, 1742, 1743, 1744, 1745, 1746, 1747, 1748, 1749 – Senior Merchant.

<sup>95</sup> 1717, 1718 – Junior Factor; 1719 – Junior Factor/Senior Factor; 1721 – Factor; 1727 – Chief of Persia.

<sup>96</sup> Court of Directors to President and Council at Bombay, London, 28 Feb. 1727, (BL, India Office Records, IOR/E/3/104, f. 110v).

<sup>97</sup> Cowan to Edward Harrison, Bombay, 3 Jan. 1729, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2A, f. 43).

<sup>98</sup> Commission on customs.

<sup>99</sup> Cowan to Josias Wordsworth, Bombay, 6 Jan. 1729, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2A, f. 53); Cowan to Charles Boone, Bombay, 6 Jan. 1729, (f. 54v).

<sup>100</sup> 1721 – Factor.

<sup>101</sup> Cowan to Charles Boone, Bombay, 6 Jan. 1729, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2A, f. 54v).

<sup>102</sup> Cowan to Alexander Hamilton, Bombay, 30 Aug. 1729, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2A, f. 3v).

<sup>103</sup> Cowan to Henry Lyall, Bombay, 6 Jan. 1729, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2A, f. 49v).

<sup>104</sup> Cowan to Charles Boone, Bombay, 25 Jul. 1729, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2A, f. 86).

covenant, but had also been shown as morally reprehensible in his 'insatiable thirst for money.'<sup>105</sup>

It was a convenient argument for Cowan to have made at the time and one which was calculated to portray a sense of outrage at Waters' behaviour and morals, whilst at the same time portraying himself as a loyal Company servant. However, following his dismissal, Waters was given permission to settle his affairs in Persia before travelling home to England.<sup>106</sup> This was in line with what the Company expected for the repatriation of dismissed servants.<sup>107</sup> The difficulty in settling the Waters affair for Cowan was that Waters counted upon Charles Boone as his patron in London, whilst Cowan also looked up to Boone as a patron figure.<sup>108</sup> This difficulty was compounded by the fact that Waters was also acting in his capacity as an attorney for Boone in disposing of his interests in India, a task which involved him having to have much professional interaction with Cowan.<sup>109</sup> Despite his misgivings about the situation, Cowan consented to assist Waters fully in any matter which concerned Boone and his estate.<sup>110</sup> Boone readily engaged himself in defending Waters in London, though this caused Cowan much concern that Boone would suffer a loss in reputation when the full facts about Waters' guilt came out.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Cowan to Charles Boone, Bombay, 25 Sept. 1728, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2A, f. 33v).

<sup>106</sup> Cowan to Sir Matthew Decker, Bombay, 2 Sept. 1729, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2A, f. 103); Cowan to Edward Harrison, Bombay, 24 Jan. 1731, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2B, f. 83).

<sup>107</sup> Court of Directors to President and Council at Bombay, London, 27 Feb. 1729, (BL, India Office Records, IOR/E/3/104, f. 359); Court of Directors to President and Council at Bombay, London, 12 Mar. 1730, (BL, India Office Records, IOR/E/3/105, ff. 124v-126).

<sup>108</sup> Cowan to John Gould Jr., Bombay, 2 Sept. 1729, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2A, f. 113).

<sup>109</sup> Cowan to Charles Boone, Bombay, 2 Sept. 1729, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2A, f. 107).

<sup>110</sup> Cowan to Charles Boone, Bombay, 2 Sept. 1729, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2A, f. 107v).

<sup>111</sup> Cowan to Edward Harrison, Bombay, 24 Jan. 1731, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2B, f. 82v).



There was also the matter of Waters petitioning Boone against Cowan's interests.<sup>112</sup> To this end, Cowan resolved to provide concrete evidence which would make Boone's defence of Waters untenable,<sup>113</sup> with Cowan also having written to Boone on a regular basis to highlight the details of charges against Waters.<sup>114</sup> Cowan also took the initiative with his own petitions in having written negatively of Waters to Edward Harrison. In his letter of 24 January 1731, Cowan asserted that Waters had managed to get Boone onto his side by 'taking advantage of servants' weakness and vanity.'<sup>115</sup> Further, he alleged that Waters had forgotten himself since he was appointed an alderman, and that he believed this position gave him greater liberties than other Company servants.<sup>116</sup> The suggestion here was that Waters' poor practices would have eroded the authority of company presidents in India if Boone had continued his active support of him.<sup>117</sup>

Cowan also advised the directors that Waters was actively complaining about the mayor's court which had tried and found him guilty.<sup>118</sup> The mayor's court system, which established courts in Bombay, Calcutta and Madras by charter in 1726, was very new and little understood. Cowan highlighted that there were few lawyers amongst Company servants in India, and so the interpretation of legislation and procedure was still poorly understood by 1731.<sup>119</sup> Cowan was also concerned that if Waters' complaints

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<sup>112</sup> Cowan to Charles Boone, Bombay, 6 Jan. 1730, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2B, f. 37v).

<sup>113</sup> Cowan to William Phipps, Bombay, 28 Aug. 1730, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2B, f.55).

<sup>114</sup> Cowan to Charles Boone, Bombay, 25 Sept. 1728, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2A, f. 33); Cowan to Charles Boone, Bombay, 6 Jan. 1729, (f. 54v); Cowan to Charles Boone, Bombay, 2 Sept. 1729, (f. 107).

<sup>115</sup> Cowan to Edward Harrison, Bombay, 24 Jan. 1731, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2B, f. 83).

<sup>116</sup> Cowan to EIC Court of Directors, Bombay, 20 Jan. 1731, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2B, f. 97).

<sup>117</sup> Cowan to John Gould Jr., Bombay, 20 Jan. 1731, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2B, f. 104).

<sup>118</sup> Cowan to Charles Boone, Bombay, 25 Jul. 1729, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2A, f. 86).

<sup>119</sup> Cowan to Edward Harrison, Bombay, 24 Jan. 1731, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2B, f. 85v); Cowan to John Gould Jr., Bombay, 20 Jan. 1731, (f. 106).

were entertained it would not only have undermined the authority of the mayor's court, but also lead to a rise in sedition at Company settlements.<sup>120</sup>

Despite the case put forward by Cowan, the directors were apprehensive about the affair on two points. First, that the charges brought may not have been sufficient to have warranted dismissal. Second, that Cowan, and indeed the Bombay Council at large, had been complacent in not providing all of the information available. The directors wrote that whilst they had taken notice of Waters' complicity with Mr. Orme, they would have liked to have been sent a more complete account of his dismissal.<sup>121</sup> Whilst they expressed surprise at the charges brought against Waters, they approved of his recall from Persia to Bombay to answer the charges against him.<sup>122</sup> Further instructions were also given regarding the dismissal of servants from overseas service.<sup>123</sup> It was ordered that those under suspicion or having been charged were not to be sent offshore, i.e. back to England, without the directors first being given advice and the opportunity to comment.<sup>124</sup>

This might be viewed in two ways. First, that the renewed instructions given for the dismissal of servants was a genuine attempt to reform service protocols between the colonies and the metropolis. Second, that the act of having included the instruction in the letter to Cowan and his council was an attempt to caution their actions. The directors had already expressed surprise at the charges against Waters in particular, and

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<sup>120</sup> Cowan to John Gould Jr., Bombay, 20 Jan. 1731, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2B, f. 106).

<sup>121</sup> Court of Directors to Governor and Council at Bombay, London, 27 Feb. 1729, (BL, India Office Records, IOR/E/3/104, f. 358v).

<sup>122</sup> Court of Directors to Governor and Council at Bombay, London, 27 Feb. 1729, (BL, India Office Records, IOR/E/3/104 f. 359v).

<sup>123</sup> Court of Directors to President and Council at Bombay, London, 27 Feb. 1729, (BL, India Office Records, IOR/E/3/104, f. 359).

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*

there was a significant noise made in London by the supporters of Lambton<sup>125</sup> and Waters about the treatment received by these men. In this way it appeared likely that the directors' actions edged towards the latter suggestion as a way of censuring possible abuses in India, as well as demonstrating that they had acted on an alleged case of injustice against Lambton and Waters.

The personal aspect which emerged in the Waters case was that he occupied a position of authority in the Persian Gulf after Cowan's stint at Mocha.<sup>126</sup> At the end of Cowan's Mocha placement, it has been described how he oversaw the withdrawal of the factory there and the scaling back of company affairs in Persia due to the ongoing unsettled nature of politics in the region. By January 1729, Cowan recorded that Persia had a good chance of finally settling down and that company trade might resume.<sup>127</sup> Cowan had noted in 1726 that he was relieved the directors were satisfied with his performance at Mocha, and highlighted once again in September 1728 that he felt his actions at Mocha were partially responsible for the improved prospects in the region.<sup>128</sup> Here, Cowan was brought into direct opposition with Waters. Waters attested when he was initially recalled from Persia that much of the credit for the settling of company prospects belonged to him.<sup>129</sup> This was both a convenient defence for his actions in Persia and also a potential blow to Cowan's reputation. Cowan rejected the notion that Waters was

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<sup>125</sup> The case of Mr. Lambton will be expanded upon below.

<sup>126</sup> Court of Directors to President and Council at Bombay, London, 28 Feb. 1727, (BL, India Office Records, IOR/E/3/104, f. 110v).

<sup>127</sup> Cowan to John Gould Jr., Bombay, 6 Jan. 1729, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2A, f. 58).

<sup>128</sup> Cowan to Edward Harrison, Bombay, 23 Sept. 1728, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2A, f. 16).

<sup>129</sup> Cowan to Josias Wordsworth, Bombay, 6 Jan. 1729, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2A, f. 53v).

responsible for the improvement in Persia when writing to Boone and instead directed his praise to Mr. Cockill and Mr. Horne, both of whom had been serving in Persia.<sup>130</sup>

The case of Lambton was more complicated, though it also caused Cowan much concern and frustration. Cowan noted that Lambton was promoted to a position on the Bombay governing council as soon as he arrived in 1728, though was reprimanded a few days later on a charge of making false accusations about his fellow council members.<sup>131</sup> The crux of this was that he suggested Cowan had been just as extravagant during his posting at Mocha as his predecessor Mr. Sarson had been. Each Company settlement was assigned a specific amount to be spent on supplies and sundries for the factory table,<sup>132</sup> and it was this fund which Lambton alleged Cowan had taken advantage of. Cowan strongly denied this and protested that the only crime he was guilty of was that of having been a favourite of William Phipps during his time in India.<sup>133</sup>

As a result of this, Lambton's position on the council was revoked by a unanimous vote of the members and he was placed under arrest.<sup>134</sup> An examination was also carried out of Lambton's papers, though Cowan lamented that Lambton's wife had succeeded in destroying most of them before they could be secured.<sup>135</sup> Why it was necessary for these papers to have been destroyed was unclear, though the timing and circumstances of their destruction pointed to damning evidence. Cowan's discovery of Lambton's

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<sup>130</sup> Cowan to Charles Boone, Bombay, 6 Jan. 1729, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2A, f. 55).

<sup>131</sup> Cowan to Charles Boone, Bombay, 25 Sept. 1728, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2A, f. 32).

<sup>132</sup> Table costs included food, drink, furniture, service and staff.

<sup>133</sup> Cowan to Charles Boone, Bombay, 25 Sept. 1728, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2A, f. 33).

<sup>134</sup> Cowan to Charles Boone, Bombay, 25 Sept. 1728, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2A, f. 32v).

<sup>135</sup> Cowan to Charles Boone, Bombay, 25 Sept. 1728, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2A, f. 32v).

criticism also held a personal aspect to it as Cowan noted that he had previously always thought of Lambton as having been a 'sober and modest man.'<sup>136</sup>

There was a great sense of disappointment arising from Lambton's behaviour, as well as the suspicion which Cowan held that Lambton and Waters were conspiring together to discredit him.<sup>137</sup> There was also the issue regarding Boone's ongoing patronage of both Lambton and Waters which Cowan had to contend with. Cowan wrote that he was dismayed that it was Boone who had recommended both Lambton and Waters to the company as he was sure to suffer from a loss of reputation as a result of his support for them.<sup>138</sup> Indeed, Waters remained confident of Boone's support throughout the dispute. Cowan reported that Waters gave the impression he had little regard or need of his colleagues, and as such cut a very self-sufficient character.<sup>139</sup> Despite Cowan's assertion that Lambton was treated fairly in respect of his crime, Cowan also noted that Lambton's supporters in London had made considerable noise in complaining about the treatment given to him.<sup>140</sup>

Cowan, however, was not content to sit back and allow affairs to play out in London, and actively lobbied both Phipps and John Gould Jr. To both of these men, Cowan gave his assurance that he would provide proof which would damage Boone's defence of Lambton and Waters.<sup>141</sup> Specifically, he noted that he would produce evidence to the allegations which would cause Lambton's patrons to be 'ashamed' of their support of

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<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>137</sup> Cowan to Charles Boone, Bombay, 25 Sept. 1728, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2A, f. 33).

<sup>138</sup> Cowan to John Gould Jr., Bombay, 2 Sept. 1729, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2A, f. 113).

<sup>139</sup> Cowan to Charles Boone, Bombay, 25 Sept. 1728, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2A, f. 32v).

<sup>140</sup> Cowan to William Phipps, Bombay, 25 Jul. 1729, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2A, f. 69v).

<sup>141</sup> Cowan to William Phipps, Bombay, 28 Aug. 1730, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2B, f. 55); Cowan to John Gould Jr., Bombay, 29 Oct. 1730, (f. 57v).

him.<sup>142</sup> Despite Cowan's activity in prosecuting Lambton and Waters, however, he did acknowledge a feeling of sadness and surprise that men he had previously shown kindness to in India had returned to England and proven to have been enemies.<sup>143</sup> In this way, the criticism which these men directed at him reflected both a personal wound for Cowan as well as demonstrated the nature of Company politics and how quickly servants could turn on one another.

The directors felt Lambton had been harshly treated by servants at Bombay in light of his misdemeanours and criticism of his colleagues.<sup>144</sup> In the absence of the papers which Lambton's wife had successfully burnt, such an attitude was understandable. The case of Waters did, however, prove to be of far greater concern for the directors. In response to the charges of fraud, they advised the Bombay council that they would approach the case as a literal case of fraud and would then proceed to give their opinion.<sup>145</sup> The directors saw the case as having had two separate elements which might have drawn censure against Waters. First, they found that Waters had accepted a payment of 4,000 rupees to cover Orme's mismanagement at Gombroon.<sup>146</sup> The directors acknowledged that Waters had defrauded the Company cash in this regard, but that it was a case to be pursued through the mayor's court.<sup>147</sup> Second, at the core of the charge, was that Waters was guilty of accepting the estate of the banian Rama Comaty and not having

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<sup>142</sup> Cowan to John Gould Jr., Bombay, 29 Oct. 1730, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2B, f. 57v).

<sup>143</sup> Cowan to Charles Boone, Bombay, 2 Sept. 1729, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2A, f. 107).

<sup>144</sup> Court of Directors to President and Council at Bombay, London, 12 Mar. 1730, (BL, India Office Records, IOR/E/3/105, f. 124).

<sup>145</sup> Court of Directors to President and Council at Bombay, London, 12 Mar. 1730, (BL, India Office Records, IOR/E/3/105, f. 124v).

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>147</sup> Court of Directors to President and Council at Bombay, London, 12 Mar. 1730, (BL, India Office Records, IOR/E/3/105, f. 125).

divided it amongst his creditors.<sup>148</sup> Comaty was found guilty of high treason for conspiring with Angré against Bombay on 11 April 1720, and his estates were forfeit to the Company.<sup>149</sup> The directors argued on Waters' behalf that the estate of Rama Comaty was received several years previously, and that no creditors had come forward.<sup>150</sup> Additionally, they distanced themselves from the mayor's court proceedings by pointing out that the action against Waters was without precedence and that the matter involving Rama Comaty's estate was a civil matter.<sup>151</sup>

The judgement of the directors in this matter was that they would have reinstated Waters due to the poorly presented case against him.<sup>152</sup> However, there was a complication in that Waters had appealed his dismissal to the King in Council<sup>153</sup> and the matter was thus taken out of their hands.<sup>154</sup> Despite Cowan's protests and evidence put forward, it appeared that the Waters lobby in London was sufficiently strong to have secured sympathy for his case. It is unclear as to which side was entirely in the right, if either was, but the Waters episode cannot be viewed as anything but a loss for Cowan both personally and publicly. This failure served to fuel discussion within Company circles about possible abuses of arbitrary power and private interest on the part of

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<sup>148</sup> Court of Directors to President and Council at Bombay, London, 12 Mar. 1730, (BL, India Office Records, IOR/E/3/105, f. 124v).

<sup>149</sup> Vaibhav Sharma, 'Bombay and the English Company: The Making of a Town (1661-1755)', PhD Thesis, Jawaharlal Nehru University, (2008), pp. 297-9.

<sup>150</sup> Court of Directors to President and Council at Bombay, London, 12 Mar. 1730, (BL, India Office Records, IOR/E/3/105, f. 124v).

<sup>151</sup> Court of Directors to President and Council at Bombay, London, 12 Mar. 1730, (BL, India Office Records, IOR/E/3/105, f. 125v).

<sup>152</sup> Court of Directors to President and Council at Bombay, London, 12 Mar. 1730, (BL, India Office Records, IOR/E/3/105, ff. 124-126).

<sup>153</sup> The advisory body to the British Monarch more commonly known as the Privy Council.

<sup>154</sup> Court of Directors to President and Council at Bombay, London, 12 Mar. 1730, (BL, India Office Records, IOR/E/3/105, f. 126).

Cowan and, in conjunction with his private trading misdemeanours, was a key element which ultimately led to his removal from office.

The expression private interest is one which cropped up occasionally in Cowan's letters when he was seeking to defend his position against critics by swearing his loyalty to the Company, and rejecting the notion that he was putting private interest above the Company's. Private trade and the construction of personal merchant empires did, after all, present a lucrative opportunity for Company servants.<sup>155</sup> The danger of servants engaging in private ventures above Company interests was nothing new to the minds of those associated with the Company. The Company took a dim view of interlopers illegally tapping into Company markets and trade routes over the previous century. The culmination of this was the creation of a new East India Company and its subsequent merging with the old company in 1708, and the subsequent settling of loose ends by award of Lord Godolphin<sup>156</sup> in 1709.<sup>157</sup> In the east, as Scammell has highlighted, men could live to their vices' whim, with the possibility of private trade a lucrative one.<sup>158</sup> Further, Prakash has argued that it was not uncommon for Company officials to take advantage of their positions to engage in private trade, often to the detriment of the company policy and position.<sup>159</sup>

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<sup>155</sup> Hejeebu, 'Contract Enforcement in the English East India Company', 496-8.

<sup>156</sup> Sidney Godolphin, 1<sup>st</sup> Earl of Godolphin (15 Jun. 1645 – 15 Sept. 1712). Politician of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. Lord High Treasurer (8 May 1702 – 11 Aug. 1710).

<sup>157</sup> Innes, *The Maritime and Colonial Expansion of England under the Stuarts*, p. 281.

<sup>158</sup> G.V. Scammell, 'European Exiles, Renegades and Outlaws and the Maritime Economy of Asia c.1500-1750,' *Modern Asian Studies*, 26, No. 4 (Oct., 1992), 659.

<sup>159</sup> Prakash, 'English Private Trade', 218.



## II - Cowan and Company Politics in London

Cowan's political standing in London was the subject of much change during the period 1732-5. Cowan had to contend with both the criticism and intrigues of Charles Boone, as well as the changing landscape of the Company boardroom. The issue with Boone and his patronage circle stretched back to Cowan's initial removal of Waters from his position at Gombroon in 1729-30, though the difficulty was compounded by Lambton's complaints about Cowan as well.<sup>160</sup> Although Cowan resolutely insisted that he had always acted in the Company's interests and had nothing to hide in the Lambton and Waters affairs,<sup>161</sup> the campaign against Cowan in London did not cease. Cowan wrote to Edward Harrison and mused that the success or failure of Boone was likely to be tied to the fates of Lambton and Waters.<sup>162</sup> The fact that the Company had written to Cowan in 1732 to highlight that they did not take the same view on the cases of the two men as Cowan complicated matters for him.<sup>163</sup> Indeed, the increased growth of factions in London meant that his position was increasingly precarious.

The threat from Boone was evident, with Cowan having noted that Boone was firmly behind Waters and was actively promoting his interests.<sup>164</sup> It was significant that Cowan had gone from regular contact with Boone during the years 1721-30, to having written

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<sup>160</sup> Cowan to Charles Boone, Bombay, 25 Sept. 1728, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2A, f. 32); Court of Directors to President and Council at Bombay, London, 12 Mar. 1730, (BL, India Office Records, IOR/E/3/105, f. 124).

<sup>161</sup> Cowan to William Phipps, Parel, 14 Apr. 1733, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2D, f. 6); Cowan to Charles Boone, Bombay, 12 Aug. 1733, (f. 52).

<sup>162</sup> Cowan to Edward Harrison, Bombay, Aug. 1733, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2D, f. 12).

<sup>163</sup> Court of Directors to President and Council at Bombay, London, 12 Mar. 1730, (BL, India Office Records, IOR/E/3/105, ff. 124-125).

<sup>164</sup> Cowan to William Phipps, Bombay, 18 Aug. 1733, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2D, f. 54).

very few letters to him during the years 1730-4. The letter Cowan wrote to Boone on 31 January 1734 was thus doubly important due to both the timing and the content. In this letter, Cowan described Boone's proposal that Cowan should forgive Waters as a favour to Boone for all of his support for Cowan during his Company career.<sup>165</sup> Cowan rejected this proposal, despite his continued admiration for Boone, on the grounds that Waters had been an active enemy in London and had stirred up trouble for Cowan there.<sup>166</sup> Whether or not Cowan forgave Waters did not ultimately matter, however, as Waters was reemployed by the Company and sent out to India once again.<sup>167</sup> Cowan begrudgingly agreed to comply, but made it clear that he would not take Waters into his confidence.<sup>168</sup> This represented a loss for Cowan as he had been overruled in his dismissal of Waters, and the Boone patronage network in London had succeeded in getting Waters redeployed to the western presidency.<sup>169</sup> A renewed directive from the Company then ordered that servants could only be dismissed in future for a very serious breach of trust.<sup>170</sup> The long-term success of the western presidency was faced with a poor future, according to Cowan, as he lamented that although his successor, John Horne,<sup>171</sup> was a good-natured man, he was very much under the sway of Lambton and Waters.<sup>172</sup>

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<sup>165</sup> Cowan to Charles Boone, Bombay, 31 Jan. 1734, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2D, f. 83v).

<sup>166</sup> Cowan to Charles Boone, Bombay, 31 Jan. 1734, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2D, f. 84).

<sup>167</sup> Cowan to John Drummond, Bombay, 31 Jan. 1734, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2D, f. 85v); Court of Directors to President and Council at Bombay, London, 1 Mar. 1733, (BL, India Office Records, IOR/E/3/105, f. 364v).

<sup>168</sup> Cowan to John Drummond, Bombay, 31 Jan. 1734, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2D, f. 85v).

<sup>169</sup> Court of Directors to President and Council at Bombay, London, 1 Mar. 1733, (BL, India Office Records, IOR/E/3/105, f. 364v).

<sup>170</sup> Court of Directors to President and Council at Bombay, London, 1 Mar. 1733, (BL, India Office Records, IOR/E/3/105, f. 362v).

<sup>171</sup> 1715, 1716, 1717, 1718, 1719 – Junior Factor; 1721 – Junior Merchant/7th in Council; 1734 – Deputy Governor/Accountant; 1735 – Deputy Governor/Accountant/President; 1736, 1737, 1738, 1739 – President of the Western Presidency.

<sup>172</sup> Cowan to William Phipps, Bombay, 1 Feb. 1734, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2D, f. 90).

Cowan did not, however, allow the positive spin on Waters to be the only narrative in London. Cowan made it clear in his correspondence that there were grounds for doubting the integrity of Waters. In his letter to Phipps on 1 February 1734, Cowan challenged the notion that he was the main reason that Waters had returned to England. Waters' was, Cowan alleged, motivated by the 'pride and vanity of his wife.'<sup>173</sup> There was precedence for occasions like this at the time, with Henry Lowther's wife having suffered badly at Surat due to the climate and disconnect from society.<sup>174</sup> Whilst it was not uncommon for servants' wives to feel uncomfortable with an extended stay in India, this version of events differed significantly from that provided by Cowan in 1730-1 when he accused Waters of fraud and summarily dismissed him.<sup>175</sup> This accusation was followed by his suggesting to John Gould Jr. that Waters was 'the bane of any society he enters.'<sup>176</sup> These were clearly personal attacks which were intended to damage Waters' reputation amongst the pro-Cowan or neutral directors who may have been willing to support Cowan against Boone and Waters.

There are two main suggestions which can be drawn from this. First, that Cowan only felt the need to stage attacks when he was either stressed or felt that his position was in danger. Second, that his confrontation with Waters, and by extension Boone, was the first time that he had been openly challenged by a rival Company lobby or patronage network. Prior to the Waters affair, Cowan had always counted on the support of Boone as well as his own patrons in London such as Sir Matthew Decker, John Gould and Edward Harrison. Due to the rapidly changing composition of the board of directors

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<sup>173</sup> Cowan to William Phipps, Bombay, 1 Feb. 1734, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2D, f. 97v).

<sup>174</sup> Cowan to Sir William Lowther, Bombay, 18 Aug. 1733, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2D, f. 47).

<sup>175</sup> Cowan to John Gould Jr., Bombay, 2 Sept. 1729, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2A, f. 112v);

Cowan to Charles Boone, Bombay, 25 Sept. 1728, (f. 33v).

<sup>176</sup> Cowan to John Gould Jr., Bombay, 1 Feb. 1734, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2D, f. 107v).

through 1733-5, however, Cowan's position was gradually eroded whilst the Boone lobby's power increased. This feeds into what Hejeebu has described as the distinct resilience which categorized the patronage relationship within East India Company circles.<sup>177</sup> The ties of loyalty between patron and client meant that at some stage there was the possibility that one area of interest would take precedence over another. In the case of Cowan, it was clear that Boone chose to favour Waters over him.

The example of Waters and the collapse of Boone's patronage for Cowan is a good study for Hancock's arguments regarding the manner in which commercial networks and network memory could fail. Hancock has provided conventional reasons for why networks could fail such as a lack of resources or will to carry out agreed tasks.<sup>178</sup> This again returns to the rational actor theory with regard to members of networks choosing self-interest over the common.<sup>179</sup> However, Hancock has gone further and suggested that while networks could fail for seemingly obvious reasons, there were also possibly hidden costs involved in personal networks which could act both for and against members. In particular, ethnic, religious and familial links could be incorporated into expectations surrounding business and patronage dealings.<sup>180</sup> This is interesting with regard to Cowan as he, from the outside, appeared to have other solid patronage links and a strong financial position when compared to Waters. It was likely that the divergence in patronage occurred as a result of the initial sources of patronage for both Cowan and Waters. It has been commented upon how Cowan's patronage network was

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<sup>177</sup> Hejeebu, 'Contract Enforcement in the English East India Company', 500.

<sup>178</sup> David Hancock 'Combining Success and Failure: Scottish Networks in the Atlantic Wine Trade' in David Dickson, Jan Parmentier & Jane Ohlmeyer (eds), *Irish and Scottish Mercantile Networks in Europe and Overseas in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, (Gent, 2007), p. 18.

<sup>179</sup> Erikson, *Between Monopoly and Free Trade*, pp. 108-9.

<sup>180</sup> Hancock, 'Combining Success and Failure', p. 19.

one which originated with Ulster Presbyterian financial circles which evolved to incorporate a greater number of London based patrons. Boone and his network, on the other hand, constituted an established courtly Company network. Boone was from a distinct southern English background and associated with established English institutions such as sending his son, Daniel, to Eton and Cambridge.<sup>181</sup> This suggested an ethnic disconnect, in line with Hancock's work,<sup>182</sup> in the Boone network which ultimately chose to favour the more familiar Waters than Cowan.

This idea of an ethnically-motivated commercial network returns to the arguments made in chapter one surrounding Cowan's ability to tap into the Presbyterian International network theory to further his career. Whilst Cowan's London patronage was largely provided by the Gould family, his introduction to them and his early commercial ventures were as a result of his relationship with the Cairnes family in Ireland. The Cairnes family were well connected in dissenting circles in Ireland, with the Henry and Conolly links highlighted above. In particular, the Cairnes-Conolly political link in county Londonderry, discussed by Walsh, in the early eighteenth century appears to have been vital.<sup>183</sup> Cowan's incorporation into London financial circles through his connection to Irish dissenting commercial networks suggests a form of cohesive Ulster or diasporic Presbyterian network which sought the advancement of its members. The existence of a large Irish commercial population operating out of Coleman Street in the early eighteenth century, and specific connections to powerful London-based financial families, such as the Nesbitts' link to the Goulds, also suggested that there was also a

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<sup>181</sup> ([www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1715-1754/member/boone-daniel-1710-70](http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1715-1754/member/boone-daniel-1710-70)), (5 Mar. 2019).

<sup>182</sup> Hancock, 'Combining Success and Failure', pp. 18-22.

<sup>183</sup> Patrick Walsh, *The Making of the Irish Protestant Ascendancy: The Life of William Conolly, 1662-1729*, (Woodbridge, 2010), p. 116.

pervasive Irish element in London commercial circles.<sup>184</sup> This highlights how the social structures of Britain and Ireland, particularly those governing the financial world, allowed passage between the two spheres in certain circumstances. It is argued that membership of an ethnic, or at least well-connected, network was a method used for moving from one financial or political sphere to the other. This is an argument also articulated by Bailey when discussing patronage of ethnic identities as a means of social exchange to overcome boundaries, whether they were social, economic or physical in nature.<sup>185</sup>

Returning to the argument first mooted in chapter one, it is also important to more fully unpack the discussion relating to the variety of political avenues connecting individuals with Company service. The current emphasis, not least in the work of Jane Ohlmeyer, is that courtly patronage delivered high ranking posts to those favoured by members of the court of directors. Ohlmeyer's example of Thomas Ashe's patronage of Gerald Aungier is a good example of this.<sup>186</sup> What is presented by the Cowan example is, however, a very different scenario. Cowan, as was seen above in chapter one and earlier in this chapter, derived his patronage from a complex political and commercial network; this is the idea of a Presbyterian International which gave opportunities to dissenting Irishmen as a way of circumventing the impact of the test act of 1704. Whilst the Cowan and Aungier examples are by no means mutually exclusive, with both having allowed Irishmen to transcend social, political and economic barriers in eighteenth-century

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<sup>184</sup> Craig Bailey, 'The Nesbitts of London and their Networks' in David Dickson, Jan Parmentier & Jane Ohlmeyer (eds), *Irish and Scottish Mercantile Networks in Europe and Overseas in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, (Gent, 2007), p. 236.

<sup>185</sup> Craig Bailey, 'Metropole and Colony: Irish Networks and Patronage in the Eighteenth-Century Empire', *Immigrants & Minorities*, 23, Nos. 2-3, (Jul. – Nov. 2005), 162-3.

<sup>186</sup> Jane Ohlmeyer, 'Eastward Enterprises: Colonial Ireland, Colonial India', *Past & Present*, 240, No. 1, (Aug. 2018), 96.

Ireland, it is clear that the understanding of Irish involvement in empire has evolved. It is argued that the current discussion must now be shifted away from aspects of courtly patronage to more fully incorporate the growing understanding of the impact of ethnic networks on the study of the Irish in empire.

Further, the argued construction of an ethnically involved network ties in to the debate started by Margot Finn on the familial proto-state. Finn has noted how the literature on British national identity among the imperial governing elite highlights their willingness to incorporate ethnic others from within the British Isles.<sup>187</sup> The specific example of Cowan and his dissenting Irish identity applies here with his betrothal to Elizabeth Gould. Finn has argued that kin-based financial mechanisms underpinned British, and indeed European, expansion in India. The Company directors' monopoly over scarce appointments in India strongly linked Company service to hereditary interests. Again, the importance of intermarriage with well-connected families, preferably also with Company links, was seen as a vital course in sustaining imperial kin networks.<sup>188</sup> If, following this line of argument, Cowan was incorporated into the Gould imperial network, it was likely done with the intent of shoring-up influence in India to deal with the increasing social, cultural and economic demands of empire. However, it is intriguing that the example of Cowan occurred earlier in the eighteenth century than the key example of Gilbert Elliot<sup>189</sup> given by Finn in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.<sup>190</sup> This suggested that the process of kin and marriage linked networking in empire was begun significantly earlier than the generation of Elliot. As such, the Cowan

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<sup>187</sup> Margot C. Finn, 'Family Formations: Anglo India and the Familial Proto-State', in David Feldman & Jon Lawrence (eds), *Structures and Transformations in Modern British History*, (Cambridge, 2011), p. 101.

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 102-3.

<sup>189</sup> Gilbert Elliot, 1<sup>st</sup> Earl Minto, (23 Apr. 1751 – 21 Jun. 1814). Governor-General of India, (1807 – 1813).

<sup>190</sup> Finn, 'Family Formations', pp. 102-3.

archive has the potential to enlarge the debate begun by Finn by pushing it earlier into the eighteenth century, thus more stringently binding the familial social unit and its attendant networks to the early empire.

In discussing commercial networks and their place in empire, particularly in the present study due to the inherent London financial connections, it is necessary to also draw attention to the debate over Cain and Hopkin's arguments on gentlemanly capitalism. Specifically, the discussion surrounding the alliance of land, politics and money in the eighteenth century, and how capital arising from this in London was channelled into imperial investment schemes.<sup>191</sup> The central argument being made was that landed capital with London financial connections, often to the East India Company, sought to advance the project of empire for private commercial reasons. This was an extreme example of the public versus private interest debate discussed throughout this study. With Cowan's membership of the Cairnes-Gould East India network which had its own interests and objectives within empire, likely realised through Cowan to an extent, it is reasonable to tie Cowan into the discussion of gentlemanly capitalism.

The gentlemanly capitalist order had its genesis in the aftermath of the 1688 revolution when the identity of financial magnates began to evolve as landed estates were consolidated.<sup>192</sup> The key period, however, was the 1690s which saw the birth of an advanced financial sector. The creation of institutions such as the Bank of England, the national debt and specialised merchant banks in London, such as that of Gould and Nesbitt,<sup>193</sup> gave London the ability to compete against advanced foreign financial

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<sup>191</sup> P.J. Cain. & A.G. Hopkins, *British Imperialism: Innovation and Expansion, 1688-1914*, (New York, 1994), pp. 71-2.

<sup>192</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 58-9.

<sup>193</sup> Bailey, 'The Nesbitts of London', pp. 235-6.



systems such as the Dutch.<sup>194</sup> The extension of the gentlemanly capitalist system abroad appears to have been the natural progression owing to the potentially high rates of return on investment when compared to domestic schemes. Overseas expansion was also favourable to a number of interested parties, such as manufacturers and import-export merchants.<sup>195</sup> The early eighteenth century saw the expansion of gentlemanly capitalist interests in India. However, up until the middle of the century, Britain's interests on the subcontinent were represented by the Company and associated private traders, and were almost exclusively commercial.<sup>196</sup>

During the period under discussion, the Company, and crucially its privately interested associates, were clearly in the best position to exploit opportunities presented by gentlemanly capitalism. The link between Cowan and his wider network to this system of financial dominance was intriguing given Cowan's Irish ethnicity. It suggested that there was a form of political economy which connected Irish and British interests through the participation in empire. The primary goal of this association was the creation of wealth by employing British and Irish landed capital to invest in imperial investment schemes, be they in India or elsewhere. This also said much about the nature of social integration arising from the possession of wealth. As Cain and Hopkins have noted, gentrification of middle-class interest, such as Cowan's, was possible through the purchase of land, intermarriage and the acquisition of titles.<sup>197</sup> Cowan was ultimately successful in this pursuit, having acquired great wealth, a knighthood and a seat in Parliament by the end of his life. Thus, he was able to evolve his identity through

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<sup>194</sup> Cain & Hopkins, *British Imperialism*, pp. 59-60; 63.

<sup>195</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 86.

<sup>196</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 91-2.

<sup>197</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 67.

gentlemanly capitalist pursuits, ultimately ending up as a wealthy nabob. His use of his Indian wealth as such was concurrent with Lawson and Phillip's arguments on nabobery and gentrification.<sup>198</sup>

Cowan was a clear example of how gentlemanly capitalist activity could benefit both the individual and his wider network. This was often to the detriment of the public interest, largely represented by the East India Company in the early eighteenth century. The ability of mercantile network members such as Cowan to access lines of credit and contacts upon reaching India, as argued by Soren Mentz, was evidence that suggested gentlemanly capitalist elements were successfully providing for their clients and ensuring network compliance in the process.<sup>199</sup> Cowan's private trade, with relation to the gentlemanly capitalist trade was interesting. Cain and Hopkins have articulated that private traders such as Cowan primarily dealt in Indian merchandise, suggestive of personal ambitions for empire, rather than in British.<sup>200</sup> This was certainly true of Cowan, who kept his investment schedule away from British goods. This could also have been due to Company restrictions, however. Nevertheless, Cowan highlights an important point made by Mentz which holds that it is difficult to assess the level of private capital brought by individuals to India.<sup>201</sup> This was true of Cowan, who went to great lengths to portray himself as cash poor upon arrival in India. This was despite his extensive private trading apparatus, something that will be dealt with at length in chapter six.

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<sup>198</sup> P. Lawson & J. Phillips, ' "Our Execrable Banditti": Perceptions of Nabobs in Mid-Eighteenth Century Britain,' *Albion*, 16, No. 3, (Autumn, 1984), 226.

<sup>199</sup> Soren Mentz, *The English Gentleman Merchant at work: Madras and the City of London, 1660-1740*, Copenhagen, 2005), p. 73.

<sup>200</sup> Cain & Hopkins, *British Imperialism*, p. 93.

<sup>201</sup> Mentz, *The English Gentleman Merchant*, p. 81.

Cowan clearly had access to a secure line of credit during his time in India, and this was likely provided by his patrons and network connections. This was suggestive of the gentlemanly capitalist interest being at work, with Cowan and his career having been used as a means of investment within empire. His inclusion of his various patrons and network connections in his investment schedule is testament to this, and suggests a form of interdependence. This returns to the arguments of Hancock with regard to network operations, in that the core function of a network was to provide the means to overcome the myriad challenges involved in overseas business.<sup>202</sup> The concept of the importance of business and social networks to the gentlemanly capitalist order was also recognised by Cain and Hopkins in their assertion that these networks were crucial to the functioning of the banking networks which underpinned the process of investment in empire.<sup>203</sup> Cowan and his network was therefore a prime example of how privately interested commercial networks engaged in gentlemanly capitalism with the goal of wealth creation. This was, as highlighted above, often to the detriment of official public strategies, with important official decisions made by Cowan, such as those elaborated upon in chapter four, potentially having been privately motivated.

Despite Phipps' rumoured appointment as a director in 1734, Cowan's support was badly hit between 1733 and 1734. Cowan's long-term patron in London, Edward Harrison, died on 28 November 1732. This was an event which greatly troubled Cowan, and was something he expressed at length to John Gould and Sir Matthew Decker.<sup>204</sup>

Cowan's letters to these men were both expressions of remorse, but also broached the

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<sup>202</sup> Hancock, 'Combining Success and Failure', p. 9.

<sup>203</sup> Cain & Hopkins, *British Imperialism*, p. 126.

<sup>204</sup> Cowan to John Gould, Bombay, 18 Aug. 1733, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2D, f. 51v); Cowan to Sir Matthew Decker, Bombay, 18 Aug. 1733, (f. 53v); Cowan to John Drummond, Bombay, 18 Aug. 1733, (f. 55v).

subject of his own patronage in London. Having lost so powerful a patron, Cowan was keen to shore up his remaining support. This was complicated by the fall in favour of another of Cowan's long-term supporters in 1733-5, Sir Matthew Decker. Decker, according to Cowan, had upset many of his colleagues when, as chairman in 1732, he had suggested lowering the annual Company dividend.<sup>205</sup> This proved an unpopular recommendation which led to the gradual ostracism of Decker from Company circles. As a result of this, Decker did not seek re-election to the directors in 1733 and quietly retired from Company life.<sup>206</sup> The loss of both Decker and Harrison in the same year was a blow to Cowan and although he could still count on supporters such as the Gould family and John Drummond,<sup>207</sup> the growing influence of the Boone lobby was a concern for him.

In the same way that Cowan went on the attack over the Waters affair, he also took a proactive line in dealing with his patronage crisis. Cowan wrote to many of his friends and acquaintances in order to rally support in London. The most notable of these was his letter to Arthur Stert on 18 August 1733. In this letter, Cowan acknowledged that there were likely to be changes in the Company and that he desired Stert rally support on his behalf.<sup>208</sup> Cowan had known Stert in Lisbon prior to his Company employment, and it was Stert who had helped Cowan's patronage attempts initially. Stert initially introduced Cowan to Charles Wayer, who in turn then recommended Cowan to Edward Harrison. Whilst Cowan had maintained a semi-regular correspondence with Stert

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<sup>205</sup> Cowan to William Phipps, Bombay, 18 Aug. 1733, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2D, f. 54).

<sup>206</sup> Cowan to Sir William Lowther, Bombay, 18 Aug. 1733, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2D, f. 55); Cowan to Arthur Stert, Bombay, 18 Aug. 1733, (f. 55v); Cowan to Nathaniel Gould, Bombay, 5 Jan. 1734, (f. 64).

<sup>207</sup> 1722 – Company Director; 1725 – Patron.

<sup>208</sup> Cowan to Arthur Stert, Bombay, 18 Aug. 1733, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2D, f. 55v).

throughout his time in India, this request to levy support represented a return to his early patronage roots in an attempt to garner greater support. This was complimented by his activity in seeking out new sources of patronage. Between August 1733 and September 1734, Cowan wrote letters to figures such as Alexander Stewart,<sup>209</sup> Captain David Wilkie,<sup>210</sup> Captain Robert Hudson<sup>211</sup> and Richard Legrond<sup>212</sup> to seek additional support. This activity was reminiscent of his letters to various patrons and wellwishers during his time at Goa and Mocha. In these letters, Cowan advised them of his progress and thanked them for their support. The evolution of Cowan's needs had clearly come full circle by 1733, however, and he was obliged to play the role of applicant to favour once again.

Cowan's position with the Company hierarchy in London was a tenuous one by 1733. This was due to the commonly held view that he had used his position as governor of Bombay to line his own pockets. Whilst the directors acknowledged that the trade between Mocha and Bombay had increased during the years Cowan was governor, they attributed this to Cowan's previous experience at Mocha and his acting in his own interests.<sup>213</sup> Of this Mocha trade, they made it clear that they did not doubt that Cowan had amassed a fortune as a result.<sup>214</sup> This was despite Cowan having consistently argued

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<sup>209</sup> Cowan to Alexander Stewart, Physician to the King, Bombay, 18 Aug. 1733, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2D, f. 40).

<sup>210</sup> Cowan to Captain David Wilkie, Bombay, 18 Aug. 1733, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2D, f. 42).

<sup>211</sup> Cowan to Captain Robert Hudson, Bombay, 16 Jan. 1734, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2D, f. 62).

<sup>212</sup> Cowan to Richard Legrond, Bombay, 20 Dec. 1733, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2D, ff. 59v-60v).

<sup>213</sup> Court of Directors to President and Council at Bombay, London, 10 Nov. 1732, (BL, India Office Records, IOR/E/3/105, f. 270); Court of Directors to President and Council at Bombay, London, 1 Mar. 1733, (BL, India Office Records, IOR/E/3/105, f. 358).

<sup>214</sup> Court of Directors to President and Council at Bombay, London, 1 Mar. 1733, (BL, India Office Records, IOR/E/3/105, f. 358).

that he had suffered many setbacks in his private trade.<sup>215</sup> The directors' complaints were also directed at the method used by Cowan, and his predecessors, in extracting a levy from trade inbound to Bombay. They alleged that Cowan and his colleagues had acted illegally in raising this tariff for their own benefit.<sup>216</sup> This affair was tied up with the Company's decision to withdraw the Bombay governor's rights to a percentage of the Surat consulage. This, Cowan expressed to John Gould Jr., was a disaster for Bombay and would have made the position of governor undesirable to any potential servants.<sup>217</sup> Cowan argued that the customs received at Bombay between 1733 and 1734 were some of the highest they had ever been, and that the increase in revenue was due to his management.<sup>218</sup> However, the Company did not see it this way and instead labelled his reports on the customs increase as 'pompous.'<sup>219</sup>

Whilst Cowan was the subject of criticism as a result of the Waters and Lambton affairs, and his involvement in private trade, it was the issue with the Portuguese ship *Europa* which caused him the most political damage. Cowan first referred to the matter of the *Europa* in August 1734. The crux of the issue was that Cowan had allowed the ship, a Portuguese flagged vessel, the freedom of trade at Bombay when this would normally have been forbidden. The common assumption was that Cowan intended to use the *Europa* to remit his personal fortune back to England.<sup>220</sup> The directors expressed their

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<sup>215</sup> Cowan to Arthur Stert, Bombay, 18 Aug. 1733, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2D, f. 44); Cowan to Richard Legrond, Bombay, 20 Dec. 1733, (f. 60).

<sup>216</sup> Court of Directors to President and Council at Bombay, London, 1 Mar. 1733, (BL, India Office Records, IOR/E/3/105, f. 358).

<sup>217</sup> Cowan to John Gould Jr., Bombay, 18 Aug. 1733, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2D, f. 51).

<sup>218</sup> Cowan to Josias Wordsworth, Bombay, 2 Feb. 1734, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2D, f. 109v); Cowan to John Gould Jr., Bombay, 31 Aug. 1734, (f. 145v).

<sup>219</sup> Court of Directors to President and Council at Bombay, London, 1 Mar. 1733, (BL, India Office Records, IOR/E/3/105, f. 357).

<sup>220</sup> Cowan to John Gould Jr., Bombay, 31 Aug. 1734, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2D, f. 145).

concern in their letter of 26 October 1733 and argued that the act of allowing the *Europa* freedom of trade at Bombay was tantamount to showing civility to ‘clandestine traders.’<sup>221</sup> When the clamour surrounding the *Europa* first struck up, Cowan protested that he had fully advised the Company about the ship before it had left Lisbon.<sup>222</sup> This was in complete opposition to the Company’s understanding. The directors argued that as the *Europa* was wholly owned by private interests at Lisbon, and since the Portuguese king held no concern in the ship, preventing the vessel from trading to Bombay would have caused no damage to Anglo-Portuguese relations.<sup>223</sup> The differentiation between Anglo-Portuguese relations in Europe and those in India was seemingly not made by the directors in this matter.

Whilst the *Europa* affair was criticised in London, Cowan protested his innocence. In his letter to Josias Wordsworth on 26 August 1734, Cowan argued that he believed he was being accused of ‘sinister motives’ over the *Europa* affair as he had lived in Lisbon twenty years previous.<sup>224</sup> Whether or not Cowan intended any wrongdoing in the matter, the feeling amongst the directors was that he had transgressed. The criticism from London not only had the effect of eroding his Company standing, but also led to him taking a much more cautious approach to management. Cowan lamented that the criticism had meant that he had chosen not to risk much in his management of Company affairs, or indeed in his own private trade.<sup>225</sup> The continued criticism of Cowan was a great source of sadness for him and he noted that although he had never expected to

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<sup>221</sup> Court of Directors to President and Council at Bombay, (BL, India Office Records, IOR/E/3/106, f. 104).

<sup>222</sup> Cowan to John Gould, Bombay, 25 Aug. 1734, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2D, f. 149v).

<sup>223</sup> Court of Directors to President and Council at Bombay, (BL, India Office Records, IOR/E/3/106, f. 104).

<sup>224</sup> Cowan to Josias Wordsworth, Bombay, 26 Aug. 1734, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2D, f. 150v).

<sup>225</sup> Cowan to Richard Legrond, Bombay, 20 Dec. 1733, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2D, f. 60).

please everyone, the new accusations each year had proven hard to take.<sup>226</sup> The censure which Cowan received for his role in the Waters and Lambton affairs, and his own private trade, whilst damaging, was not sufficient to have forced him from office. The fallout from the *Europa* affair was, however, sufficiently damning to have made his position untenable. This was compounded by the suspicion that Cowan may not have fully disclosed his private trading accounts. The net result was that Cowan's political outlook was poor.

### **III - Company Politics in the Western Presidency 1733-4**

The difficulties experienced at Surat, in terms of security, politics and trade, have been a frequent point of reference throughout this study due to the large impact which Surat had on regional affairs. Surat was still considered to be the 'great mart of India' at this time, despite the difficulties reported.<sup>227</sup> These difficulties, according to Farooqui, were by-products of falling trade as a result of the declining power of the Mughal, Persian and Ottoman empires.<sup>228</sup> This returns to the arguments made in chapters two and four regarding the increased regionalization of the Mughal empire in the eighteenth century. Bayly agrees with Farooqui to the extent that it is argued that the Ottoman, Safavid and Mughal dominions became more complex and conflict-ridden.<sup>229</sup> However, Bayly's key

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<sup>226</sup> Cowan to John Drummond, Bombay, 31 Aug. 1734, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2D, f. 147); Cowan to John Gould, Bombay, 25 Aug. 1734, (f. 149).

<sup>227</sup> Cowan to Hugh Henry, Bombay, 30 Aug. 1728, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2A, ff. 5-7); Court of Directors to President and Council at Bombay, London, 7 Mar. 1729, (BL India Office Records, IOR/E/3/104, f. 230).

<sup>228</sup> Farooqui, 'Urban Development in a Colonial Situation', 2748.

<sup>229</sup> Bayly, *Imperial Meridian*, p. 16.



point is that the growth in complexity of provincial society, and the evolution of politically relevant classes, shifted power from the centre to the periphery.<sup>230</sup> This presents a much more complicated scenario than a mere power vacuum, and reflects what Bayly has described as the metamorphosis of Mughal government which led to the creation of regional power bases.<sup>231</sup>

As Roy has noted, the onset of Indo-European trade caused the construction of new contract arrangements, and the need for conflict free contracts over mere informal community ties was evident.<sup>232</sup> As such, the Company broker at Surat, Loldas Parack, once again played a prominent role during the period 1733-5, though the bulk of correspondence dealt with his debts and the possibility that the Company may have sought to replace him. The merchant Nowroji Rustum was a popular choice in London to replace Loldas, and therefore a great deal of Cowan's time was dedicated to defending Loldas and blocking the alleged intrigues of Nowroji. The shift in support from Loldas to Nowroji was tied to the shift in support away from Cowan in London, and so the discussion of Company brokers at Surat will naturally lead into a discussion of wider Company politics. This also reflected the evolving experiences of commercial elites, portfolio capitalists and merchant families in regional settings, as described by Subrahmanyam and Bayly.<sup>233</sup>

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<sup>230</sup> Ibid., p. 32.

<sup>231</sup> Bayly, *Indian Society and the Making of the British Empire*, (Cambridge, 1988), p. 18.

<sup>232</sup> Tirthankar Roy, *Company of Kinsmen: Enterprise and Community in South Asian History 1700-1940*, (Oxford, 2011), p. 24.

<sup>233</sup> Sanjay Subrahmanyam & C.A. Bayly, 'Portfolio Capitalists and the Political Economy of Early Modern India', *The Indian Economic and Social Review*, 25, Vol. 4, (Dec. 1988), 416-7.

Nadri has highlighted the Parack family as a prominent merchant family that likely had ties to the Company.<sup>234</sup> Judging by the relationship that developed between Loldas and Cowan, and by extension the Company, Nadri was correct on this point. However, Nadri conceded that the knowledge of how Parack family business was conducted is limited.<sup>235</sup> The difficulties which were experienced by Loldas and his relationship with Cowan shed much light in this respect. The case of Loldas' debts was a factor which plagued Cowan and Henry Lowther for several years. The directors expressed concern that Loldas' debts were allowed to reach a critical level, and that the risk to the Company was too great.<sup>236</sup> The spiralling debt burden on Loldas was reflective of what Nadri has highlighted regarding the Company-broker relationship. This was, that whilst broking for a European trading company could bring great wealth and opportunity, the changing political and economic environment could lead to a large debt being owed to the Company.<sup>237</sup>

By April 1733, Cowan and Lowther introduced a method for reducing Loldas' debts, with Cowan having remarked to William Phipps that the process was 'satisfying.'<sup>238</sup> Despite the positive work undertaken to reduce Loldas' debts, problems arose with his current and future trading activities. A specific incident which was highlighted by Cowan was the late payment by Loldas of one of his bills at Surat. This bill was for a large exchange

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<sup>234</sup> Ghulam A. Nadri, 'The Maritime Merchants of Surat: A Long-Term Perspective', *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, 50, No. 2/3, (2007), 237.

<sup>235</sup> *Ibid.*, 239.

<sup>236</sup> Court of Directors to President and Council at Bombay, London, 1 Mar. 1733, (BL India Office Records, IOR/E/3/105, ff. 352-352v).

<sup>237</sup> Nadri, 'Commercial World of Mancherji Khurshedji and the Dutch East India Company: A Study of Mutual Relationships', *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 41, No. 2 (Mar., 2007), 316.

<sup>238</sup> Cowan to William Phipps, Parel, 14 Apr. 1733, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2D, f. 6).

from Bengal and led to significant delays at Surat as a result.<sup>239</sup> Despite Cowan's willingness to assist Loldas, he was concerned that Lowther would face censure over Loldas' poor performance and the delay with the bill.<sup>240</sup> In his follow up letter to Josias Wordsworth, Cowan alleged that the delay at Surat was caused by 'neglect or want of advice.'<sup>241</sup> Whilst this statement may have been directed at Lowther, it was interesting that Lowther was not directly named or indeed was Loldas criticised. This suggested a desire on the part of Cowan to shield both Lowther and Loldas from Company criticism. Such an action would have been concurrent with Company patronage networks, or patrimonialism, in which the swearing of personal allegiance was the foundation of political power.<sup>242</sup>

As a result of the criticism Loldas was subject to regarding his debts, Cowan took steps to identify reasons for his difficulties. Cowan earlier suggested that many of the Surat sub-brokers had been taking advantage of Loldas by supplying poor quality and overpriced goods, and diverting payments which had meant to alleviate his debts.<sup>243</sup> However, one of the key issues which Cowan identified for his debts was the bloated English woollens export to Surat. Since the Company encouraged the export of woollens as a means of placating English weavers and dyers, a larger amount of goods than there was demand for was often exported to Surat. As the Company broker there, it was natural that Loldas took a large quantity as a means of pleasing the Company. Cowan,

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<sup>239</sup> Cowan to Edward Harrison, Bombay, Aug. 1733, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2D, f. 12v); Cowan to Josias Wordsworth, Bombay, 18 Aug. 1733, (f. 31); Court of Directors to President and Council at Bombay, London, 1 Mar. 1733, (BL India Office Records, IOR/E/3/105, ff. 352-352v).

<sup>240</sup> Cowan to Edward Harrison, Bombay, Aug. 1733, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2D, ff. 12v-13).

<sup>241</sup> Cowan to Josias Wordsworth, Bombay, 18 Aug. 1733, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2D, f. 30v).

<sup>242</sup> Erikson, *Between Monopoly and Free Trade*, p. 19.

<sup>243</sup> Cowan to William Phipps, Bombay, 6 Jan. 1730, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2B, f. 5); Cowan to William Phipps, Bombay, 13 Feb. 1734, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2D, f. 122).

however, saw the matter differently. In his opinion, Loldas had not only been compelled to take a vast amount of woollens each year, but had also been forced to overpay for twelve years.<sup>244</sup> With this in mind, it was no surprise that his debts had become unsustainable. Despite the clear issue with the import of woollens to Surat, Loldas had proposed a scheme whereby he would take up 1,000 bales of woollens annually there. Of this, Cowan wrote to Edward Harrison and Josias Wordsworth to express his distaste for the proposal and relief that it was ultimately rejected.<sup>245</sup> The directors had also taken notice of this issue and had expressed their concern with the willingness of Loldas to continue purchasing woollens.<sup>246</sup>

A solution was found whereby his sons purchased excess woollens from their father to reduce his individual debt burden.<sup>247</sup> This solution also effectively tied the Parack family to Company service at Surat and guaranteed their employment for the foreseeable future. Whilst Kanakalatha Mukund has suggested that there was an inherent suspicion of native merchants, she has also argued that there was a curious 'symbiotic' relationship between them and Europeans. This was represented in the European need of linguistic skills and local knowledge, and the merchants seizing on opportunities for making profits and becoming suppliers to European trading companies.<sup>248</sup> This reciprocal arrangement was seemingly at play between Cowan, the Company and the Parack family at Surat.

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<sup>244</sup> Cowan to John Gould Jr., Bombay, 1 Feb. 1734, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2D, f. 106v).

<sup>245</sup> Cowan to Edward Harrison, Bombay, Aug. 1733, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2D, f. 17); Cowan to Josias Wordsworth, Bombay, 18 Aug. 1733, (f. 31v).

<sup>246</sup> Court of Directors to President and Council at Bombay, London, 1 Mar. 1733, (BL India Office Records, IOR/E/3/105, ff. 352-352v).

<sup>247</sup> Court of Directors to President and Council at Bombay, London, 15 Mar. 1733, (BL India Office Records, IOR/E/3/106, f. 106v).

<sup>248</sup> Kanakalatha Mukund, 'New Social Elites and the Early Colonial State: Construction of Identity and Patronage in Madras', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 38, No. 27 (Jul. 5-11, 2003), 2857.

However, the issue of woollens did not end with the debt resolution as a trading indulgence was given to ships' commanders in 1733. This led to an increased desire on their part to trade in woollens.<sup>249</sup> The net result was to bring even more goods to an already overstocked market, and to raise the threshold of what were considered merchantable goods. As a result of this, Edward Harrison suffered a total loss on his woollen investment in August 1733 when his goods were rejected at Surat.<sup>250</sup> The rejection of these goods was also related to the increased difficulty experienced in trading at Surat due to the merchant Mahmud Chellaby.<sup>251</sup> Chellaby, Cowan asserted, was an influential figure on all durbar councils at Surat, and could thus manipulate markets for his own intentions. The ease with which Chellaby manipulated was likely due to the highly responsive nature of Gujarati markets to pressure placed on them,<sup>252</sup> and the fact that the political uncertainty in Gujarat in the eighteenth century made merchants an easy target for those who held power.<sup>253</sup> This was a similar case as that of Cosim Turbatty at Mocha during the years 1723-9.

In February 1734, Cowan wrote to Phipps and alleged that Chellaby had succeeded in ruining a number of Surat merchants through 'avarice.'<sup>254</sup> However, the body of Surat merchants were not sufficiently put down as those at Mocha in the case of Turbatty, and sided with the Company over Chellaby in their dealings at Surat.<sup>255</sup> The directors described this as a 'surprising revolution' and instructed servants there to be more

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<sup>249</sup> Cowan to John Drummond, Bombay, 18 Aug. 1733, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2D, f. 25).

<sup>250</sup> Ibid.

<sup>251</sup> Of the powerful Surat merchant family which included Hadji Ahmud Chellaby and Omar Chellaby. According to Das Gupta, Ahmud Chellaby was second only to Mahmud Ally at Surat.

<sup>252</sup> Ruby Maloni, 'Europeans in Seventeenth Century Gujarat: Presence and Response', *Social Scientist*, 36, No. 3/4 (Mar. - Apr., 2008), 74.

<sup>253</sup> Nadri, 'Commercial World of Mancherji Khurshedji', 316.

<sup>254</sup> Cowan to William Phipps, Bombay, 27 Feb. 1734, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2D, f. 126v).

<sup>255</sup> Cowan to 'Sir', Bombay, 10 Feb. 1734, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2D, ff. 117-117v).

cautious in future.<sup>256</sup> Though it would appear that the Company and Surat merchants managed to defeat Chellaby's intrigues, particularly through the use of the naval blockade which was the Company's response to the tanka affair,<sup>257</sup> Chellaby was still actively involved in his own trade when all other shipping into Surat had stopped.<sup>258</sup>

The Company position at Surat was also complicated by the political intrigues involving Nowroji Rustum. This concern about Nowroji supported Nadri's identification of rivalry within the Parsi community at Surat.<sup>259</sup> Nowroji's desire to become Company broker at Surat was understandable given the increased opportunities for fortune making that would have come with the role.<sup>260</sup> In January 1734 Cowan alleged that Nowroji was plotting to become the sole Company broker at Surat,<sup>261</sup> and acknowledged that 'some in London are in favour of this.'<sup>262</sup> Those in London who backed Nowroji were previously suggested by Cowan to have been Charles Boone and his patronage circle.<sup>263</sup> Support for Nowroji was also held by Cowan's successor as governor of Bombay, and recipient of Boone's patronage, John Horne.<sup>264</sup>

However, the actual intrigue was difficult to pin down due to the lack of correspondence from official Company channels on the subject, and the fact that Nowroji and his family

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<sup>256</sup> Court of Directors to President and Council at Bombay, London, 15 Mar. 1733, (BL India Office Records, IOR/E/3/106, f. 109).

<sup>257</sup> Cowan to Captain David Hunter, Bombay, 3 Feb. 1734, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2D, ff. 115v-116).

<sup>258</sup> Cowan to Josias Wordsworth, Bombay, 28 Feb. 1734, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2D, f. 126v); Cowan to John Gould Jr., Bombay, 28 Feb. 1734, (f. 127).

<sup>259</sup> Nadri, 'The Maritime Merchants of Surat', 239.

<sup>260</sup> *Ibid.*, 246.

<sup>261</sup> Cowan to Josias Wordsworth, Bombay, 10 Jan. 1734, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2D, f. 65); Cowan to William Phipps, Bombay, 1 Feb. 1734, (ff. 88-88v); Cowan to Josias Wordsworth, Bombay, 2 Feb. 1734, (ff. 108v-109).

<sup>262</sup> Cowan to Josias Wordsworth, Bombay, 10 Jan. 1734, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2D, f. 65).

<sup>263</sup> Cowan to William Phipps, Bombay, 1 Feb. 1734, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2D, ff. 90-94v)

<sup>264</sup> *Ibid.*

were publicly quarrelling at the time.<sup>265</sup> Cowan alleged that Nowroji had conspired to stir trouble for the Company at Surat, especially that he had attempted to damage the Company's firman situation there.<sup>266</sup> It must be acknowledged that the argument over whether Loldas or Nowroji should have been the Company broker must be viewed as a part of the wider Company political operation. It was likely that this issue was a political manoeuvre by the rival faction in London to displace Cowan and his supporters in both London and India. With Cowan having lost supporters in London, and his successor in favour of Nowroji, it was a convenient method for discrediting Cowan.

The Loldas versus Nowroji affair was a good case in point for Roy's argument that merchant communities, such as those at Surat in 1733-5, were small and atomised.<sup>267</sup> The Loldas affair must then have given Cowan an inadvertent lead into the rivalries of native merchants, and possibly the kin network to which they belonged.<sup>268</sup> Since the Loldas versus Nowroji situation was a facet of the wider Cowan versus Boone affair, Cowan's commentary must be seen as partisan. The line of arguments which Cowan used against Nowroji suggested that he believed he could have swayed Company directors away from Nowroji. In particular, Cowan expressed his surprise that the Company would patronise a 'black villain' who was actively working against them.<sup>269</sup> Nowroji's alleged crimes began with his interference with the Company firman at Surat, but also carried over into commercial matters. On 13 February 1734, Cowan advised William Phipps that Nowroji had disregarded Company authority at a public durbar in

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<sup>265</sup> Cowan to John Robinson, Bombay, 6 Jan. 1734, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2D, f. 71v).

<sup>266</sup> Cowan to Josias Wordsworth, Bombay, 2 Feb. 1734, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2D, f. 109); Cowan to 'Sir', Bombay, 10 Feb. 1734, (f. 117); Cowan to William Phipps, Parel, 4 Sept. 1734, (f. 137).

<sup>267</sup> Roy, *Company of Kinsmen*, p. 105.

<sup>268</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>269</sup> Cowan to 'Sir', Bombay, 10 Feb. 1734, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2D, f. 117v); Cowan to Josias Wordsworth, Bombay, 10 Feb. 1734, (f. 119v).

the receipt of a shipment of shawls.<sup>270</sup> This supposed disrespect was, according to Cowan, part of a wider attempt by Nowroji to ruin the reputation of Henry Lowther.<sup>271</sup> This wider conspiracy involving Nowroji was, according to Cowan, orchestrated by Charles Boone and his 'imps.'<sup>272</sup> By undermining Lowther, Cowan's staunch supporter and friend at Surat, as well as discrediting Loldas, Cowan's enemies were able to portray the situation in the western presidency as having drifted out of Cowan's control. Cowan made it clear to Josias Wordsworth that he was certain Nowroji was plotting to take over Company broking duties at Surat, and acknowledged that there were supporters in London for this.<sup>273</sup> Boone, Lambton, Waters and Horne, were all in favour of this change.<sup>274</sup> Cowan was, however, mostly concerned that Company interests might potentially be supplanted by those of 'black fellows' and 'turncoats.'<sup>275</sup> This was based on his assertion that Lambton and Horne had an association with 'two black fellows.'<sup>276</sup> The men in question were believed to be Nowroji and one of the other Surat merchants, Monackji or Savaji.<sup>277</sup> If this were true, it would have meant that Boone and his circle had made use of foreign assets who were, according to Cowan, actively working against the wider interests of the Company. Despite the seeming support for Nowroji in London,

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<sup>270</sup> Cowan to John Gould Jr., Bombay, 13 Feb. 1734, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2D, f. 120v); Cowan to William Phipps, Bombay, 13 Feb. 1734, (f. 122v).

<sup>271</sup> Cowan to William Phipps, Parel, 4 Sept. 1734, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2D, f. 138).

<sup>272</sup> Cowan to John Gould Jr., Bombay, 3 Feb. 1734., (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2D, f. 113v).

<sup>273</sup> Cowan to Josias Wordsworth, Bombay, 10 Jan. 1734, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2D, f. 65).

<sup>274</sup> Cowan to John Gould Jr., Bombay, 1 Feb. 1734., (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2D, f. 106); Cowan to John Gould, Bombay, 3 Feb. 1734, (f. 113v).

<sup>275</sup> Cowan to John Drummond, Bombay, 31 Jan. 1734, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2D, f. 86).

<sup>276</sup> Cowan to John Gould Jr., Bombay, 1 Feb. 1734., (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2D, f. 106).

<sup>277</sup> Cowan to John Gould Jr., Bombay, 1 Feb. 1734., (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2D, f. 106); Cowan to Josias Wordsworth, Bombay, 10 Feb. 1734, (f. 119).



the directors expressed pleasure with the way Cowan had managed his relationship with Nowroji in 1733, and had received no complaints from him or his family that year.<sup>278</sup>

Stern has written of the need to view Company actions in India through the lens of the 'politics of Asian trade.'<sup>279</sup> The machinations of Nowroji at Surat were undoubtedly a part of Company politics in the western Indian Ocean trade owing to the consistent discourse regarding his family's rights at Bombay and Surat since 1728,<sup>280</sup> and the fact that he had seemingly convinced a number of Company directors in London that he was better placed to serve their trading interests at Surat.<sup>281</sup> The suspicion which many in London held of native brokers also fed the criticism of Loldas, and by extension Cowan, which again formed another strand of what Nadri has identified as a strong rivalry from within the Parsi community at Surat.<sup>282</sup>

It must also be commented that the clash between the rival houses of Parack and Rustum in this affair also ties in to arguments regarding public and private interest. It is unclear which family would have better served the Company's public interest; however, there were clearly two private interest networks competing in the matter. The Boone lobby was evidently more successful in portraying itself as more closely aligned to the public interest when one considers Cowan's fall and the eventual reappointment of Nowroji as broker. This adds another layer of complexity to the world of private

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<sup>278</sup> Court of Directors to President and Council at Bombay, London, 1 Mar. 1733, (BL, India Office Records, IOR/E/3/105, f. 358).

<sup>279</sup> Stern, "'A Politie of Civill & Military Power": Political Thought and the Late Seventeenth-Century Foundations of the East India Company-State', *Journal of British Studies*, 47, No. 2 (Apr., 2008), 255.

<sup>280</sup> Cowan to Edward Harrison, Bombay, 23 Sept. 1728, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2A, f. 19); Cowan to William Phipps, Bombay, 25 Jul. 1729, (f. 67); Cowan to Edward Harrison, Bombay, 28 Aug. 1730, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2B, f. 53v).

<sup>281</sup> Cowan to Josias Wordsworth, Bombay, 10 Jan. 1734, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2D, f. 65); Cowan to William Phipps, Bombay, 1 Feb. 1734, (ff. 88-88v); Cowan to Josias Wordsworth, Bombay, 2 Feb. 1734, (ff. 108v-109).

<sup>282</sup> Nadri, 'The Maritime Merchants of Surat', 239.

networks in empire, and returns to Hancock's observations on the ways in which network relationships could fail and divide.<sup>283</sup> Thus, the political manoeuvres of Boone from London also had a great impact on Cowan's standing both in India and in London. This represented the breakdown of the patrimonial relationship between Cowan and Boone when their interpersonal networks divided as a result of the Waters affair.

It is important to note that the split between Cowan's governorship into macro and micro has provided a number of interesting conclusions regarding Cowan's private trade and interests. It was his alleged illicit trading behaviour which ultimately cost him his Company position. Once again, this returns to Erikson's discussion of the rational actor theory.<sup>284</sup> It was intriguing, however, that whilst Cowan succeeded in portraying a positive view on his official duties such as diplomacy and defence, he was unable to do this in relation to personal matters. Ironically, this suggested superior communication on public matters than on private ones. For a Company servant who allegedly misled the Company, it was interesting that he failed to portray his private actions in a more positive light.

In terms of his private trade and remittances, it must be concluded that his time as governor of Bombay was a success and also demonstrated the interconnectedness of the early modern world by incorporating elements from across the intra-Asian sphere. Cowan's commercial footprint touched the Middle East, Far East, India and South East Asia. All of these elements then combined to facilitate his trading apparatus. The decisions he made with regard to this network were also interesting and have provided

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<sup>283</sup> Hancock, 'Combining Success and Failure', pp. 19-20.

<sup>284</sup> Erikson, *Between Monopoly and Free Trade*, pp. 108-9.

much detail for further study. In particular, his decision to split his investment portfolio and voyage schedule between the Middle East and Far East.

Finally, the patronage network was a definitive element of Cowan's latter Company career. It has been shown how Cowan suffered due to the nature of Company politics and the disintegration of his own patronage network. Although this happened through a series of events during the years 1732-5, it was the impact rather than the cause which was most curious. Cowan's network failed due to a combination of patron deaths and political mismanagement. Clearly, the Lambton and Waters affairs were the flashpoint for Cowan, though it was the aftermath which was most difficult for Cowan. It was the resulting decline in favour of the Cowan lobby which he could not recover from. Whilst the Boone lobby was in the ascent during this period, Cowan's was in a definite decline. The consequences of this with regard to Cowan's legacy will be discussed in the next chapter.

## **Chapter Six: Cowan's Return to England and Legacy, 1735-39**

Once Cowan had been tarred by his handling of the Portuguese ship *Europa*, his mind turned towards his inevitable return to England.<sup>1</sup> Cowan had long known that his successor as governor of Bombay was to be John Horne, a recipient of Charles Boone's patronage. This meant that any difficulties outstanding at Bombay were likely to have been blamed on Cowan. His reputation in London was also under threat, as by 1734 the court of directors was heavily under the Boone lobby's influence and his disagreements with Boone over the Lambton and Waters affairs cost him a great deal of sympathy in London. This must also be tempered with the knowledge of the *Europa* affair. The question as to what his prospects were once he was back in England must then be posed. It has been discussed in the previous chapter how Cowan was heavily involved in private trade during his tenure as governor of Bombay. Similarly, it has been shown that he was in a position to have made great profits from the multitude of voyages in which he was concerned.

This chapter will go into greater detail of Cowan's fortune building methods. This will be done through extensive use of his private accounts and bills. The extent of Cowan's diamond and precious stone remittance during his later years in India will also be examined. The fact that stones were high in value and easy to transport made them an attractive method of remitting wealth to Europe. However, Company policy on the

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<sup>1</sup> Cowan to William Phipps, Parel, 4 Sept. 1734, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2D, ff. 131-131v); Cowan to Josias Wordsworth, Bombay, 31 Aug. 1734, (ff. 142v-143).

remittance of gemstones was prohibitive.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, this potentially came under the heading of contraband. However, Cowan certainly engaged in the trade for diamonds personally and as an agent for third parties. The funds which he made through this diamond trade will be discussed in conjunction with the contents of his will and fortune once he returned to England. The two topics neatly dovetail due to the convenience of the diamonds in remitting wealth, and the fact that many of those involved in administering his will were also involved in the trade.

The discussion will then move towards Cowan's arrangements for life back in England. However, Cowan died two years after returning from India and so comparatively little was recorded of his life during 1735-7. This discussion will expand on the provisions made in his will to evaluate his legacy. It must be acknowledged here that there were legal suits regarding the will that extended the probate timeframe. Although there were many cases attached to the proceedings, it was ultimately a case of Griffith Lort attempting to stake a claim on the Cowan estate. There were three key pleadings which took place between 1716 and 1739. These were the cases of Lort v. Lort,<sup>3</sup> Lort v. Lowther,<sup>4</sup> and Lort v. Stewart.<sup>5</sup> The lengthy court battles meant that the Cowan inheritance was tied up in court proceedings until the death of Griffith Lort in March 1742.

It must also be remembered that Cowan's identity as a Presbyterian from Ulster plays a key role in discussing his legacy, as well as the distinct connections between the

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<sup>2</sup> The Company required servants to declare such purchases and to pay a customs duty, of which the rate varied, into the Company cash.

<sup>3</sup> Lort v. Lort, 1716, (National Archives, Kew, Court of Chancery, C11/965/16).

<sup>4</sup> Lort v. Lowther, 1739, (National Archives, Kew, Court of Chancery, C11/1059/12).

<sup>5</sup> Lort v. Stewart, 1739, (National Archives, Kew, Court of Chancery, C11/1059/13).

Presbyterian international network outlined in chapter 1. This also feeds into aspects of how penal legislation in the early eighteenth century gave Cowan, and others like him, the opportunity of offsetting their diminished political standing with entry in London's financial world. As a final note, commentary will also be given to the significance of the Cowan inheritance to the Stewart family and their descendants. As Cowan died with no known wife or children, it was therefore in the Stewart family that his long-term legacy has been judged.

### **I - Cowan's Private Accounts**

An element of Cowan's finances from 1732-5 which have furthered the investigation of his career in India has been his private account transactions. These were important as they allow a greater vision of Cowan's commercial portfolio. During 1732-5, there were a total of 26 individuals who sent him payments. Further, there were 46 transactions made during this period. Figure 6.1, below, outlines the details of these transactions. The bulk of these were from fellow Company servants who understandably had many dealings with Cowan. Those listed were based at stations from across the western Indian Ocean, though again this was hardly surprising as Cowan was the chief of the western presidency. What is intriguing to consider, however, is the idea of Cowan's financial footprint. This, in conjunction with Cowan's multiple accounts, offered an insight into how multifaceted Cowan's portfolio was. By having private accounts in many settlements, Cowan had a trading framework throughout the intra-Asian sphere. Within this network there were clearly many native elites. This concurs with Mukund's

assertion that as English power grew, so too did their need to rely on native intermediaries.<sup>6</sup> The framework potential, in tandem with his willingness to take risks, was what gave him the opportunity to make profit. The usage of these trading networks also contributed to keeping smaller ports open.<sup>7</sup>

Account transfers to Robert Cowan 1732-5			
<u>Name</u>	<u>Description</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Amounts (rupees)</u>
Antonio D'Silva	Goa Merchant	1	12,200:2:42
Charles Carmichael	EIC Servant	1	1,799:2:35
Cresna Sinoy	Native Merchant	1	19,482:1:56
George Percival	EIC Servant	2	16,761:2:0 1,462:0:67
Henry Kellett	EIC Servant	3	49,374:3:29 43,447:1:38 33,732:3:99
Henry Lowther	EIC Servant	3	950,195:0:46 153,637:1:62 655,847:1:27
Hugh Barker		1	68,197:1:50
Hugh Bidwell	EIC Servant	3	10,589:0:0 8,270:1:70 2,317:1:96
James Chapman	EIC Servant	3	12,510:3:87 3,830:0:55 316:0:73
John Deane	EIC Servant	1	4,926:3:60
John Gould Jr.	Patron	2	35,162:1:60 £3,026:6:8 1/2 <sup>8</sup>
John Hinde	EIC Servant	1	8,000:0:0
John Hope	EIC Servant	1	4,536:1:89
John Horne	EIC Servant	1	419,838:0:88

<sup>6</sup> Kanakalatha Mukund, 'New Social Elites and the Early Colonial State: Construction of Identity and Patronage in Madras', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 38, No. 27 (Jul. 5-11, 2003), 2858.

<sup>7</sup> Emily Erikson, *Between Monopoly and Free Trade: The English East India Company 1600-1757*, (Princeton, 2014), p. 24.

<sup>8</sup> This figure only given in pounds sterling.

John Upton	EIC Servant	1	665:0:80
Loldas Parack	Native Merchant	2	47,595:0:0 83,209:0:31
Martin French	EIC Servant	3	10,974:3:72 10,821:3:04 21,240:2:69
Mordecai Walker		1	6,382:0:0
Narsu Naique	Native Merchant	1	14,884:3:88
Robert Lennox	EIC Servant	1	2,183:2:12
Stephen Law	EIC Servant	2	74,240:0:98 13,493:2:83
William Cowan	EIC Servant / Brother	1	80,776:3:57
William Draper	EIC Servant	1	1,201:1:0
William Phipps	EIC Servant / Patron	4	131,967:1:84 131,414:1:69 £1,450:13:04 1/2 <sup>9</sup> £7,415:01:05 <sup>10</sup>
William Wake	EIC Servant	1	3,590:2:28
Zacharias Elephantus	Native Broker	1	6,867:3:0

Fig. 6.1 Account transfers to Robert Cowan 1732-5.<sup>11</sup>

Cowan held accounts with native mercantile allies as this provided an increased potential for capitalism.<sup>12</sup> These accounts were effectively contracts which bound together Cowan's interests to those of the broker(s). This feeds into Hejeebu's study of Company contracts with native intermediaries. Hejeebu asserted that long distance trade required long distance contracts to enforce it.<sup>13</sup> The only way these could be relied

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Chart Showing Account Transfers to Robert Cowan 1732-5, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/10B).

<sup>12</sup> Bonaventure Swai, 'East India Company and Moplah Merchants of Tellicherry: 1694-1800', *Social Scientist*, 8, No. 1 (Aug., 1979), 67.

<sup>13</sup> Santhi Hejeebu, 'Contract Enforcement in the English East India Company', *Journal of Economic History*, 65, No. 2 (Jun., 2005), 496.



upon, according to Roy, was to base the understandings on trust and predetermined rules.<sup>14</sup> The resilience and effectiveness of native mercantile networks was dependent on their ability to command trust and respect, and Cowan's own behaviour reflected this argument. Cowan's involvement with the broker Loldas underpinned this, and their relationship stretched from 1721 until Cowan's departure from India in late 1734. Though Loldas was often criticised, Cowan maintained his support for him. In contrast, Cowan was hostile to rival brokerage candidates such as Nowroji and Savaji, and distrusted native elites with whom he had no relationship.<sup>15</sup> Trust then was an important factor in the shaping of the broker relationship. Loldas appearing in figure 6.1 must therefore be no surprise. Of the other native entries in figure 6.1, Zacharias Elephantus was a broker at Goa, whilst Cresna Sinoy was a broker at Surat.<sup>16</sup>

Besides native links, these transactions also provide an insight into Cowan's London connections. A total of six transactions between Cowan and his patrons in London were recorded.<sup>17</sup> The transfers between Cowan and Gould were interesting as they tied in with Cowan's attempts to settle his Lisbon debts. Cowan requested that John Gould Jr. and his cousin, Sir Nathaniel Gould, provided security so that negotiations with his creditors could be concluded in 1733-5. Since Cowan's creditors became aware of his having come into a fortune in India,<sup>18</sup> a source of temporary solvency was needed to plug the gap. However, the nature of Cowan's financial relationship with these men was far deeper than this. The account between John Gould Jr. and Cowan on 28 January

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<sup>14</sup> Tirthankar Roy, *Company of Kinsmen: Enterprise and Community in South Asian History 1700-1940*, (Oxford, 2011), p. 23.

<sup>15</sup> This was likely a part of the wider Parack vs. Rustum family rivalry at Surat, as described by Das Gupta.

<sup>16</sup> Cresna Sinoy's Account with Robert Cowan, Bombay, 20 Jan. 1735, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/10B, f. 85).

<sup>17</sup> These were John Gould Jr. and William Phipps.

<sup>18</sup> Cowan to Nathaniel Gould, Bombay, 18 Aug. 1733, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2D, f. 54v).

1733 highlighted two interesting aspects of their commercial relationship. First, that Cowan acted as an intermediary for Gould in private trading ventures in India. Second, that Gould was the main source of wine and spirits for Cowan during his later years in India.<sup>19</sup> Whilst these aspects were important in terms of Cowan's private trade, the debt negotiations were vital as Cowan was able to defer payment of the bulk of his debts until the time of his death, with a provision made in his will for 80,000 rupees.<sup>20</sup> Without this arrangement, Cowan would likely have been unable to satisfy a sudden call on his account. As such, it was in his creditors' interests to allow for a renegotiation of debts.

Regarding the transfers between Phipps and Cowan, the patronage relationship between the two must be considered.<sup>21</sup> Phipps placed a great deal of trust in Cowan and had supported him throughout his difficult tenure at Mocha.<sup>22</sup> Cowan had been building his relationship with Phipps as far back as 1721, and so when Cowan was announced as his successor it was of no surprise.<sup>23</sup> The trust between these men eventually crossed into the trading sphere, and when Phipps left Bombay he appointed Cowan as attorney over his affairs in India. Cowan then had control over Phipps' investments in India from 1729 until 1735, and occasionally concerned Phipps in the voyages he undertook during that time. In particular, the voyage of the *Balls* to China in July 1732 demonstrated this. It can be seen that Cowan administered Phipps' investment of approximately one quarter concern in the voyage, amounting to 9,672

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<sup>19</sup> John Gould Jr.'s Account with Robert Cowan, Bombay, 28 Jan. 1733, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/10B, f. 23).

<sup>20</sup> Will of Robert Cowan, Bombay, 4 Jan. 1735, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/C/1/1A, f. 1).

<sup>21</sup> The direct patronage that Cowan received from Charles Boone up until 1723 was superseded by Phipps as he was Cowan's immediate superior in the western presidency.

<sup>22</sup> Cowan to John Courtney, Bombay, 8 Sep. 1724, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1C, f. 28); Cowan to Edward Harrison, Mocha, 2 Aug. 1725, (f. 108); Cowan to Henry Lyall, Bombay, 6 Sep. 1726, (f. 184v).

<sup>23</sup> Cowan to 'Madam', Goa, 6 Jan. 1721, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1AA, f. 116).

rupees.<sup>24</sup> Due to the close relationship, the transfer of vast sums of money between the two men was unsurprising. Similar trust-based patronage links, with Cowan as the senior partner, also existed with Henry Kellett, Martin French and Robert Lennox.<sup>25</sup> These relationships demonstrate the strength of Hejeebu's arguments regarding trust and the utility of contracts.<sup>26</sup> Further, Cowan's inward account transfers indicate the complex nature of international commerce. Instead of him using private accounts merely as tools to remit money to Europe, he can be seen to have orchestrated a system of investment for his friends and colleagues in which funds were sent from the metropolis to the colonies. This returns to the discussion of gentlemanly capitalist activities begun by Cain and Hopkins.<sup>27</sup>

## **II - Cowan and the Diamond Trade**

The diamond trade was a constant source of interest throughout Cowan's career in India. This saw periods of great profit, as well as a weakening value in the trade. Whilst the opportunity for purchasing precious stones was there, it was necessary to have an intermediary to source them. Following the idea of native elites having been used for specific personal transactions, their involvement in the diamond trade was decisive. The first example of this was during Cowan's stint at Surat. Cowan reported that he had

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<sup>24</sup> Voyage of the *Balls* to China, Bombay, 31 Jul. 1732, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/10B, f. 10); William Phipps' Account with Robert Cowan, Bombay, 1 Aug. 1734, (f. 69).

<sup>25</sup> All of these men served in the western presidency and appear in figure 6.1.

<sup>26</sup> Hejeebu, 'Contract Enforcement in the English East India Company', 496.

<sup>27</sup> P.J. Cain. & A.G. Hopkins, *British Imperialism: Innovation and Expansion, 1688-1914*, (New York, 1994), pp. 71-2.

identified 'an honest broker', likely Loldas, who managed to source cheap diamonds.<sup>28</sup> Loldas was instructed to investigate, seemingly because of his success in prosecuting the former Company brokers.<sup>29</sup> This commission was followed by an instruction to source good quality pearls for remittance as well.<sup>30</sup> This suggested that these were readily obtainable, and that their remittance was feasible. Though it was unclear if these diamonds and pearls were ultimately provided, Cowan expressed his certainty that Loldas would account for them.<sup>31</sup>

At this time Surat was the market through which many of the gemstones extracted from Hyderabad and the northern half of India were sent for sale.<sup>32</sup> Cowan's investment in diamonds during the period 1724-8 was approximately 10,000 rupees.<sup>33</sup> During his stay at Surat in January 1726, Cowan advised Henry Cairnes that he had remitted diamonds on his account.<sup>34</sup> One diamond was sent to Dublin for Hugh Henry, whereas the remainder were sent to England for Cairnes.<sup>35</sup> In June 1726, Cowan received a letter from his patron, Edward Harrison, in which Harrison advised that he wanted a selection of precious stones. Cowan confirmed that he would act as agent for him and thus source the stones.<sup>36</sup> He later advised that he purchased Harrison's stones and sent them to England aboard the ship *Drake* at Mocha in June 1726.<sup>37</sup> Further instructions for the purchase of diamonds at Surat on Cowan's account followed in December.<sup>38</sup> However,

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<sup>28</sup> Cowan to 'Sir', Surat, 27 Aug. 1722, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1AA, f. 173v).

<sup>29</sup> Cowan to William Phipps, Surat, 2 May 1722, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1AA, f. 144v); Cowan to William Phipps, Surat, 9 May 1722, (f. 147).

<sup>30</sup> Cowan to 'Sir', Surat, 4 Sept. 1722, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1AA, f. 174).

<sup>31</sup> Cowan to 'Sir', Surat, 7 Sept. 1722, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1AA, f. 176).

<sup>32</sup> Madras and Fort St. George having served as the outlet for the southern prospect.

<sup>33</sup> Cowan to John Courtney, Bombay, 14 Sept. 1726, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1C, f. 192).

<sup>34</sup> Cowan to Henry Cairnes, Surat, 11 Jan. 1726, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1C, f. 143).

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> Cowan to Edward Harrison, Mocha, 8 Jun. 1726, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1C, f. 171v).

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> Cowan to John Courtney, Bombay, 5 Dec. 1726, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1C, f. 201).

the bulk of Cowan's diamond trade occurred during his time as governor of Bombay. This was for his own account as well as others.

The primary buyer which Cowan sourced stones for was his predecessor as governor, William Phipps.<sup>39</sup> Cowan learnt that a Surat broker called Elchy possessed a number of stones which might have satisfied Phipps.<sup>40</sup> He instructed Lowther to investigate the availability of these stones in that regard.<sup>41</sup> In January 1730, Cowan advised Phipps that the stones had been obtained. He added that these were the first stones seen at Surat for years.<sup>42</sup> Despite this initial success, by October 1730 Cowan reported that the price of diamonds at Surat was in flux.<sup>43</sup> It was likely that the increased supply of diamonds from the Portuguese colonies in Brazil caused this distortion, with demand thus satisfied by the external supply.<sup>44</sup> Cowan further noted that by November it was impossible to buy diamonds at all at Surat.<sup>45</sup> Indeed, given the ongoing troubles there and the wider conflict in Gujarat, it was unsurprising that the market was badly hit. The trade was also impacted by stricter enforcement by the Company.

In 1727 the directors ordered that any fraud related to the sale or smuggling of diamonds should be especially reported to them for investigation.<sup>46</sup> A concession was made, however, in that any servant who wished to engage in the lawful trade for gemstones in India was to be allowed three years to trade from the time that their silver

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<sup>39</sup> Cowan to William Phipps, Bombay, 25 Jul. 1729, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2A, f. 64v); Cowan to William Phipps, Bombay, 6 Jan. 1730, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2B, f. 3).

<sup>40</sup> Cowan to William Phipps, Bombay, 25 Jul. 1729, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2A, f. 64v).

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> Cowan to William Phipps, Bombay, 6 Jan. 1730, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2B, f. 3).

<sup>43</sup> Cowan to William Phipps, Bombay, 20 Oct. 1730, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2B, f. 57).

<sup>44</sup> Cowan to William Phipps, Bombay, 20 Oct. 1730, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2B, f. 57); Cowan to John Sherman, Bombay, 30 Nov. 1730, (f. 65v).

<sup>45</sup> Cowan to John Sherman, Bombay, 30 Nov. 1730, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2B, f. 65v).

<sup>46</sup> Court of Directors to President and Council at Bombay, London, 28 Feb. 1727, (BL, India Office Records, IOR/E/3/104, f. 107).

arrived in India.<sup>47</sup> This must, however, be viewed as the Company trying to increase regulation in the trade rather than as a concession. However, the fact remained that gemstones were small items which were relatively easy to conceal from officials.<sup>48</sup> It is interesting to note that the directors' position regarding diamonds can be seen to have altered in 1730. Instead of insisting on greater regulation, their approach shifted to one of greater incentivisation. During this period the directors felt that the gemstone trade in India was poor, and so offered a concession to servants who were trading in coral.<sup>49</sup> The opportunity of paying profits on coral into the Company cash was given in recognition of the fact that diamonds were not as profitable as they had previously been.<sup>50</sup> This change reflected the negative perspective which was given about trade on the west coast of India during this period, as well signalling that the directors no longer saw the illicit trade in diamonds as a threat.

The Surat diamond market experienced two distinct problems between 1730 and 1732. First, the supply of diamonds at Surat was no longer able to meet European demands.<sup>51</sup> Second, the opening of diamond mines in Brazil created a surplus of cheap stones for the European market which caused the price of Surat diamonds to plummet. Whilst Cowan was active in the trade prior to the crash, he escaped the worst effects of the falling prices. Cowan recorded on 20 December 1733 that at the time of the crash he

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<sup>47</sup> Court of Directors to Governor and Council at Bombay, London, 27 Feb. 1729, (BL, India Office Records, IOR/E/3/104, f. 353).

<sup>48</sup> Hejeebu, 'Contract Enforcement in the English East India Company', 503.

<sup>49</sup> Court of Directors to President and Council at Bombay, London, 12 Mar. 1730, (BL, India Office Records, IOR/E/3/105, f. 120).

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> Cowan to William Phipps, Bombay, 20 Oct. 1730, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2B, f. 57).

had only two stones in his possession.<sup>52</sup> These were 14 and 8 carats respectively, and Cowan valued them at approximately £1,500.<sup>53</sup> The crash, however, significantly reduced Cowan's ability to sell these stones and to continue trading diamonds. By August 1734, Cowan lamented that there had been no opportunities at either Bombay or Bengal for remitting diamonds as before.<sup>54</sup>

Despite the decline in opportunities towards the end of his Indian career, it was clear that there was a long period during which Cowan took advantage. Cowan's first recorded exposure to the diamond trade was as far back as 1722.<sup>55</sup> It was significant that Cowan held correspondence dealing with diamonds and precious gems throughout his career. This pointed to an extended involvement in the trade and the likelihood that he had made many purchases for himself across the period. Whilst there are far fewer documents concerning his involvement in the diamond trade, this was hardly surprising. The great profits to be made in the remittance of diamonds were to be had in concealing them, and thus avoiding customs payable on them. The proceeds from diamond remittances, it is argued, likely contributed to his wealth when he returned to England.

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<sup>52</sup> Cowan to William Phipps, Bombay, 20 Oct. 1730, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2B, f. 57); Cowan to John Sherman, Bombay, 30 Nov. 1730, (f. 65v); Cowan to Richard Legrond, Bombay, 20 Dec. 1733, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2D, f. 60).

<sup>53</sup> Cowan to Richard Legrond, Bombay, 20 Dec. 1733, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2D, f. 60).

<sup>54</sup> Cowan to John Gould Jr., Bombay, 31 Aug. 1734, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2D, f. 145).

<sup>55</sup> Cowan to 'Sir', Surat, 27 Aug. 1722, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1AA, f. 173v).

### III - Cowan's life in England and Will

Prior to 1733, Cowan maintained the ambition of returning to England with a fortune that was both sufficient to support him and to finance the purchase of an estate. By April 1733, however, Cowan was sceptical about these plans as he had suffered several drawbacks in India.<sup>56</sup> Cowan expressed his desire to have purchased an estate near to Phipps' family in Westbury, Wiltshire,<sup>57</sup> though this was contradicted by his having also stated to Arthur Stert that he desired an estate close to his in Plymouth, Devon.<sup>58</sup> Despite his setbacks, Cowan acknowledged that he was satisfied with the fortune he made and would have approximately £600 a year to live on.<sup>59</sup> This was to be augmented by approximately £500 a year when his 'ancient father' in Ireland died.<sup>60</sup> Cowan's estimate for the value of his father's estate fluctuated between £300 and £500 per annum, depending on who he was writing to.<sup>61</sup> This was clearly a reasonable competency to allow Cowan to live comfortably, despite his hopes for a greater sum.

Regarding his post-Company life, Arthur Stert and John Gould promised to propose him for Parliament.<sup>62</sup> As such, Cowan had asked Stert to investigate the possibility of a seat in Devon for the next election.<sup>63</sup> Cowan's expectations for this appointment were minimal, and he pledged that he would never make any speeches and would follow his

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<sup>56</sup> Cowan to William Phipps, Parel, 14 Apr. 1733, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2D, f. 9).

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Cowan to Arthur Stert, Bombay, 18 Aug. 1733, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2D, f. 44).

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Cowan to Arthur Stert, Bombay, 18 Aug. 1733, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2D, f. 44); Cowan to William Cowan, Bombay, 8 Jan. 1734, (f. 80v).

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Cowan to Arthur Stert, Bombay, 18 Aug. 1733, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2D, f. 44).

<sup>63</sup> Cowan to Arthur Stert, Bombay, 18 Aug. 1733, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2D, f. 44v).



previous politics.<sup>64</sup> Since Cowan was elected to Parliament as a Whig candidate for the constituency of Tregony, Cornwall, in the 1737 election, the assumption must be that he was a supporter of the Whig party throughout. Sir Robert Walpole said of Cowan that he was 'a moneyed man and a sure hand.'<sup>65</sup> He was also awarded a knighthood circa January-February 1735.<sup>66</sup> There is an apparent contradiction here between Cowan's fall from Company favour and his granting of a knighthood by the Walpolian interest. It might have been assumed that honours and Parliamentary service would have been beyond a man in Cowan's position. However, he did possess certain characteristics which worked in his favour.

As a returning Company servant with a vast fortune, Cowan likely fit the established mould of a nabob. This suggested that he was cash rich and was in a position to buy a landed estate as well as his entry into Parliament. From the outside, this may have been seen as a negative position due to the poor opinion of nabobs held in eighteenth-century Britain.<sup>67</sup> However, taking Cowan's assurances that he would not be active in politics, vote in his party's call, and his long-term network structure, he was likely a sound choice for the Walpole lobby. As discussed in chapter one, Cowan secured entry into a powerful and politically mobile Presbyterian network with links between Londonderry, Belfast, Dublin and London. One of the most prominent members of this set identified by Patrick Walsh was the character of William Conolly. It will be recalled that Conolly successfully drew political support from both his landed interests in the city

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Biography of Sir Robert Cowan (d. 1737), ([www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1715-1754/member/cowan-sir-robert-1737](http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1715-1754/member/cowan-sir-robert-1737)), (12 Aug. 2017).

<sup>66</sup> *The London Gazette*, 3-7 Feb. 1735.

<sup>67</sup> P. Lawson & J. Phillips, ' "Our Execrable Banditti": Perceptions of Nabobs in Mid-Eighteenth Century Britain,' *Albion*, 16, No. 3, (Autumn, 1984), 226.

and county of Londonderry, as well as his connections to the Irish society. These links were then used to translate Presbyterian political capital in Ireland into Parliamentary seats in support of Walpole.<sup>68</sup> If it is considered that Cowan was part of a network connected to the powerful Whig political machine of Conolly in Ulster, and suggested that he would follow Walpolian politics, it is understandable how Cowan may have been seen as ‘a moneyed man and a sure hand’ as Walpole himself put it.<sup>69</sup>

In discussing Parliamentary service, Cowan determined that he would vote for a war as he believed that the country wanted one, and would also vote to raise the interest rates.<sup>70</sup> These statements were intriguing as Cowan had written several times throughout 1733-5 that he was fearful of England being drawn into a European war.<sup>71</sup> Cowan’s comment about interest rates was also interesting due to his argument regarding the fact that low interest rates were harming the value of Company servants’ fortunes.<sup>72</sup> Cowan’s desire to raise interests rates can then be seen as an attempt to increase the value of his Indian investments post-1734, as well as those held by his friends and colleagues. By October 1734, Cowan had abandoned all hopes of purchasing an estate in either Devon or Wiltshire, and had instead instructed John Gould Jr. to procure ‘handsome lodgings near St. James’, London, for him.<sup>73</sup> He also gave specific instructions for the setting up of this household. ‘I desire you will provide me handsome

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<sup>68</sup> Patrick Walsh, *The Making of the Irish Protestant Ascendancy: The Life of William Conolly, 1662-1729*, (Woodbridge, 2010), pp. 116-122.

<sup>69</sup> Biography of Sir Robert Cowan (d. 1737), ([www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1715-1754/member/cowan-sir-robert-1737](http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1715-1754/member/cowan-sir-robert-1737)), (12 Aug. 2017).

<sup>70</sup> Cowan to Arthur Stert, Bombay, 18 Aug. 1733, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2D, ff. 44v-45).

<sup>71</sup> Cowan to Hezekiah King, Bombay, 27 Aug. 1734, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2D, f. 154v); Cowan to Nathaniel Gould, Bombay, 31 Aug. 1734, (f. 159).

<sup>72</sup> Cowan to Edward Harrison, Bombay, Aug. 1733, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2D, f. 11v).

<sup>73</sup> Cowan to John Gould Jr., Bombay, 13 Oct. 1734, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2D, f. 161).

lodgings well-furnished in St. James' end of the town, two good footmen, a plain chariot and a pair of horses.'<sup>74</sup>

The content of Cowan's will, seen below in figure 6.2, was a good barometer of his wealth at the time of his death, and also provided an insight into his personal relationships. The total declared value of Cowan's estate was 136,500 rupees, or approximately £11,000.<sup>75</sup> In terms of present-day purchasing power, this equated to approximately £1.3m.<sup>76</sup> However, this was only the declared value of Cowan's estate.<sup>77</sup> Watson's *ODNB* entry for Cowan suggests that his approximate wealth at death was £100,000. However, from an investigation of Cowan's accounts, and the court cases that followed his death, it is argued that Cowan's wealth was nearer to £50,000.<sup>78</sup> This sum is also closer to the estimate given by K.N. Chaudhuri of £40,000.<sup>79</sup> Cowan's half-brother, William Cowan, was named as sole executor, with Henry Lowther and George Dudley as trustees. The will itself contained ten specific instructions for the disbursement of payments and items to Cowan's beneficiaries, with the remainder to go to his brother William. The condition of William inheriting was that the fortune was to be used to purchase an estate for the benefit of future generations of the family. William died unmarried and intestate before Cowan, and so the bulk of the fortune passed to Cowan's sister Mary, as the terms of the will dictated in the event of William's death.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>75</sup> Will of Robert Cowan, Bombay, 4 Jan. 1735, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/C/1/1A, f. 1).

<sup>76</sup> Historic Currency Converter, ([www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/currencyconverter](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/currencyconverter)), (5 Jun. 2018).

<sup>77</sup> A more detailed discussion of his estate will be given in the following section.

<sup>78</sup> This equates to £5,889.960 in present-day purchasing power.

<sup>79</sup> K.N. Chaudhuri, *The Trading World of Asia and the English East India Company: 1660-1760*, (Cambridge, 2006), p. 212.

<sup>80</sup> Will of Robert Cowan, Bombay, 4 Jan. 1735, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/C/1/1A, f. 1).

The majority of Cowan's declared estate was earmarked as payment for Cowan's Lisbon creditors. The large sum of 80,000 rupees represented a valid reason as to why Cowan was not able to discharge his Lisbon debts prior to his death. The sum due to his creditors amounted to well over half his declared estate value, and would likely have only been able to be made into liquid assets upon his death. The large individual payment to his sister Mary suggested a paternalistic attitude towards her as John Cowan, though not poor, would have been unable to have provided anything near this towards Mary's security. As Mary was also the net inheritor of Cowan's estate following the death of William, Cowan's fortune became the foundation of the wealth of the Stewart family, later marquesses of Londonderry, as she married Alexander Stewart. Aside from the two largest stipulations, the other interesting area was the provision for his god children. Cowan allotted 500 rupees and 1,000 rupees for Cowan Henry Draper and Robert Cowan Kellett respectively, but reserved 8,000 rupees for his god daughter Wilhelmina Pauuw. The special provision for Wilhelmina stemmed from Cowan's close association with her father, Arnoldus,<sup>81</sup> who was his assistant at Bombay and with whom he had a great friendship. Arnoldus died in 1730-1, leaving behind his wife and daughter. It has been speculated that Wilhelmina was possibly a child of Cowan's due to the generous bequest compared with Cowan's other god children. However, there is no material evidence to support this theory. The bequest of 8,000 rupees could thus also have been a means of supporting the long-term future of Wilhelmina in the absence of her own father.

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<sup>81</sup> 1723, 1724 - Factor/Assistant Accountant; 1725, 1726, 1727 - Factor; 1728, 1729 – Junior Merchant; 1730, 1731 - 7th in Council

Provisions of the will of Robert Cowan.		
<u>Recipient</u>	<u>Description(s)</u>	<u>Amount (Rupees)</u>
Mary Cowan.	Of Londonderry. Sister.	40,000
Baron Monaghan <sup>82</sup> and wife.	Friends.	5,000
Wilhelmina Pauuw.	Of London. God daughter.	8,000
Cowan Henry Draper.	God son.	500
Robert Cowan Kellett.	God son.	1,000
Creditors of Cowan and Lort.	Lisbon debts.	80,000
Benjamin Davis.	Of Londonderry.	1,000
Henry Kellett	Friend. EIC Colleague	Gold Watch
Johanna Kellett	Friend.	Diamond Ring
Henry Lowther	Friend. EIC Colleague.	500
George Dudley	Friend. EIC Colleague	500
<b>Total</b>		<b>136,500</b>

Fig. 6.2 Provisions of the will of Robert Cowan.<sup>83</sup>

Cowan returned to England with a clear vision of the life he wanted, with his instructions for lodgings and suggestions of a seat in parliament already having been debated by October 1734.<sup>84</sup> It was clear that Cowan provided for himself in his retirement years if the annual allowance of £500-£600 was anything to go by.<sup>85</sup> Again, with this to have

<sup>82</sup> Sir Henry Cairnes, 2<sup>nd</sup> Baronet (1673 – 16 Jun. 1743).

<sup>83</sup> Will of Robert Cowan, Bombay, 4 Jan. 1735, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/C/1/1A, f. 1).

<sup>84</sup> Cowan to Arthur Stert, Bombay, 18 Aug. 1733, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2D, f. 44v); Cowan to John Gould Jr., Bombay, 13 Oct. 1734, (f. 161).

<sup>85</sup> Cowan to Arthur Stert, Bombay, 18 Aug. 1733, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2D, f. 44).

been augmented by his father's estates in Londonderry.<sup>86</sup> The contents of his will also painted a picture of security and wealth. However, there were a number of difficulties which arose out of Cowan's estate, and in the eventual proving of his will. The various court pleadings and answers which came about will be discussed in the section below. This will then allow for a more thorough investigation into the legacy which was left by Cowan to his sister Mary, and by extension to the Stewart family down through the ages.

#### **IV - Court Pleadings and Cowan's Legacy**

The Cowan inheritance is a fascinating subject not only because it allowed the Stewart family to purchase lands in Ireland, but due to the complicated way in which the estate was acquired. It has been noted that Cowan's will allocated a total of 136,500 rupees to various beneficiaries. However, there was great uncertainty surrounding his estate following his death. This, together with suspicion surrounding the extent of his private trading fortune. Cowan's will stated that the remainder of his estate after the set provisions was to go to his sister Mary. There were, however, two major difficulties with distributing the remaining funds. First, that Griffith Lort pursued the estate for unpaid debts which were allegedly due to him. Second, that the method of remitting funds by Cowan was seen as irregular and potentially fraudulent. The result of this was to promote confusion amongst the named beneficiaries of his will, the Company and Lort.

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<sup>86</sup> Cowan to Arthur Stert, Bombay, 18 Aug. 1733, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2D, f. 44); Cowan to William Cowan, Bombay, 8 Jan. 1734, (f. 80v).

Five court cases were heard in conjunction with the settling of Cowan's estate.<sup>87</sup> The cases were comprised of a series of pleadings and answers which were partisan by nature. As such, the potential for discrepancy for all parties concerned was high. To remedy this, the evaluation will be limited to reach the main conclusions of how much was involved, who it went to, and how it was remitted from India.

When Cowan died in February 1737 his will was proven by a number of his associates, including his long-time colleague in India, Henry Lowther.<sup>88</sup> Lowther was key to the many legal suits which arose after Cowan's death as it was alleged that he had assisted Cowan in remitting his money from India. It was alleged that Cowan had drawn two bills of 60,000 rupees on the Company factory at Surat.<sup>89</sup> The request from Cowan to pay into the Company cash and remit via bill of exchange was granted by the Bombay council, allegedly without Company approval, on 3 February 1735.<sup>90</sup> A dispute surrounding these bills arose due to the question of whether or not either Lowther or the Company had come into possession of Cowan's estate via these bills. Whilst Lowther and the Company asserted that they never held any part of Cowan's estate, the case put forward by Lort was the reverse.<sup>91</sup> The burden of proof was on Lort to present evidence that either party had handled Cowan's estate, but this proved difficult. The Company's position was that whilst it had allowed servants, Cowan among them, to pay into the Company's cash, it was not aware of any remaining Company interest in Cowan's estate.

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<sup>87</sup> Phipps vs. Stewart, London, 1735, (National Archives, Kew, C11/837/7); Lort vs. Lowther, London, 1739, (C11/1059/12); Lort vs. Lowther, London, 1739, (C11/1059/13); Stewart vs. East India Company, London, 1739, (C11/1555/25); Stewart vs. East India Company, 1739, (C11/1557/20).

<sup>88</sup> Lort vs. Lowther, London, 1739, (National Archives, Kew, C11/1059/12).

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>90</sup> Stewart vs. East India Company, London, 1735, (National Archives, Kew, C11/1555/25).

<sup>91</sup> Lort vs. Lowther, London, 1739, (C11/1059/12); Lort vs. Lowther, London, 1739, (C11/1059/13); Stewart vs. East India Company, London, 1739, (C11/1555/25).

Further, the Company did not accept that it or Lowther should have been responsible for Cowan's debts, particularly given the lack of security given for the bills in India.<sup>92</sup> Without reference to Cowan's debts, or indeed to the bills of exchange, in the Bombay or Surat consultation books and accounts, the Company argued that there was nothing official linking it to the debts or the ongoing suit.<sup>93</sup>

Cowan, the Company informed the court, had been dismissed from service on 15 March 1733 for 'ill conduct.'<sup>94</sup> This tallied with Cowan's discussions of the *Europa* affair throughout 1734.<sup>95</sup> One of the most interesting issues put forward by the Company in this suit was the extent of the personal relationship between Cowan and Lowther. Whilst from viewing Cowan's letter books it was clear that he and Lowther were in regular contact and had many dealings together, there was little recorded to suggest wrongdoing. However, the Company attested that the men entered into secret covenants regarding the remittance of funds. The Company argued that Lowther was suspected of many frauds, and that his link with Cowan was only one aspect.<sup>96</sup> It is unclear what Lowther's other crimes were; however, the Company highlighted a definite link between him and Cowan's remittance mechanism. The directors believed that Lowther was responsible for directing a series of false payments to Cowan's advantage while he was chief at Surat. The fraud was allegedly conducted with the assistance of John Robinson and John Ramsden.<sup>97</sup> It was later suggested that Phipps,

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<sup>92</sup> Stewart vs. East India Company, London, 1735, (National Archives, Kew, C11/1555/25).

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Cowan to William Phipps, Parel, 4 Sept. 1734, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2D, ff. 131-131v); Cowan to Josias Wordsworth, Bombay, 31 Aug. 1734, (ff. 142v-143).

<sup>96</sup> Stewart vs. East India Company, London, 1735, (National Archives, Kew, C11/1555/25).

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.



Dickinson and Dudley were also likely collaborators.<sup>98</sup> All of these men held council positions in the western presidency during Cowan's time in India, and so this suggested that Cowan had created an apparatus of personal loyalties to him within the Company framework.

The Company believed that Cowan's connections to Lowther and the broker Loldas at Surat were the key elements to his operation. It was supposedly through these men that Cowan falsified transactions to both hide his wealth and to remit it to Europe. His influence at Bombay, as well as his personal connections, were highlighted as a means of forcing through his fake transactions.<sup>99</sup> The Parack family link was interesting as the Company believed that the family were wholly tied up in Cowan's private interests. This returns to Erikson's arguments on the possibility of personal loyalties emerging within Company networks.<sup>100</sup> This revelation likely contributed to the Company's removal of the Parack family as Surat brokers in favour of the Rustums following Cowan's return to England.<sup>101</sup> The Company were also aware of Cowan's attempts to trade in diamonds at Surat in the 1730s, however, they noted that he was unable to find buyers.<sup>102</sup> This concurred with Cowan's own comments on the saleability of diamonds at Surat during this period.<sup>103</sup> Although the Company found no diamonds in Lowther's possession when

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<sup>98</sup> Stewart vs. East India Company, London, 1739, (National Archives, Kew, C11/1557/20).

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> Erikson, *Between Monopoly and Free Trade*, pp. 19-20.

<sup>101</sup> Ashin Das Gupta, 'The Merchants of Surat, c. 1700-1750' in E. Leach & S.N. Muckherjee (eds), *Elites in South Asia*, (Cambridge, 1970), pp. 213-214.

<sup>102</sup> Stewart vs. East India Company, London, 1739, (National Archives, Kew, C11/1557/20).

<sup>103</sup> Cowan to William Phipps, Bombay, 20 Oct. 1730, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2B, f. 57); Cowan to John Sherman, Bombay, 30 Nov. 1730, (f. 65v); Cowan to Richard Legrond, Bombay, 20 Dec. 1733, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2D, f. 60).

he returned to England, they concluded that there were a number of undisclosed interest accounts and commissions between him and Cowan.<sup>104</sup>

The fraud which Lowther was held accountable for, however, was that surrounding the split of Cowan's remittances. The true amount paid into bills of exchange was 120,000 rupees, as mentioned above. However, Cowan received the value of 400,000 rupees on exchange at London.<sup>105</sup> The Company claimed that on or about 19 November 1735, Lowther paid 280,000 rupees into one of Cowan's accounts. However, only the two initial bills of exchange were properly accounted for. The directors maintained that they did not receive the balance into their account.<sup>106</sup> Whilst the covert transfer of so large a sum was sufficiently suspicious, Lowther then fled the Company's holdings and sought sanctuary within the French factory at Surat.<sup>107</sup> If this is viewed with the knowledge that he was also suspected of other frauds, it suggested that Lowther's actions for Cowan were illicit. Further, upon his return to England, Lowther was pursued by the board of green cloth for fraud and subsequently fled to the port of Boulogne.<sup>108</sup> Despite this damning series of affairs, the Company did not believe Lowther held any remaining interest in Cowan's estate and so should not have been a party to the suit.<sup>109</sup>

The above raises two issues. First, the content of Cowan's will severely undervalued his real assets. Second, that he succeeded in remitting the balance of his fortune without widespread knowledge. Whilst Cowan frequently downplayed his fortune in India, there were clearly some individuals who knew the truth as early as 1733 due to his Bristol

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<sup>104</sup> Stewart vs. East India Company, London, 1739, (National Archives, Kew, C11/1557/20).

<sup>105</sup> Stewart vs. East India Company, London, 1735, (National Archives, Kew, C11/1555/25).

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> Stewart vs. East India Company, London, 1739, (National Archives, Kew, C11/1557/20).

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

creditors having discovered a more accurate appraisal of his wealth.<sup>110</sup> The Company, whilst not necessarily certain of his assets, also had suspicions in 1733.<sup>111</sup> This pointed to the Company having leaked the information, although it cannot be certain without evidence. What was clear, however, was that the Company was able to provide four pages of customs accounts from Cowan's time at Mocha which linked him to vast profits through the Mocha consulage.<sup>112</sup> This partially returns to Davies' findings on Cowan's time at Mocha.<sup>113</sup> However, it was evident that suspicion surrounding Cowan was based on much more than private trade. The Company attested that Cowan likely conducted his customs business at Mocha through Dickinson,<sup>114</sup> something which further added to the notion that Cowan constructed a patronage-based apparatus for his own use.

It has been highlighted above that Cowan's sister Mary was his major beneficiary. Cowan's fortune ultimately came under the control of her husband, Alexander Stewart, however. In his court pleading, Phipps attested that Stewart took possession of Cowan's estate upon the latter's death.<sup>115</sup> What was interesting, however, was that Phipps referred to both Cowan's Indian wealth and his assets in Ireland. Phipps suggested that the leaseholds which Cowan inherited from his father were of 'considerable value.'<sup>116</sup> This did not tally with Cowan's own assessment of his father's estate in 1733, in which it was estimated that John Cowan had an income of £300-£400 a year.<sup>117</sup> This may have

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<sup>110</sup> Cowan to Nathaniel Gould, Bombay, 18 Aug. 1733, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2D, f. 54v).

<sup>111</sup> Court of Directors to President and Council at Bombay, London, 1 Mar. 1733, (BL, India Office Records, IOR/E/3/105, f. 358).

<sup>112</sup> Stewart vs. East India Company, London, 1739, (National Archives, Kew, C11/1557/20).

<sup>113</sup> Timothy Davies, 'British Private Trade Networks in the Arabian Seas, c. 1680 – c. 1760', PhD Thesis, University of Warwick, (2012), p. 212.

<sup>114</sup> Stewart vs. East India Company, London, 1739, (National Archives, Kew, C11/1557/20).

<sup>115</sup> Phipps vs. Stewart, London, 1735, (National Archives, Kew, C11/837/7).

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>117</sup> Cowan to William Cowan, Bombay, 8 Jan. 1734, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2D, f. 80v).

been a simple case of misinformation, or indeed an attempt by Phipps to misdirect Cowan's creditors. However, it cannot be certain which. Stewart was well placed to seize Cowan's estate as both he and Mary lived in St. James', London, during the period.<sup>118</sup> As such, they were likely in regular contact with Cowan and thus familiar with the intentions he had for his fortune. Whilst Mary was the main beneficiary, Cowan had also included the particular clause for how the fortune was to be spent. It was Cowan's desire for his money to be invested in a country estate which was then to have been passed down through the generations.<sup>119</sup>

It was evident that Cowan had a number of financial interests, both declared and undeclared, which contributed to his personal fortune. The more obvious methods of private trade and the remittance of diamonds were naturally a big factor in his ability to build his fortune. However, these methods were also subject to limitations. Trading prices could ebb and flow and, as has been demonstrated above, the diamond markets at Surat were unreliable.<sup>120</sup> To combat this, Cowan diversified his investments and approach. Whilst he likely made great sums through trade, it was through the use of his many customs, interest and personal accounts that he was able to make further profits. It has been shown above that Cowan's personal account transactions saw vast sums of money being moved. Whilst this was impressive, it was more likely through consulage accounts that Cowan secured a steady stream of income. The Company certainly believed that he had made a great deal through this method.<sup>121</sup> The broad heading of private trade which is often used does not necessarily describe this process accurately.

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<sup>118</sup> Stewart vs. East India Company, London, 1739, (National Archives, Kew, C11/1557/20).

<sup>119</sup> Will of Robert Cowan, Bombay, 4 Jan. 1735, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/C/1/1A, f. 1).

<sup>120</sup> Cowan to John Gould Jr., Bombay, 31 Aug. 1734, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2D, f. 145).

<sup>121</sup> Stewart vs. East India Company, London, 1739, (National Archives, Kew, C11/1557/20).

Whilst Cowan certainly traded on his own account, the scope of his actions was far greater. With this in mind it is argued that the commonly used descriptions of private trade in the early eighteenth century are no longer serviceable. As such, it is suggested that further research and a broader evaluation of the multifaceted private trading world is needed.

The Irish aspect of Cowan's career and life was something which it was hoped would be displayed throughout his letter books in order to greater discuss the impact of the Irish, and their networks, in the building of empire. However, Cowan's Irish connections only presented themselves at the beginning and end of his life. Due to Cowan's bequests to Mary, however, there was a far-reaching legacy which arose out of Cowan's Indian career. Through the Stuart and Vane-Tempest-Stewart families, Cowan's legacy lived on. The great success enjoyed by these families would likely not have been possible without the initial establishment of their interests through Cowan's estate. Throughout their history, the Stewarts also developed connections with some of the most powerful families in Britain.<sup>122</sup> Although Cowan himself had no children, his legacy was evidently realised in the successes of his family and the creation of the Stewart dynasty which enjoyed the title of marquess of Londonderry.<sup>123</sup>

Clearly, Mary Cowan played the key role in the transfer of wealth from Cowan to Stewart. This was, however, as highlighted above, only a chance happening due to Cowan's own death and William Cowan having predeceased him. Without this turn of

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<sup>122</sup> Examples of this included Charles Vane (née Stewart), 3<sup>rd</sup> Marquess of Londonderry's marriage to Lady Frances Anne Vane-Tempest on 3 April 1819 and Lady Frances Anne Emily Vane's marriage to John Spencer-Churchill, 7<sup>th</sup> Duke of Marlborough, on 12 July 1843.

<sup>123</sup> Created in the Irish peerage on 13 January 1816. The first holder of the title was Robert Stewart (b. 27 Sept. 1739, d. 6 Apr. 1821), first son of Alexander Stewart and Mary Cowan.

events it was entirely possible that William would have beget heirs of his own to continue the Cowan line. A.P.W. Malcomson has commented that Mary Stewart was an heiress whose wealth was responsible for bringing almost the whole Stewart estate into the family.<sup>124</sup> Malcomson also observed that Alexander Stewart married Mary 'before she was aware what man or money was.'<sup>125</sup> This is intriguing due to the relationship between Stewart and Mary, them being first cousins. It has been assumed above that Stewart had knowledge of Cowan's wealth and the terms of his will, meaning that he was aware of the great potential to inherit a fortune through Mary. It was also likely that he had very easy access to Mary due to the ties of cousinage between them, where other potential suitors may have encountered barriers. As such, it is suggested that Mary was likely targeted as a favourable match by Stewart in order to secure Cowan's vast wealth. This is in line with Malcomson's arguments on the case of Mary.<sup>126</sup>

As noted above, it had been Cowan's desire for a landed estate to be purchased to be handed down through the generations of his family. This was an aspiration often held by nabobs returning from India with a vast reserve of wealth. Lawson and Phillips have commented that the purchase of country estates was a common method used by nabobs in soliciting peerages, advantageous marriages and seats in Parliament.<sup>127</sup> Connected to this was the link between land ownership and membership of the elite ruling class of the early eighteenth century.<sup>128</sup> As such, it was unsurprising that Cowan, and ultimately Stewart, desired the purchase of a great landed estate. This wish was

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<sup>124</sup> A.P.W. Malcomson, *The Pursuit of the Heiress: Aristocratic Marriage in Ireland, 1740-1840*, (Belfast, 2006), p. 50.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 55.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>127</sup> P. Lawson & J. Phillips, ' "Our Execrable Banditti" ', 227.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, 236-7.

carried out through Stewart's purchase of lands in Comber and Newtownards, County Down. Stewart then rebuilt a house called Mount Pleasant within his Newtownards holdings and renamed it Mount Stewart.<sup>129</sup> The cost of the estate and works is unclear, though the financial bequest to Mary is something more quantifiable. Stephanie Barczewski has suggested £20,000 as Cowan's Indian earnings,<sup>130</sup> whilst it has been noted above that Chaudhuri noted £40,000,<sup>131</sup> and Watson £100,000.<sup>132</sup> This thesis, meanwhile, has argued that £50,000 was the more accurate sum.

The repatriation of imperial fortunes by nabobs such as Cowan, who would largely have come from the middle classes, was understandable due to the inherent links between land ownership, politeness and nobility.<sup>133</sup> The purchase of the Mount Stewart estate itself was important; however, it was also only one element of the material legacy of the Cowan bequest. Barczewski has highlighted the armorial china ware held at the Mount Stewart estate which belonged to Cowan as an important aspect of material culture.<sup>134</sup> An example of this is provided in figure 6.3, below.

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<sup>129</sup> Mount Stewart went on to be the seat of the Stewart, and later Vane-Tempest-Stewart, family until it was given to the national trust in 1977 by Lady Mairi Bury (née Vane-Tempest-Stewart, Dowager Viscountess Bury).

<sup>130</sup> Stephanie Barczewski, *Country Houses and the British Empire, 1700-1930*, (Manchester, 2014), p.107.

<sup>131</sup> Chaudhuri, *The Trading World of Asia and the English East India Company*, p. 212.

<sup>132</sup> Biography of Sir Robert Cowan (d. 1737), ([www-oxforddnb-com](http://www-oxforddnb-com)), (12 Aug. 2017).

<sup>133</sup> Lawson & Phillips, "Our Execrable Banditti", 231.

<sup>134</sup> Barczewski, *Country Houses and the British Empire*, p. 175.



Fig. 6.3 Cowan Armorial Plate<sup>135</sup>

Kate Smith has written of the highly gendered identity of Chinese porcelain in early-modern Britain, with early representations of it having been a distinctly feminine product. However, armorial sets commissioned to display familial coats of arms within the decoration became fashionable in eighteenth-century Europe, particularly among those with East India Company connections. These were, according to Smith, often acquired by men to display wealth and ancestry, suggesting that specific forms of porcelain came to be viewed as masculine.<sup>136</sup> The Cowan set was ordered in April 1722, with specific instructions for Cowan's coat of arms to be applied.<sup>137</sup> This suggested that

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<sup>135</sup> Plate of the Cowan Armorial Porcelain Set, ([www.nationaltrustcollections.org.uk/object/1220252.3](http://www.nationaltrustcollections.org.uk/object/1220252.3)), (3 Dec. 2019).

<sup>136</sup> Kate Smith, 'Manly Objects? Gendering Armorial Porcelain Wares,' in Margot Finn & Kate Smith (eds), *The East India Company at Home, 1757-1857*, (London, 2018), p. 113.

<sup>137</sup> Cowan to Scattergood, Surat, Apr. 1722, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1AA, f. 137v).



Cowan had reasonable financial means even in his early career as Smith has suggested that a full service cost approximately £100 in the early eighteenth century, and was roughly three times as expensive as ordinary porcelain, in addition to taking up to three years to fulfil the order.<sup>138</sup> This latter point is interesting given the National Trust's estimation for the Cowan set's age, with the date range of 1730-60 being given on their website.<sup>139</sup> Cowan's instruction to Scattergood, however, suggests that the approximate date range can now be more accurately estimated.

It must be noted that the accumulation of such a fortune, and the extant material legacy provided by it, came as a result of early Presbyterian network connections for Cowan in Ulster. These networks, as discussed at length in chapter one, enabled Cowan to tap into wider financial and political systems ranging from Londonderry, Belfast, Dublin and London. Cowan's usage of this Presbyterian International network to connect himself to powerful London-based financiers says much about the connections that existed between London and Ulster during the early eighteenth century. It is also suggestive of wider mechanism at work which enabled dissenters in Ulster to create prospects for themselves despite the penal legislation which forbade them from taking up civil or military office.<sup>140</sup>

It is argued that the successful implementation of mercantile networks of ethnicity and shared identity, as described by Hancock,<sup>141</sup> provided dissenting Irishmen such as

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<sup>138</sup> Smith, 'Manly Objects?', p. 115.

<sup>139</sup> Plate of the Cowan Armorial Porcelain Set, ([www.nationaltrustcollections.org.uk/object/1220252.3](http://www.nationaltrustcollections.org.uk/object/1220252.3)), (3 Dec. 2019).

<sup>140</sup> D. W. Hayton, *Ruling Ireland, 1685-1742: Politics, Politicians and Parties*, (Woodbridge, 2004), pp. 186-7.

<sup>141</sup> David Hancock 'Combining Success and Failure: Scottish Networks in the Atlantic Wine Trade' in David Dickson, Jan Parmentier & Jane Ohlmeyer (eds), *Irish and Scottish Mercantile Networks in Europe and Overseas in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, (Gent, 2007), pp. 14-5.

Cowan the means to circumvent penal legislation and advance their careers. This says much about the nature of Irish society and its links to Britain in the early eighteenth century. Cowan has proven to be a useful case study in examining the complex system of network connections which facilitated the movement of Irishmen, and especially dissenting Irishmen, through commercial channels and enabled them to engage in London-based financial operations and Indian service. This again ties into Crosbie's arguments on the opportunities afforded by empire for Irishmen in the early eighteenth century.<sup>142</sup> The East India Company service was the key example here, with Cowan having the opportunity to depart to India as a man with large debts and few prospects, and to then return as a nabob with a vast fortune. It is argued that without his connection to the specific Presbyterian International commercial community, and his subsequent entry into the Gould-Cairnes patronage nexus, Cowan would not have had the opportunity to make the fortune he so desired. Again, the arguments put forward by Margot Finn are useful here in highlighting the value of kin-linked ethnic networks and their importance to early empire.<sup>143</sup> Cowan, through his Gould connection, displayed how the private interests of a family group network had the potential to impact, and possibly override, the public interests of the Company.

Through his participation in empire and the creation of a vast personal fortune, Cowan provided an invaluable case study for the evaluation of Irish and Presbyterian involvement in empire which, it is argued, will form the basis of discussions on the

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<sup>142</sup> Barry Crosbie, *Irish Imperial Networks*, (Cambridge, 2011), p. 24.

<sup>143</sup> Margot C. Finn, 'Family Formations: Anglo India and the Familial Proto-State', in David Feldman & Jon Lawrence (eds), *Structures and Transformations in Modern British History*, (Cambridge, 2011), pp. 101-3.

subject for many years to come. This, in addition to his material wealth passed down through the Stewart family, constitutes his lasting legacy.

## Conclusion

This thesis represents the first in-depth study of Sir Robert Cowan and his career in the Western Indian Ocean. Cowan was important in the history of the East India Company in the western Indian Ocean during the early eighteenth century due to the central role which he played in corporate governance and trade. This has clearly been displayed in the above chapters. One of the most exciting elements of this thesis has been the great opportunity that Cowan's archive has allowed. Whilst several scholars have drawn attention to the presence of this archive, and indeed referenced aspects of it in their work, the task of constructing an effective study of Cowan had not been attempted until this thesis. The sheer volume of material in Cowan's archive has allowed for the above evaluation of his career, and has also contributed much to the study of the wider Company network in the western Indian Ocean in the early eighteenth century. This is linked to Soren Mentz's desire for a new corpus of private trading material to be used in the field.<sup>1</sup>

During the years 1680-1750, political and economic volatility in India and Persia caused great uncertainty for the Company and its servants.<sup>2</sup> As has been articulated in chapters two and four, the arguments put forward by Subrahmanyam and Bayly regarding the regionalization of the Mughal empire in the eighteenth century apply here.<sup>3</sup> This study

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<sup>1</sup> Soren Mentz, *The English Gentleman Merchant at work: Madras and the City of London, 1660-1740*, (Copenhagen, 2005), p. 72.

<sup>2</sup> Cowan to Hugh Henry, Mocha, 8 Jul. 1724, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1C, f. 7); Cowan to John Drummond, Bombay, 20 Dec. 1725, (f. 122v); Cowan to Josias Wordsworth, Bombay, 1 Jan. 1726, (f. 140v).

<sup>3</sup> Sanjay Subrahmanyam & C.A. Bayly, 'Portfolio Capitalists and the Political Economy of Early Modern India', *The Indian Economic and Social Review*, 25, Vol. 4, (Dec. 1988), 416-8.

has discussed the methods used by Company servants to deal with these issues. Of particular relevance to Cowan was the breakdown of power structures in sub-continental India during this period. The changing nature of Mughal politics, reflected in greater regional autonomy, contrasted against the rising aggression of the Maratha state, meant that the western Indian Ocean region faced a series of wars during Cowan's tenure in India.<sup>4</sup> These were not limited to native versus European scenarios, such as the Anglo-Portuguese expedition described in chapter two, but also encompassed a great number of internal disputes within Persia and the Indian subcontinent.

The Anglo-Portuguese expedition was, however, one of the most crucial elements of Cowan's career. Whilst Goa was Cowan's first major posting in India and was therefore his first opportunity to make an impression, it also demonstrated a great deal about the nature of diplomacy on the west coast of India. Although Cowan was seen to request advice and decisions from the Bombay council following his negotiations with the viceroy,<sup>5</sup> discussions and construction of acceptable treaty clauses were left to him. This pointed to a very decentralised approach to Company diplomacy in which a single servant was ultimately responsible for the negotiation of a major military alliance. This naturally led to questions surrounding the alignment of public and private interest in major policy decisions. This ties into the horizontal versus vertical network structures debate which was discussed in chapter five. Linked to this was also the conclusion that London-based financial network interests, such as the Gould family, had the potential to interfere in Company policy through Cowan as their agent. This supports Margot

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<sup>4</sup> Cowan to Edward Harrison, Bombay, Aug. 1733, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/2D, f. 15).

<sup>5</sup> Cowan to John Courtney, Goa, 4 Jul. 1721, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1AA, f. 50v).

Finn's arguments on the familial proto-state,<sup>6</sup> and once again returns to the gentlemanly capitalism debate initiated by Cain and Hopkins.<sup>7</sup> The other important consideration was the fact that it was the Company which entered into negotiations, and ultimately an alliance, with the Portuguese of Goa, rather than the English crown. This reinforces Stern's arguments regarding the delineation of power between crown and the Company.<sup>8</sup> Effectively, Cowan's negotiations demonstrated that the Company was able to act in a sovereign manner within the intra-Asian sphere.

Cowan's time at Goa was also the first opportunity to observe his patronage network in operation. It was shown in chapter two how he made use of this network to petition his colleagues and supporters for assistance in advancing his career. Although this patronage dialogue has only been examined from the outgoing perspective, the results of it can be seen through Cowan's obvious career advancement and his acknowledgement that he received letters of recommendation.<sup>9</sup> Cowan's use of this patronage system was also discussed in chapters three and five. It is interesting to note that Cowan altered his approach to this network depending on the specific need at a given time or location. The examples of his ascent during his Goa years, and his decline during his latter Bombay years, demonstrated this particularly well.

The key aspect with relation to Cowan's network was his ethnicity and identity. It has been shown, particularly in chapter one, how Cowan's identity as an Ulster Presbyterian

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<sup>6</sup> Margot C. Finn, 'Family Formations: Anglo India and the Familial Proto-State', in David Feldman & Jon Lawrence (eds), *Structures and Transformations in Modern British History*, (Cambridge, 2011), pp. 101-3.

<sup>7</sup> P.J. Cain. & A.G. Hopkins, *British Imperialism: Innovation and Expansion, 1688-1914*, (New York, 1994), pp. 71-2.

<sup>8</sup> Philip Stern, *The Company State: Corporate Sovereignty & the Early Modern Foundations of the British Empire in India*, (Oxford, 2011), pp. 7-8.

<sup>9</sup> Cowan to Mrs. Gould, Bombay, 23 Mar. 1722, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/1AA, f. 132).

enabled him to make politically and commercially powerful connections to bypass societal barriers such as the test act of 1704 and become upwardly socially and economically mobile. As outlined in chapter one, this was carried out through the means of a Presbyterian international network of interested parties. The initial Ulster connection to the Cairnes family led him to an association with the Goulds, a prominent East India Company family. His friendship of the family, and subsequent betrothal to Elizabeth Gould, linked him into an imperial network. This returns to Finn's debate on the familial proto-state.<sup>10</sup> The entry of an Irish dissenter into a prominent imperial network also raised questions about the role of the Irish in eighteenth-century empire. In chapter five it was concluded that the intriguing method of Cowan's entry into the Company world merits further research and shifts the focus of Irish imperial networks away from courtly patronage, and more towards the prominence of ethnically driven networks. This ties in with Bailey's discussion of the form and benefit of networks which share collective identities, ethnicities and memories.<sup>11</sup>

Cowan's time at Surat also demonstrated several key areas in which his career and archive have helped to build on the knowledge of Company affairs in the western Indian Ocean. The many occasions which Cowan highlighted economic or political problems at Surat, or Gujarat at large, have helped to build a profile of relative economic malaise on the west coast of India during the years 1719-35. This was seen to have continued throughout the period, and was particularly well demonstrated during his years as governor of Bombay, as outlined in chapter four. It has been shown that whilst

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<sup>10</sup> Finn, 'Family Formations', pp. 101-3.

<sup>11</sup> Craig Bailey, 'Metropole and Colony: Irish Networks and Patronage in the Eighteenth-Century Empire', *Immigrants & Minorities*, 23, Nos. 2-3, (Jul. – Nov. 2005), 161-3.

difficulties were ongoing on the west coast of India, the causes of these were varied. In the 1720s it was seen that political rivalries within Gujarat caused a series of blockades and shortages at the great mart of Surat, which in turn impacted the western Indian Ocean trade. However, by the 1730s disruptions came to be caused more by the regionalization of the Mughal empire at large and the increased aggression of the Marathas both on land and at sea. Cowan's archive records the changing power structures in north west India at the time, and demonstrates the keen interest which the Company took in native politics on the west coast of India. The evolving power structures is reflective of Bayly's arguments regarding the evolution of political power in Mughal India to delivery greater control to regional systems of autonomy.<sup>12</sup> The attempted tanka agreement, pushed by Cowan, at Surat highlighted the Company's awareness of changing native politics and its desire to take advantage of events. This returns to Stern's argument on the corporate sovereignty of the Company in India.<sup>13</sup>

Examination of Cowan's time at Surat has allowed for a discussion of European cooperation with native elites. For Cowan, the most important of these men was Loldas Parack, with whom he developed a long-term commercial relationship. The argument was made in chapter five that the relationship between the two men was an element of the wider political world of the Company. Das Gupta's work into native brokers at Surat, in particular the Parack-Rustum rivalry,<sup>14</sup> has been built on to demonstrate this. The Cowan versus Lambton and Waters affair, described in chapter five, highlighted how the two differing patronage networks supported rival candidates. In this way, the native

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<sup>12</sup> C.A. Bayly, *Imperial Meridian: The British Empire and the World, 1780-1830*, (New York, 1990), p. 32.

<sup>13</sup> Philip Stern, *The Company State: Corporate Sovereignty & the Early Modern Foundations of the British Empire in India*, (Oxford, 2011), pp. 7-8.

<sup>14</sup> Das Gupta, Ashin, 'The Merchants of Surat, c. 1700-1750' in E. Leach & S.N. Muckherjee (eds), *Elites in South Asia*, (Cambridge, 1970), pp. 213-214.



politics of Surat dovetailed with internal Company politics which happened to play out in the western Indian Ocean sphere. This also ties in to debates surrounding the question of gentlemanly capitalism as two distinct, privately interested, commercial networks were seeking to influence public policy since Company policy was British policy in India prior to the middle of the eighteenth century.<sup>15</sup>

Cowan's career overlapped with Loldas's period as sole Surat broker and their fortunes were tied to such an extent that Loldas's service effectively ended when Cowan's did. This might have suggested an intimate commercial fulcrum based on the level of cooperation, although this is only supposition. What can be said about the nature of servants' relationships with native elites, taking Cowan as the case study, was that they appeared to go through phases of favour and disapproval with the Company and individual servants. This was displayed by Loldas' popularity in the early 1720s, as described in chapter two, and his decline in favour through the 1730s discussed in chapter five. There were, however, other key relationships between Cowan and native elites. The brokers Elchy of Surat and Zacharias Elephantus of Goa were seen to serve as brokers within Cowan's personal trading apparatus for diamonds and arak respectively. This demonstrated that Company servants such as Cowan had the potential to construct networks of native elites to benefit their private interests as well as that of the Company. This returns to Erikson's arguments on horizontal network

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<sup>15</sup> Cain. & Hopkins, *British Imperialism*, pp. 91-2.

structures,<sup>16</sup> and builds on Roy's discussion of native kin-linked commercial operations which were highly atomised and flexible in their cooperation with European elements.<sup>17</sup>

During Cowan's time at Mocha events in Persia caused mass disruption for the Mochan marketplace and Yemen at large, leading to destabilisation for Company trade in the western Indian Ocean. This study has looked at two main aspects of this period of difficulty: first, the domestic problems in Yemen which caused price fluctuations in coffee; second, the Afghan-Persian war which led to regional unrest. Both of these events tie in to Bayly's discussion of the changing nature of power in Islamic empires at the time.<sup>18</sup> These circumstances presented challenges to Cowan and the Company in the western Indian Ocean, and have also served as a case study into how Company servants often acted within a decentralised power structure to manage various crises that arose. This is another aspect of the horizontal versus vertical network debate. The Company, for its part, had to accept the decisions made in the colony or factory and hope that the servant acted in good faith. This ties in with Erikson's arguments regarding the rational actor theory and the temptations for personal gain which might have arisen for servants.<sup>19</sup>

The Afghan-Persian war was a more complicated matter for Cowan to broach due to the great geo-political scope of the conflict and the many trading implications resulting from the disturbance of Persian factories. In chapter three, Cowan's interactions with this conflict were approached from the aspect of his information-sharing network. This was

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<sup>16</sup> Emily Erikson, *Between Monopoly and Free Trade: The English East India Company 1600-1757*, (Princeton, 2014), pp. 19-20.

<sup>17</sup> Tirthankar Roy, *Company of Kinsmen: Enterprise and Community in South Asian History 1700-1940*, (Oxford, 2011), p. 105.

<sup>18</sup> Bayly, *Imperial Meridian*, pp. 16-8.

<sup>19</sup> Erikson, *Between Monopoly and Free Trade*, pp. 108-9.

a useful example, which may be applied to many of his placements and experiences, in demonstrating how interpersonal networks of patronage and communication were vital components in Company operation within the western Indian Ocean. This is in agreement with Mentz's arguments on the value in terms of information sharing networks provided by the letters of private merchants.<sup>20</sup> The great variety and volume of Cowan's letters allowed for an in-depth discussion of these networks. It is important to highlight Cowan's role in particular in serving as a source of information for Company directors in the decision-making process. In this way, Cowan served as a fulcrum for deciding on key decisions for the Company in the Middle East. The withdrawal of the Mocha factory in 1727 was a good example of this.

Regional trade was also an important consideration for Cowan in the western Indian Ocean. It was seen in chapter three how difficulties regarding the supply of coffee took up much of his time and gave great concern to the Company directors. This was also contextualised with the Mocha-Surat trading paradigm, as highlighted by Prakash.<sup>21</sup> However, whilst difficulty in the east led to losses, there was an opportunity for colonies in the west.<sup>22</sup> The cultivation of coffee plants at Jamaica and other Caribbean colonies, coinciding with the troubles at Mocha, thus created the potential for profit in the Atlantic colonies. This then served to draw Atlantic spheres of interest into the interconnected coffee trade. However, networks and other spheres of interest had the potential to encompass a multitude of aspects. As such, they were not limited to merely

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<sup>20</sup> Mentz, *The English Gentleman Merchant*, p. 81.

<sup>21</sup> Om Prakash, 'English Private Trade in the Western Indian Ocean, 1720-1740', *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, 50, No. 2/3, Spatial and Temporal Continuities of Merchant Networks in South Asia and the Indian Ocean (2007), 219.

<sup>22</sup> S.D. Smith, 'Accounting for Taste: British Coffee Consumption in Historical Perspective', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 27, No. 2 (Autumn, 1996), 185-7.

commercial spheres. This ties in with Stern's discussion of the importance of viewing geo-political spheres in a global sense, as opposed a limited regional one.<sup>23</sup>

Cowan's time as governor of Bombay was clearly crucial in the evaluation that this thesis has constructed. It represented the longest period he spent in a given role and place, and was also when he had the most authority. As a result of these factors, the years 1728-35 also comprised the period when he produced the most correspondence. The decision to split Cowan's time at Bombay into two thematic chapters, rather than continuing the established chronological method, was made in response to the sheer weight of source material. As outlined in chapters four and five, this included for coverage of topics such as trade, security, diplomacy, native politics and Company politics. Cowan's archive has also allowed a further insight into the Company settlement of Bombay during the years 1719-35. There had been a notable lack of discussion of the town and population during these years, as evidenced in Sharma's 2008 thesis on the history of Bombay in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. In this way, this study has built on Sharma's work and provided avenues for further research into the settlement of Bombay as a standalone unit. Chapter four particularly highlighted approximate population figures and a discussion of defensive structures built during Cowan's time in India, whilst chapter five evaluated the changing nature of Company justice through the lens of the newly implemented mayor's court system.

One of the great strengths of the Cowan archive is that it has allowed a detailed discussion of Company trade in the western Indian Ocean. Whilst this was naturally

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<sup>23</sup> Stern, 'British Asia and British Atlantic: Comparisons and Connections', *William and Mary Quarterly*, Third Series, 63, No. 4 (Oct., 2006), 693-5.

viewed through the lens of Cowan's experiences, this was also an opportunity for an investigation into the devolved nature of governance. This again feeds into the vertical versus horizontal networks and gentlemanly capitalist debates. It has been shown that whilst trade on the west coast of India was badly disrupted due to a number of problems, it was often Cowan, and likely his council as well, who took action to remedy them. This suggested a high degree of devolution in power from London to Bombay, or at least a willingness on the part of Company servants to act in an arbitrary fashion rather than consulting London on every decision. Whilst this may have prompted concerns about abuses of power, again returning to the rational actor theory, such a system also enabled innovation in dealing with problems. This returns to the arguments of Mentz with regard to local autonomy.<sup>24</sup> A good example of this was Cowan's opening up of the Carmentia woollen market to serve as both a source of raw materials and also an export destination for finished goods from England. Cowan's actions have also enabled a narrative on key commodities such as cloth and pepper to be constructed in tandem with his efforts to normalise their supply.

The question of Bombay's defence was one which played a large role in Cowan's career, and indeed in the overall security of the Company in the western Indian Ocean. Crucial to this was the application of force in terms of both offence and defence. It has been shown in chapter four how the Bombay marine was used as a prestige piece for intimidation and naval interdiction. Likewise, the successful use of this force was demonstrated in chapter three through the blockade of Mocha in 1727. This thesis has

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<sup>24</sup> Mentz, *The English Gentleman Merchant*, p. 87.

agreed with Watson's arguments on the symbiosis of offence and defence,<sup>25</sup> with Cowan's defensive policy at Bombay having been a solid example of this. The flexible application of both static and fluid defences suggested an awareness of the changing defensive needs of Bombay, as well as representing the many threats which Bombay was faced with. However, Cowan's decisions often represented the danger proposed by Mentz of the balancing of a very high degree of local autonomy compared to hierarchical process.<sup>26</sup>

Politics was another key area in which the Company had to rely on the diligence of their servants to act in their best interests. Cowan clearly acted in a diplomatic role throughout his career in India, with his role in Anglo-Portuguese relations having been his most significant contribution. The Anglo-Portuguese treaty, as discussed in chapter two, was his first contribution; however, it has been shown that he played a continuous role throughout his time in India. Following his appointment as governor of Bombay, Cowan became responsible for managing Company relations with both native and European powers. As discussed in chapter four, Cowan clearly saw a greater threat from native powers such as the Marathas than he did the Portuguese. Cowan's commentary on the decline of the Portuguese in India was interesting in the context of the wider western Indian Ocean politics as it left the Company as the most powerful European force on the west coast of India. In this way it is argued that Cowan's tenure in India was increasingly a period when European power in the western Indian ocean came to be exercised through English, specifically East India Company, activity. This was again

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<sup>25</sup> I.B. Watson, 'Fortifications and the "Idea" of Force in Early East India Company Relations with India', *Past and Present*, No. 88 (Aug., 1980), 76.

<sup>26</sup> Mentz, *The English Gentleman Merchant*, p. 87.

suggestive of both the Company's sovereignty in India,<sup>27</sup> and the opportunity for privately interested networks to influence important decisions.<sup>28</sup>

Internal Company politics was also demonstrated as having been a key consideration for servants in the western Indian Ocean. In chapter five, Cowan's political relationship with senior Company figures was expanded upon and it was shown how fragile these connections could be. This proved to be a good case study for Hancock's assumptions of what happens when a network fails.<sup>29</sup> The Lambton-Waters and *Europa* affairs were clearly flashpoints regarding Cowan's fall from grace in Company circles. This tied in to the formation, and dissolution, of Cowan's patronage network within the Company. It has been shown how affairs conducted in both England and India could have an impact on the situation, and vice-versa. The splintering of Charles Boone's patronage in favouring Waters over Cowan showed the fickle nature of loyalties within the Company structure, and the incorporation of the Parack-Rustum feud within internal Company politics highlighted the interconnectivity of Company politics within the western Indian Ocean. This further tied London based private financial interests into the expansion of early empire.<sup>30</sup>

It was shown in chapter five that Cowan held a great many trading interests across the intra-Asian sphere. Cowan's trade served to both answer questions regarding his own accumulation of wealth, as well as to demonstrate the connectedness of the various trading spheres. The operation of trade from the Red Sea, along the west coast of India

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<sup>27</sup> Stern, *The Company State*, pp. 7-8.

<sup>28</sup> Finn, 'Family Formations', pp. 101-3.

<sup>29</sup> David Hancock 'Combining Success and Failure: Scottish Networks in the Atlantic Wine Trade' in David Dickson, Jan Parmentier & Jane Ohlmeyer (eds), *Irish and Scottish Mercantile Networks in Europe and Overseas in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, (Gent, 2007), pp. 16-8.

<sup>30</sup> Cain & Hopkins, *British Imperialism*, p. 67.

and east towards China and Malacca displayed how a well-established trade existed between the western Indian Ocean and many other commercial spheres, all of which was connected to Europe through Company trade. This makes it possible to view the various trading spheres as elements of a wider whole, again reinforcing Stern's arguments on the importance of a global approach to history.<sup>31</sup>

Cowan's commercial activities, including trade, diamond broking and credit accounts, also displayed the multifaceted approach which Company servants could take in the accumulation of wealth. Although the Company disapproved of Cowan's methods and latterly censured him, it cannot be denied that he successfully built a fortune for himself. In chapter six it was shown that this fortune amounted to approximately 400,000 rupees, or £50,000. Whilst the sum itself was worthy of discussion, it was in the methods of remittance that the greatest controversy was found. The various court cases heard after his death pointed to an illicit format of both accumulation and remittance involving a personal network. This again ties in with the rational actor theory and demonstrates the opportunities that servants in the western Indian Ocean had for both making money, and indeed for concealing it. As suggested in chapter six, the proceeds of Cowan's activities formed the basis of the marquesses of Londonderry's long-term fortune.

In terms of the central research question regarding the use of Cowan as a case study for wider research into the Company and the western Indian Ocean trading sphere, it is fair to comment that his archive has proven useful in examining a range of topics. These have included, but were not limited to, trade, security, politics and diplomacy. This

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<sup>31</sup> Stern, 'British Asia and British Atlantic', 693-5.



thesis has constructed a study of Robert Cowan which was, as discussed above, missing from the wider scholarship of the East India Company. This has been done through the use of his personal archive held at PRONI, as well as records from the British Library and National Archives, Kew. Through the investigation into Cowan's career, further light has been shed on the nature of trade in the western Indian Ocean, Company activity in military and diplomatic spheres, and the development of interpersonal networks within the Company. The global approach to international commerce in the early modern period has been championed, and the interconnected nature of early modern trade has been discussed. Further investigation of the vital ethnic network connections which so benefitted Cowan have been held up as the next logical step in the study of the Irish in empire and the various methods they used to enter imperial networks. Finally, it is hoped that this thesis will form the basis of further research into Cowan, the East India Company and the wider intra-Asian world of the early eighteenth century.

## Glossary

The following are terms which have been used throughout the study and are intended as points of reference only. Commonly referenced places, whose names have since changed, have been included below to assist the reader in identifying locations.

**Ameer, Meer, Emir.** A nobleman.

**Anjenjo, Anjengo.** Current-day Anchuthengu.

**Anna.** A piece of money, the sixteenth part of a rupee.

**Arak, Arrack.** Liquor, spirit or wine. Commonly made from coconut palm sap, rice or sugarcane.

**Aurung.** The place where goods are manufactured.

**Bafta.** Coarse cotton fabric.

**Bantam.** Current-day Banten.

**Banian, Banyan.** A Hindu merchant, or shopkeeper.

**Bassein.** Current-day Vasai.

**Batavia.** Current-day Jakarta.

**Batta.** Deficiency, discount, allowance. Allowance to troops in the field.

**Bazar, Bazaar.** Daily market or market place.

**Bega.** A land measure equal, in Bengal, to about the third part of an acre.

**Begum.** A lady, princess, woman of high rank.

**Bill of Exchange.** A written order instructing payment to a named payee. A promissory note.

**Bombay.** Current-day Mumbai.

**Brahmen, Brahmin, Brahman, Bramin.** A divine, a priest; the first Hindu cast.

**Buckshaw.** Dried bummalo fish. Associated with the fertilisation of crops, particularly at Bombay, with rotten bummalo fish.

**Calcutta.** Current-day Kolkata.

**Calicut.** Current-day Kozhikode.

**Cambay Beads.** Precious agate stones historically found at Cambay and on the Gujarati coastline.

**Camphire, Camphor.** A tough gummy substance from the wood and bark of the camphore tree. Used in medicine.

**Candy, Khanda.** Originally used as a term for crystallised sugar.

**Canton.** Current-day Guangzhou.

**Carinjah.** Current-day Karanja.

**Carwar.** Current-day Karwar.

**Caun, Cawn, Khan.** A title, similar to that of Lord.

**Chhatrapati.** Royal title used by the Marathas. Indicates sovereign rule.

**Chit, Chitty.** Note, person who accounts for goods.

**Cochin.** Current-day Kochi.

**Consulage.** A duty paid by merchants for a consul's protection of their goods while abroad.

**Coolie, Cooly.** Porter, labourer.

**Dar.** Keeper, holder. This word is often joined with another to denote the holder of a particular office or employment.

**Dacoits, Decoits.** Gang-robbers.

**Dubash.** See Banian.

**Durbar.** The court, the hall of audience, a general assembly.

**EDI.** Estado da Índia. The Portuguese State of India, 1505-1961.

**Firman, Firmaun, Phirmaund.** Order, mandate. An imperial decree, a royal grant, or charter.

**Fort St. David.** Current-day Cuddalore.

**Gallevat, Gallivat.** A small armed boat with sails and oars.

**Grab, Groab.** Small vessel or galley.

**Gurrah.** Coarse Indian muslin.

**Hoondi.** Bill of exchange.

**Jagir.** An assignment to an individual of the government share of the produce of a portion of land.

**Kelladar, Killader.** Warder of a castle commander of a fort. Castellan.

**Lac, Lakh.** One-hundred thousand.

**Lascar.** Term applied to native sailors.

**Madras.** Current-day Chennai.

**Monsoon.** The rainy season, typically between May / June and September / October.

**Nabob, Nawab.** The governor of a province under the Mogul government.

Alternatively, a man with conspicuous wealth derived from service in India, especially during the eighteenth century.

**Olibanum.** Frankincense.

**Omrah.** A lord under the Mogul government.

**Pachak, Putchuck.** Roots of the thistle *Saussurea Costus*. Used as incense.

**Pagoda.** A temple or a gold coin valued at eight shillings.

**Pandit, Pundit.** A learned Brahmin scholar.

**Peshwa.** Guide, leader. The prime minister of the Maratha government.

**Piscash.** A present, particularly to government, in consideration of an appointment or a grant.

**Raja, Rajah.** King, prince, chieftain, nobleman.

**Rajput, Rajputs.** Literally, son of a king. Warlike tribes.

**Rupees, rs.** Silver coins.

**Sepoy.** A native soldier.

**Shroff.** A banker or money-changer.

**Shyrash.** Modern-day Shiraz. A variety of wine originally produced in Persia.

**Sindh.** Current-day Sindh.

**Soucar.** A merchant, banker or money-lender.

**Spanish Dollar.** Also known as a piece of eight. A silver coin worth approximately eight Spanish reales. Widely used due to uniformity in minting.

**Subahdar.** The holder of the subah. A governor or viceroy.

**Tank.** Pond, reservoir.

**Tanka, Tuncaw, Tunkha.** An assignment on the revenue, for personal support, or other purposes.

**Tannah.** Current-day Thane.

**Tellicherry.** Current-day Thalassery.

**Toothenaque.** A metal coming from China.

**Topasses.** Indo-Portuguese soldiers.

**Vakel, Vakil.** Ambassador or agent. Native law pleader, often serving Europeans.

**Vizir, Vizier.** Under the Mogul government, the prime minister of the sovereign.

**VOC.** Vereenigde Oostendische Compagnie. The Dutch East India Company.

**Zamindar, Zemindar.** An officer under the Mughal government charged with the lands and revenues of a district.

## **Appendix One**

### **Recipients of Correspondence from Robert Cowan during his time in India, 1719-35.**

This table lists the names of those who received any number of correspondences from Robert Cowan during the years 1719-35. These years have been chosen to overlap with Robert Cowan's Indian employment. This table is intended as a supporting appendix to assist the reader in identifying Cowan's many correspondents mentioned or referenced in the above.

<b><u>Name</u></b>	<b><u>Description</u></b>	<b><u>Date Range</u></b>
Abiss, James	?	1731-3
Acton, Richard	1714 – Factor; 1721 – Free Merchant	1726-31
Adams, Abraham	1721 – Company Director	1729-31
Adams, Robert	1736 – Company Director	1721-33
Albert, Henry	?	1724
Ally, Mulna Mahmud	1727 – Native Merchant	1727-8
Annesley, Samuel	1712 - Factor	1726-31
Baillie, Robert	1726 – EIC Captain	1726-33
Bannister, James	1719 - Writer; 1722 - Writer/Assistant Secretary; 1726 - Factor; 1727 - Factor/Junior Merchant; 1728 – Junior Merchant	1722-8
Barker, Hugh	?	1729-32
Baylis, Robert	1731 – Company Director	1723-7
Bell, John	1730 – EIC Captain	1730-2
Benyon, Richard	1745 – Company Director	1723-7
Blechelyn, Mr.	?	1721-3

Bonnell, Jeremiah	?	1725-7
Bonnell, William	?	1724-7
Bookey, Matthew	1725 – EIC Captain	1725-31
Boone, Charles	1717, 1718, 1719, 1721, 1722 – President	1721-34
Bootle, Robert	1724 – EIC Captain	1724-31
Borice & Smith, Mssrs.	?	1722
Boulton, Richard	1718 – Company Director	1722-6
Bourchier, Richard	1750 - President	1729-34
Braddyl, John	1718 - 8th in Council; 1719 - 6th in Council; 1721 - 2nd in Council/Accountant/Chief Justice; 1724, 1725, 1726, 1727, 1728, 1736, 1737 - 3rd in Council; 1734, 1735 - 4th in Council	1721-33
Braithwaite, Mr.	1722 – Cowan’s Creditor	1722
Brandon, Mr.	1722 – Cowan’s Creditor	1722
Braund, Benjamin	1728 – EIC Captain	1728-32
Bronsdon, Ms.	1724 – Friend in London	1724-7
Bronsdon, Thomas	1724 – EIC Captain	1724-34
Bronson, Mr.	?	1722
Brown, Walter	1718 - 9th in Council; 1719 - 7th in Council; 1721 - 3rd in Council	1721-3
Burrill, Peter	?	1731
C.S.	? – Likely Charles Savage. See below.	1722
Cairnes, Henry	1721 – Patron; Friend in London	1721-33
Cairnes, Lady	1721 – Patron; Friend in London	1721-3
Cairnes, Sir Alexander	1721 – Patron; Friend in London	1728-33
Cairo, Consul	British Consul at Cairo	1724
Campbell, H.	1721 – EIC Captain	1721-3
Campbell, John	?	1730-1
Cappa, Benjamin	1728 -EIC Captain	1728-32
Clark & Gomes	?	1721
Clarke, Mr.	?	1721
Cockburn, William	1729 - Surgeon	1729-30
Cockell, William	1718, 1719 – Junior Factor; 1721 - Factor; 1738 - 4th in Council	1729-34
Colebrooke, James	1728 – London Financier	1728
Cordieux, William	?	1729-33
Court of Directors	EIC Court of Directors in London	1722-34
Courtney, John	1712 – Warehouse Keeper, 1713 – 5th In Council; 1718, 1719 – Senior Factor; 1721 - 4th in Council; 1723, 1724; 1730, 1731 - 2nd in Council/Accountant/Chief Justice	1721-29
Cowan, John	1721 - Father	1721-31



Cowan, William	1721 – Brother	1721-34
Coward, Edward	1730 – EIC Captain	1730-2
Craig, William	?	1729
Cruickshank, John	1731 – EIC Captain	1731-3
Curgenvén, Peter	1724 – Free Merchant	1724-7
D’Abbadie, Francis	1729 – EIC Captain	1729-33
Da Costa, Philip Mendes	1730 – London Financier	1730-1
Dagleish, Alexander	1725 – EIC Captain	1725-7
Davey, Samuel	1727 – EIC Captain	1727-33
Davies, Benjamin	?	1731
Davis, Mrs.	1722 – Half-sister	1722
Dawson / Dawsonne, William	1710 – Company Director; 1721 - Patron	1721-31
Deane, John	1723 – President; 1728 – President	1724-9
Decker, Sir Matthew	1714 – Company Director; 1725 - Patron	1725-33
Delaporte, Peter	1721 – London Financier; Patron	1721-32
Dickinson, Francis	1727, 1728, 1729 – Junior Merchant; 1730, 1731 – Senior Merchant; 1732 – 6th/8th in Council; 1733 - 7th/8th in Council; 1734, 1735 - 9th in Council	1723-33
Douglas, Alexander	1723 – EIC Captain	1723-7
Douglas, James	?	1723
Draper, William Henry	1717, 1718, 1719 - Writer; 1721, 1722, 1723 - Factor; 1724 - Factor/Junior Merchant; 1725, 1726, 1727 – Junior Merchant; 1729 – Senior Merchant; 1730 – Senior Merchant/Mayor, 1731 – Mayor/7th in Council; 1732 - 3rd in Council; 1733 - 4th/5th in Council; 1734, 1735 - 6th in Council; 1736, 1737 - 5th in Council	1721-33
Drummond, John	1722 – Company Director; 1725 - Patron	1725-33
Durley, John	1730 – Factor	1730-1
Ecclestone, John	1721 – Company Director	1730-2
Echlin, Walley	1724 – EIC Captain	1724-32
Edlyne, Edmund	1718, 1721 - Writer; 1719 - Writer/Assistant Accountant; 1724 - Factor	1725-7
Everest, Francis	?	1726-9
Falcone, Thomas	?	1725-7
Farmer, R.	?	1721-3
Faudin, Daniel	1722 - Factor	1722-3
Febos, Joao Gomes	1723 – Free Merchant	1723-7
Fleetwood, Robert	?	1728
Forbes, James	1723 – EIC Captain	1723-7

Forbes, William	1721 - Factor; 1722, 1723, 1724, 1725 - Factor/Assistant Accountant; 1726 – Junior Merchant/Deputy Accountant	1721-7
Fotheringham, John	1724 - Engineer	1724-6
Fowler, Henry	1721, 1722 - Factor	1725
Francia, Benjamin	?	1727-31
Frankland, Henry	1724 – EIC Captain	1724-31
Frankland, Robert	1726 – EIC Captain	1726-33
French, Martin	1724 – EIC Captain; 1729 – Assistant Secretary	1724-33
Furness, Betty	1723 – Friend in London	1723-4
Furness, Mr.	1722 – Friend in London	1722-6
Geckie, John	1729 – Junior Merchant	1726-32
Gee, Zacharias	1728 – Native Broker	1728
Gerrard, John	? at Bayt-al-Fayiq / Mocha	1725-7
Gilbert, Mr.	?	1721-3
Goddard, John	1731 – Friend in London	1731-3
Goodwin, Nicholas	1723, 1727 - Writer; 1736, 1737, 1738, 1739 – Senior Merchant	1728-33
Gortling, Mr.	?	1722
Goselin, Styleman	1721 - Factor	1723
Gould, Elizabeth	1722 – Fiancé / Friend in London	1722-32
Gould, John	1721 – Company Director; Patron; Friend in London	1721-31
Gould, John Jr.	1721 – Company Director; Patron; Friend in London	1722-34
Gould, Mrs.	1721 – Friend in London	1722-5
Gould, Nathaniel	1721 – Patron; Friend in London	1729-33
Greenhill, S.	?	1729
Grey, Charles	1729 – EIC Captain	1729
Gustons, Mr.	?	1722
Hamilton, Charles	1722 – Friend in Ireland	1722-3
Hammond, Nicholas	?	1721
Harnett, Thomas	1722 - Writer; 1723 - Writer/Assistant Secretary, 1724 - Writer/Factor/Deputy Secretary; 1725 - Factor/Deputy Secretary	1730-2
Harrison, Edward	1718 – Company Director; Patron	1724-31
Hart, Rawson	?	1729-30
Heathcote, John	1726 - Patron	1726-30
Henry, Hugh	1721 - Patron	1721-9
Heydon, Samuel	1722 -Friend in London	1722-7
Hinde, John	1724 – Free Merchant	1724-7
Hope, John	1712, 1713, 1715 – Junior Factor, 1716 – Junior Factor/9th in Council, 1717 - 8th in Council, 1718 -	1722-7

	7th in Council; 1724, 1725, 1726, 1727 - 2nd in Council/Accountant/Chief Justice	
Horden, Mr.	?	1722
Horne, John	1715, 1716, 1717, 1718, 1719 – Junior Factor; 1721 – Junior Merchant/7th in Council; 1734 - Deputy Governor/Accountant; 1735 - Deputy Governor/Accountant/President; 1736, 1737, 1738, 1739 - President	1729-33
Housay, Isaac	?	1726-7
Hunter, David	1721 – EIC Captain	1721-31
Hunter, John	1728 – EIC Captain	1728-33
Hyde, John	?	1724
Innes, Daniel	1722, 1723, 1724 - Factor; 1737 – Senior Merchant	1722-33
Johnson, John	1731 – EIC Captain	1731-2
Jones, Jeremiah	?	1727
Jordan, Mr.	?	1722
Keeble, William	1730 – EIC Captain	1730
Kellett, Henry	1721, 1723, 1724, 1725 - Factor; 1726 - Factor/Junior Merchant; 1727, 1728 – Junior Merchant; 1729 - 7th in Council; 1730, 1731 - 6th in Council; 1732 - 4th in Council; 1733 - 6th/7th in Council; 1734, 1735 - 8th in Council; 1736 - 7th in Council	1721-33
Keyden, Mr.	?	1722
King, Hezekiah	1712, 1713 - Writer, 1715 – Junior Factor; 1722 - 5th in Council; 1723, 1724, 1725, 1726, 1727, 1728 - 4th in Council	1721-30
King, Mrs.	Wife of Hezekiah King	1725
Kyffin, Henry	1722 – Senior Merchant; 1723 – Junior Merchant	1721-3
Lambton, John	1719, 1721 - Writer; 1722 - Writer/Deputy Secretary; 1723, 1724, 1725 - Factor; 1726, 1727, 1728 – Junior Merchant; 1732 - 6th in Council, 1733 - 5th/6th in Council; 1734, 1735 - 7th in Council; 1736, 1737 - 6th in Council; 1740, 1741, 1742, 1743, 1744, 1745, 1746, 1747, 1748, 1749 – Senior Merchant	1721-30
Law, Stephen	1731 - 7th in Council; 1732 - 5th in Council; 1740, 1741, 1742, 1743 – President	1725-33
Lawson, Thomas	1721 – EIC Captain	1721
Lazinby, Richard	1721 – EIC Captain	1724-5
Legrond, Mr	1721 – Patron	1721-7
Lennox, Robert	1721 – Factor; Friend in London	1721-30
Lenon, Mr.	?	1723
Lewin, Charles	?	1727
Loader, Jacob	1723 – EIC Captain	1723

Lowther, Henry	1719 – Junior Factor; 1721, 1722, 1723 - Factor; 1724 - Factor/Junior Merchant; 1726, 1728 - 7th in Council; 1727 - 8th in Council; 1729 - 4th in Council	1723-34
Lyell, Balthazar	1730 – Company Director; Patron	1730-3
Lyell, Henry	1710 – Company Director; Patron	1724-33
Macneal, Robert	1728 – EIC Captain	1728-31
Macrae, James	1723 – EIC Captain; 1724 – President	1721-31
Macrae, Mrs.	Wife of James Macrae	1721-2
Martin, Matthew	1726 – EIC Captain	1726-33
Massey, Edward	1719 – Junior Factor; 1721, 1722, 1723 - Factor; 1724 - Factor/Junior Merchant; 1725, 1726 – Junior Merchant; 1727 – Junior Merchant/Senior Merchant; 1728, 1729 – Senior Merchant	1721
May, William	1728 – Factor	1728
Milles, John	1721 – Factor	1721-4
Mitchell, Mrs.	1723 – Friend in Ireland	1723
Mitchell, Philip	1729 – Friend in Ireland	1729
Mitchell, William	1727 – Friend in Ireland	1727-8
Moore, Samuel	?	1723
Morice, William	?	1731
Mounier, John	?	1721
Moyne, Mr.	1721 – Friend in Ireland	1721
Mulell, Mrs.	1721 – Friend in Ireland	1721-2
Munro, Duncan	1723 – Surgeon	1723
Nelly, Francis	1728 – EIC Captain	1728-30
Nesbitt, Robert	1729 – Friend in London	1729-30
Neville, James	?	1725
Newlin, Robert	1713, July 1713, 1715, 1716 - Writer; 1717 - Writer/Assistant Accountant; 1718, 1719 – Junior Factor/Assistant Accountant; 1721 – Junior Merchant/Assistant Accountant/8th in Council; 1722 - 5th in Council; 1723 - 4th in Council, 1724 - 5th in Council/Chief Justice	1724-7
Newton, Jonathan	?	1729
Nightingale, Robert	1712 – Company Director	1721-3
Oliver, Richard	?	1730
Orme, Alexander	1721 – Factor	1721
Paauw, Arnoldus	1723, 1724 - Factor/Assistant Accountant; 1725, 1726, 1727 - Factor; 1728, 1729 – Junior Merchant; 1730, 1731 - 7th in Council	1724-8
Panwell, Thomas	1728 – EIC Captain	1728-9
Parack, Loldas	1726 – Native Broker	1726
Park, Mr.	?	1721-2

Parker, Lawrence	1717 – 2nd in Council, 1718 - Deputy Governor/Accountant; 1719 - Deputy Governor/Accountant/Chief Justice	1721-3
Philly, Mr.	?	1721
Phipps, William	1712 – Warehouse Keeper; 1713 – Senior Merchant; 1722 - 2nd in Council; 1723, 1724, 1725, 1726, 1727, 1728, 1729 – President	1722-34
Pidgeon, Mr.	?	1721
Pitt, George Morton	1724 – Accountant; Deputy Governor; 1730 – President.	1729-32
Ralle, Mr.	?	1722
Rammell, Thomas	1716, 1717, 1718 - Writer; 1727, 1728 – Senior Merchant; 1729 - 5th in Council; 1730, 1731 - 4th in Council	1724-32
Ramsden, James	1726, 1727, 1728, 1729 – Factor	1729-32
Rawdon, Marmaduke	1727 – London Financier	1727-9
Reeve, William	1727 – EIC Captain	1729-30
Reynes, Elizabeth	1724 – Friend in London	1724
Richmond, Mrs.	1723 – Friend in London	1723
Robinson, John	1726, 1727, 1728, 1729 – Factor	1729-32
Robinson, William	1727, 1728 – Writer	1728-9
Ryneon, Mr.	?	1721
Sarson, John	July 1713, 1715, 1716, 1717 - Writer; 1718 - Writer/Junior Factor; 1719 – Junior Factor/Assistant Accountant; 1721 – Junior Merchant/Assistant Accountant; 1722 - 8th in Council/Accountant; 1723 - 7th in Council	1724-5
Saunders, John	?	1729
Savage, Charles	1725 – Company Director; Patron	1731-3
Savage, Charles Jr.	1731 – Company Director; Patron	1726-33
Sawbridge, Thomas	1722 - Chaplain; 1723, 1724, 1725 – Minister	1724-5
Scattergood, Mr.	1722 – Free Merchant	1722-3
Sedgewicke, Nathaniel	1731 – Friend in London	1731
Shannon, Betty	1723 – Friend in London	1723
Shaw, John	?	1731
Sherman, John	1721 – Patron; Friend in London	1721-32
Sir	Superior(s) - ?	1722-7
Skinner, William	?	1730
Smith, Thomas	1723 – EIC Captain	1723-5
Starke, John	1723 – Free Merchant	1723
Stephenson, Edward	1729 – Friend in London	1729-30
Sterling, Mrs.	1729 – Friend in London	1724
Sterling, William	?	1727

Stert, Arthur	1721 – Patron; Friend in London	1721-33
Stonestreet, Thomas	1723 - Writer; 1724 - Writer/Assistant Accountant; 1730 - Factor/Deputy Accountant; 1731, 1732, 1733 – Junior Merchant/Deputy Accountant; 1734 – Senior Merchant/Deputy Accountant/Mayor; 1735, 1736, 1737 – Senior Merchant/Deputy Accountant; 1738 – Senior Merchant/ 6th/7th in Council; 1739 - 6th in Council; 1740 - 5th in Council	1729-31
Stuart, Mr.	?	1721
Sully, Mr.	?	1722
Sutton, Robert	1718, 1719 – Junior Factor; 1721 - Factor; 1723 - 8th in Council	1721-2
Taylor, George	1712, 1713 – Junior Factor; 1722 – Senior Merchant/Chief Justice/3rd in Council; 1731 – Senior Merchant; 1732, 1733, 1736, 1737, 1738, 1739 – 2nd in Council/Accountant; 1734, 1735 3rd in Council	1721-7
Tullie, Timothy	1730 – EIC Captain	1730-1
Tully, Mr.	?	1722
Upton, Anthony	1724 – Free Merchant	1724-5
Upton, Arthur	1721, 1722, 1723, 1724, 1725 - Factor; 1726, 1727, 1728 – Junior Merchant; 1729 - 6th in Council; 1730, 1731 - 5th in Council	1721-9
Upton, Richard	1728 – EIC Captain	1728-32
Vane, George	1721 – Engineer	1721-5
Vesey, Benjamin	?	1731
Wake, William	1733 - 8th/9th in Council; 1743 - Chief of Tellicherry; 1744, 1745, 1746, 1747, 1748, 1749, 1750, 1751 – President	1721-33
Walker, Francis	?	1725
Wallis, John	1719, 1721, 1722 - Writer; 1723 - Writer/Factor/Deputy Secretary; 1727 - Factor/Junior Merchant; 1730 – Junior Merchant/Senior Merchant; 1731 – Senior Merchant/Assistant Accountant; 1732, 1734, 1735, 1737 – Senior Merchant; 1736 – Senior Merchant/Mayor	1729-33
Walsh, Mr.	?	1722
Warne, Mr.	?	1721
Wastell, Thomas	?	1730
Waters, Richard	1717, 1718 – Junior Factor; 1719 – Junior Factor/Senior Factor; 1721 – Factor; 1727 – Chief of Persia.	1721-2
Welch, John	?	1723
West, John	?	1728
Westerbane, William	1726 – EIC Captain	1726-32

Wheak, Philip	British Consul at Cairo	1727
Whitehill, Charles	1717, 1718, 1719 - Writer; 1735, 1736, 1737 – Senior Merchant; 1738 - 4th /5th in Council; 1739 - 4th in Council; 1740 - 3rd in Council/4th in Council; 1745 - 2nd in Council	1722-31
Whitwell, Nathaniel	1726, 1727 - Writer; 1732 - Factor; 1747, 1748 – 2nd in Council/Accountant	1729-32
Whorwood, Thomas	?	1731
Wilkie, David	1730 – EIC Captain	1730-1
Williams, Mr.	?	1722
Woodward, Thomas	1721 – Factor	1721-3
Woolley, Thomas	EIC Secretary	1721-33
Wordsworth, Josias	1712 – Company Director; 1724 – Patron	1724-32
Wright, Edmund	?	1722
Wyard, Charles	1718, 1719 – Junior Factor; 1723 - Factor/Junior Merchant; 1724, 1725 – Junior Merchant	1722-5
Yeomans, Thomas	1721, 1722, 1723, 1724, 1725, 1726 – Assay Master	1722-4
Young, Sir John	?	1730

## Appendix Two

### Draft Articles of Alliance for the Anglo-Portuguese Expedition of 1721.

This is a transcription of the draft alliance treaty which was negotiated between Robert Cowan and the Portuguese Viceroy of Goa, Francis Joseph de Sampayo é Castro, in August – November 1721. The articles have been reproduced from a copy of the treaty text held at PRONI, Belfast.<sup>32</sup> The articles are intended for use in conjunction with chapter two to assist the reader when the Anglo-Portuguese alliance of 1721 is being discussed. As such, the points have been listed with their corresponding numeral(s).

- I. There shall be a league offensive and defensive made against the Asiatic Princes, that are enemies of the crowns of Great Britain and Portugal, except the Mogul, Kings of Persia, Arabia and China, and both nations shall immediately commence a vigorous war against Angria without listening to any treaty of peace with the said enemy nor shall any of the two nations in alliance separately, without the other nation to any proposals leading to peace, but anything proposed shall be to both present, and nothing concluded without their mutual consent.

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<sup>32</sup> Articles of an Alliance, Offensive and Defensive, made by the British and Portuguese Nations, (PRONI, Cowan Papers, D654/B/1/3A1, ff. 36-38).



- II. In case a Prince in enmity with one crown shall make war against the other crown, then the league is defensive only, that is in case of an invasion the nation invaded shall be succoured by the other, without fail on any pretence whatsoever.
  
- III. As to the union of the British and Portuguese forces in their operations, as well as at land, as sea the same order shall be observed that was practiced betwixt the two nations in the late war with Spain, the generals of both nations shall command alternately (except when the Viceroy goes to the field in person) and in like manner the troops of both nations shall make the posts of honour, one nation at one ridge in battle, the other at another.
  
- IV. The troops that are ancillaries shall be under the command of the nation they go to assist, and upon all detachments and in time of action the officers shall command according to their commissions, whether British or Portuguese.
  
- V. The ancillary troops shall be paid and maintained both at sea and land by their respective sovereigns.
  
- VI. All prizes taken at sea during the war, by both nations being all the same time in conjunction, shall be divided equally betwixt them with the ammunition, value of the hulls, and everything else, and the said prizes shall be carried, the first to a port under the Portuguese dominion, and the second to a port under the dominion of Great Britain and so for the others alternatively, in like manner all plunder by land

shall be carried to the camp and there equally divided betwixt both nations, except cattle, that shall be distributed amongst the officers and soldiers of both nations.

- VII. In case of any port or place being taken from the enemy, any goods or merchandise carried thither by either nation, shall not pay duty or custom but only such goods as are sold in the port or place.
- VIII. Each nation shall put two-thousand foot in the field with officers in proportion, and what cavalry are in readiness on either side, and in case a greater body of infantry shall be found necessary it shall be furnished equally by both nations and by sea each nation shall fitt out five grabs and other small vessels as are needful.
- IX. Each body or party both by sea and land shall spend their own ammunition for account of their own sovereign, and if either shall want, they shall be supplied at a just and reasonable price with what is necessary.
- X. The fort of Culabo and its district shall belong to Portugal, the subjects of Great Britain reserving to themselves a house in Culabo if they please, and the fort of Greim with its district shall belong to the crown of Great Britain, the subjects of Portugal reserving to themselves a house if they think fit. But in case the subjects of Great Britain think proper to demolish Greim it shall be effected by both nations and one equal dividend made of the two artillery and munitions; And for Culabo and its district one equivalent shall be given to the subjects of Great Britain in which shall be included the island Candry.

- XI. The deserters from one side to the other shall not be entertained in the service, but restored on application made by the officer commanding from whence they fled, to the other commanding officer where they deserted to, pardoning them their crimes.
  
- XII. That if any theft happen on either side, upon full proof of the same restitution shall be made to whom it belongs.
  
- XIII. Such persons who have taken the protection of either crown for crimes committed meriting death shall not be delivered up.
  
- XIV. These fourteen articles where of this league consists being duly ratified the execution of the project shall be presently entered upon. Reserving at all times the respective rights of their Majesties of Great Britain and Portugal.

## **Bibliography**

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IOR/E/1/11 – East India Company Miscellaneous Letters Received.

IOR/E/3/89 – East India Company Letter Book 6 (1678 – 1682)

IOR/E/3/90 - East India Company Letter Book 7 (1682 – 1685)

IOR/E/3/100 – East India Company Letter Book 17 (November 1719 – May 1721).

IOR/E/3/101 – East India Company Letter Book 18 (March 1721 – March 1724).

IOR/E/3/102 – East India Company Letter Book 19 (October 1723 – April 1725).

IOR/E/3/103 – East India Company Letter Book 20 (October 1725 – April 1727).

IOR/E/3/104 – East India Company Letter Book 21 (February 1727 – February 1729).

IOR/E/3/105 – East India Company Letter Book 22 (March 1730 – March 1733).

IOR/E/3/106 – East India Company Letter Book 23 (October 1733 – July 1736).

IOR/G/17/1 – East India Company Egypt / Red Sea Factory Records (July 1721 – September 1726).

IOR/G/17/2 – East India Company Egypt / Red Sea Factory Records (July 1721 – September 1726).

IOR/G/17/3 – East India Company Egypt / Red Sea Factory Records (July 1721 – September 1726).

IOR/H/24 – East India Company Commissions.

IOR/O/5/31 & 37 – Bombay Personnel Listings.

## National Archives, Kew

C 11/715/19: Short title: Cooper v Young. Document type: Bill and answer. Plaintiffs: Thomas Cooper the elder, gent now of Colyton, Devon, late of Dorchester, Dorset. Defendants: Benjamin Young, John Keate and Mary Keate, William Spencer and Jane Spencer his wife.

C 11/837/7: Short title: Phipps v Stewart. Document type: Three bills, answer and demurrer. Plaintiffs: William Phipps, esq of Haywood, Wiltshire, John Gould an infant (son, heir and residuary devisee of John Gould, esq deceased of Woodford Bridge, Essex, by Mary Gould.

C 11/965/16: Short title: Lort v Lort. Document type: Bill and answer. Plaintiffs: Griffith Lort, merchant formerly of Lisbon, Portugal and now of London. Defendants: Robert Lort, William Ryans, John Arthur and others. Date of bill (or first document): 1716.

C 11/1059/12: Short title: Lort v Lowther. Document type: Bill and two answers. Plaintiffs: Griffith Lort, merchant of Pembroke, Pembrokeshire. Defendants: Henry Lowther, William Phipps, esq, John Gould, esq, Alexander Stewart and [unknown] Stewart his wife. Date of bill (or first document): 1739.

C 11/1059/13: Short title: Lort v Stewart. Document type: Answer only. Plaintiffs: Griffith Lort. Defendants: Alexander Stewart and Mary Stewart his wife and others. Date of bill (or first document): 1739.

C11/2614/26: Short Title: Fitter v Cairnes. Document Type: Bill and Answer. Plaintiffs: James Fitter, merchant of London, and Francis Browne and John Roderigues Barrata, merchants of the Isle of Madeira, West Indies. Defendants: Henry Cairnes, Hugh Mitchell, Robert Cowan and [unknown] Lort. Date of bill (or first document): 1718.

C 11/1555/25: Short title: Stewart v East India Company. Document type: Bill and answer. Plaintiffs: Alexander Stewart, esq of St Martin in the Fields, Middlesex and Mary Stewart his wife (only sister and next of kin to Sir Robert Cowan kt, deceased). Defendants: East.

C 11/1557/20: Short title: Stewart v East India Company. Document type: Two bills and six answers. Plaintiffs: Alexander Stewart, esq of Craig's Court, St James Westminster, Middlesex and Mary Stewart his wife (late Mary Cowan, sister and only next of kin and residuary.

## **Public Record Office of Northern Ireland, Belfast**

D654/B/1/1A - Out letter book containing copy letters from Robert Cowan, (April 1723 - June 1723).

D654/B/1/1AA – Out letter book containing reports from Robert Cowan, (February 1721-January 1723).

D654/B/1/1B - Out letter book containing copy letters from Robert Cowan, (July 1723-June 1724).

D654/B/1/1C - Out letter book containing copy letters from Robert Cowan, (July 1724-April 1729).

D654/B/1/1D - Out letter book containing copy letters from Robert Cowan, (April 1729 - October 1729).

D654/B/1/1E - Out letter book containing copies of letters from Robert Cowan, (October 1729-February 1730).

D654/B/1/1F - Out letter book containing copy letters from Robert Cowan, (February 1730-November 1730).

D654/B/1/1G - Out letter book containing copy letters from Robert Cowan, (1730-July 1731).

D654/B/1/1H - Out letter book containing letters from Robert Cowan, (February 1729-August 1729).

D654/B/1/1J - Out letter book, containing copy letters from Robert Cowan, (August 1729-May 1730).

D654/B/1/1K - Out letter book containing copy letters from Robert Cowan, (May 1730-September 1731).

D654/B/1/1L - Out letter book containing copy letters from Robert Cowan, (July 1731-September 1732).

D654/B/1/1M - Out letter book containing copy letters from Robert Cowan, (August 1732-July 1733).

D654/B/1/1N - Out letter book containing copy letters from Robert Cowan, (August 1733-April 1734).



D654/B/1/2A - Out letter book containing copy letters from Robert Cowan, (August 1728-September 1729).

D654/B/1/2B - Out letter book containing copy letters from Robert Cowan, (January 1730-January 1731).

D654/B/1/2C - Out letter book containing copy letters from Robert Cowan, (September 1731-January 1732).

D654/B/1/2D - Out letter book containing copy letters from Robert Cowan, (April 1733-October 1734).

D654/B/1/5A – Letters to Robert Cowan, (1728-31).

D654/B/1/5AA/1 - Part of a letter book containing letters from Robert Cowan, (1720-1723).

D654/B/1/7A - Mocha Ledger A, (1724).

D654/B/1/7B - Journal Letter B containing the private affairs and Transactions of Robert Cowan, (February 1724-April 1725).

D654/B/1/8B - Journal of Accounts Letter B, (December 1727-July 1729).

D654/B/1/8D - Foul Journal Letter D, (August 1730-July 1732).

D654/B/1/8E - Foul Journal Letter E, (August 1731-July 1732).

D654/B/1/8F - Foul Journal Letter F, (August 1732-July 1733).

D654/B/1/8G - Foul Journal Letter G, (August 1733-July 1734).

D654/B/1/8H – Foul Journal Letter H, (August 1734-January 1735).

D654/B/1/9A - Invoice and Account Sales inwards', (October 1728-August 1731).

D654/B/1/9B - Invoice and Account Sales Inwards, (1731-1734).

D654/B/1/10A-B – Invoice and Account Books Outwards, (1725-1735).

D654/B/1/11 – Cash Books, (1729-1735).

D654/B/1/13 – Account Books of William Phipps, (1722-1735).

D654/B/1/15 – Miscellaneous Account Books, (1723-1734).

D654/C/1/1A - Probate copy of will dated 4th January 1734-1735, Sir Robert Cowan. (13 January 1734-35).

D654/C/1/1B – Release of the Estate of Sir Robert Cowan, (26 January, 1739-1740).

D654/C/1/1E - Conveyance of reversionary interest in the estate of Sir Robert Cowan. Messrs Phipps and Gould to Mr Stewart, (22 June 1743).

D654/D/2/A/9 - Bond between Henry Thomson and John Cowan, (2 Dec. 1682).

D654/D/2/A/10 - Bond between Henry Thomson, (20 Jan. 1683).

D654/D/2/A/11 - Grant between Hugh Thomson and John Cowan, (17 Apr. 1690).

D654/D/2/A/13 - Fine between Samuel Davy and John Cowan, (1715).

D654/D/2/A/14 - Conveyance between John Cowan and William Ross, (4 Nov. 1715).

D654/F/6 - Marriage Settlement, Alexander Stewart and Mary Cowan, (30 June 1737).

D654/L/E/69/1 - Lease between John Cowan and Tristram Joanes, (1 Nov. 1706).

D654/L/E/69/2 - Lease between John Cowan and William Quinn, (23 Apr. 1730).

D654/L/E/75/1 - Lease between John Cowan and William Cowan, (13 Feb. 1720).

D654/L/E/75/2 - Lease between John Cowan and John Joanes, (15 Dec. 1731).

D654/MR2 - A Map of Lands Belonging to Alderman John Cowan.

D/75/1 – Grant from Rt Hon. Arthur Earl of Donegall to John Cowan, (8 August 1698).

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