THE EAST INDIA COMPANY'S MARITIME SERVICE 1746–1834

Masters of the Eastern Seas

JEAN SUTTON

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WORLDS OF THE EAST INDIA COMPANY

ISSN 1752-5667

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THE BOYDELL PRESS

First published 2010
The Boydell Press, Woodbridge

ISBN 978-1-84383-583-7

The Boydell Press is an imprint of Boydell & Brewer Ltd
PO Box 9, Woodbridge, Suffolk IP12 3DF, UK
and of Boydell & Brewer Inc.
668 Mt Hope Avenue, Rochester, NY 14620, USA
website: www.boydellandbrewer.com

A CIP catalogue record for this title is available from the British Library

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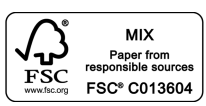

Typeset by
Frances Hackeson Freelance Publishing Services, Brinscall, Lancs
Printed in Great Britain by
CPI Antony Rowe, Chippenham and Eastbourne

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In memory of my husband Bryan, who gave me his unswerving support over many decades

PREFACE

My earlier study of the East India Company's maritime service, *Lords of the East, the East India Company and its Ships* (Conway, 1981 and 2000) dealt with the basic system by which the Company chartered the ships and men required to carry on its trade. A further book is needed to consider the various roles the service played in the final, turbulent century of the Company's commercial life. For most of the period from the 1740s to the 1830s the Company's ships were supporting the small royal naval force in the eastern seas in their struggle to achieve British supremacy in India. Concurrently, the maritime service advanced the knowledge of navigation and hydrography in the course of its expanding trade with China, conducted in restricted conditions in an alien culture.

Such a complex study over a long period requires a cohesive theme. I decided to follow the careers of members of the ubiquitous Larkins family, but was daunted by the genealogical aspect. Following publication of the second edition of *Lords of the East* I received a letter from a Geoffrey Bovill. He said he was descended from the Larkins who served in the Company's maritime service and asked me if I would write a book about them. His father had spent many years studying the India records and had written a book, which he had failed to get published. Geoffrey offered to allow me to use all his father's notes and the script. Although my theme differs greatly from that of his father, the notes, especially his abstract of every reference to members of the Larkins family in the Court Minutes and the family tree, have saved me months of research. I had many conversations with Geoffrey, a truly charming man, and sent him instalments of my script but sadly he died just as I completed it. His son Giles has continued the family's interest in my work and has generously supplied me with prints recording the battle between *Warren Hastings* and *La Piémontaise* and permitted me to reproduce them.

I am also greatly indebted to David Gordon-Steward for inviting me to view the 'commander's packet', containing all the information a captain of a Company ship required for a voyage, belonging to his forebear Captain Gabriel Steward, a colleague of William Larkins. During forty years of research this is the only complete packet I have seen. It has proved a valuable resource and David has kindly allowed me to

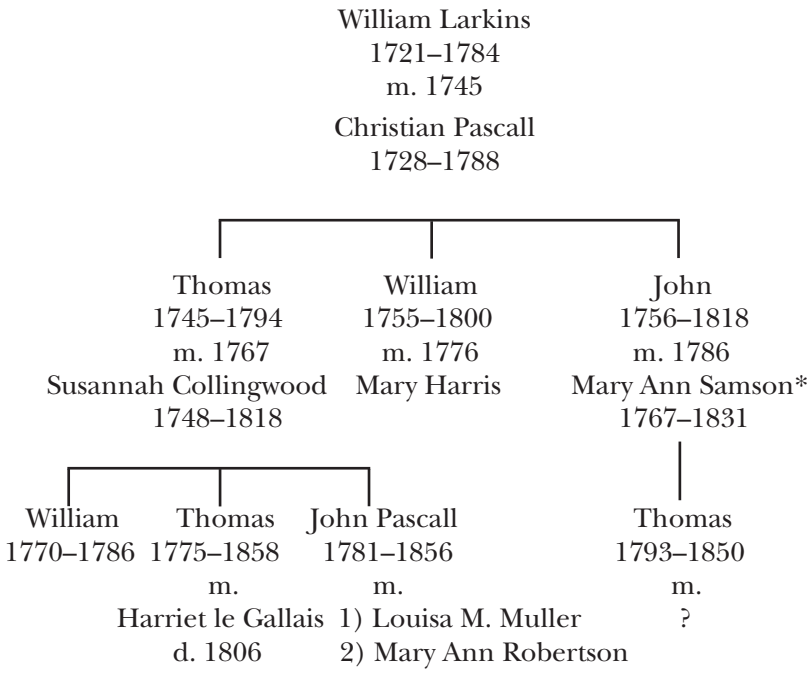
reproduce the French king's order to allow safe passage for *Neptune*, with the translation.

I am grateful to several other people for supplying images and giving permission to reproduce them in the book: the Martyn Gregory Gallery for the views of the factories at Canton and the anchorage at Whampoa; the Blackheath Society and Neil Rhind, the authority on Blackheath, for the views of Park House and Point House; and Poole Museums for the Pennell urns.

I owe special thanks to my sons, Michael for drawing the maps and Paul for solving every problem in completing them and organizing all images electronically. David Watkins at Poole Museums generously gave his time to solve a particularly difficult problem.

Many people have helped with information and advice which have contributed to this book, particularly Ken Jones, Georgina Green, Ed Cumming, Stephen Taylor, John Evans, Derek Morris and my dear friend John Versey who has with great patience, over many years, helped me master the technology. I am particularly indebted to the staff in the Asia, Pacific and Africa Collection at the British Library and the National Maritime Museum for their unstinting service and support, always offered with great courtesy. Most of all I wish to thank Professor Huw Bowen, whose patience and great experience as a writer and teacher have helped me to produce a much better book than would otherwise have been the case.

The Larkins Family



Only those members of the Larkin family who served in the East India Company and who are mentioned in the text are included.

Dates of birth, marriage and death are included where known.

* A great deal of confusion has arisen from the variations in spelling. Samson has been used throughout the text.

INTRODUCTION

CATHAY! FOR centuries its siren cadence lured European adventurers over land and sea. The Spanish searched to the west while the Portuguese penetrated ever further south down the coast of Africa. Within five years of Columbus's arrival in the Bahamas Vasco da Gama had rounded the Cape of Good Hope and reached the ancient emporium of Calicut on the Malabar coast of India. Although the Spanish had failed to reach China, the silver they acquired in America fuelled the European trade with the East for centuries.[1] The Portuguese systematically established control over the eastern seas through powerful fortifications at Mozambique, Ormuz, Diu, Goa, Cochin, Colombo, Malacca, and fortified factories in the Moluccas, with access to Chinese products through a settlement at Macao. Denied the use of the southern sea routes by the great Catholic powers legitimized by Papal Bull,[2] the English sailed by the northeast and the northwest to find markets for their surplus woollen cloth. They believed '… the fittest places are the manifold islands of Japan and the northern parts of China and the regions of the Tartars next adjoyning',[3] but none of the expeditions was successful.

In the last two decades of the sixteenth century English seamen dared to venture into the southern ocean,[4] confident in their ability to take on the huge Portuguese carracks. In 1578 Drake sailed by the Strait of Magellan and circumnavigated the world. Emboldened by the defeat of the Spanish armada, Elizabeth I licensed an expedition which sailed by the Cape of Good Hope to search for countries between Calicut and China not settled by the Portuguese 'for the ventinge of our comodities … but especially our trade of clotheinge'.[5] Commercially it failed,

but two English ships sailed round the Indian seas as far as the Malay peninsula without interference from the Portuguese. Merchants of the Turkey and Levant companies travelled widely overland in Persia and India, supplementing the knowledge of navigating to the eastern seas with valuable information about markets and products. Linschoten, a Dutchman who had worked for several years for the Portuguese in Goa, vastly increased this knowledge by publishing Portuguese sailing directions and full information on Portuguese possessions in the East. The capture by English seamen of two Portuguese carracks revealed at once the enormous wealth to be acquired in the East and the weakness of the Portuguese at sea. Spurred on by the Dutch, who sent out many expeditions which were bringing back valuable cargoes by the end of the century, a group of London merchants petitioned Elizabeth I to grant them the sole privilege of trading to the East, with immunities and freedom from customs. They requested that they be incorporated 'for that the trade of the Indias, being so farre remote from hence, cannot be traded but in a joynt and a unyted stock'.[6]

On the last day of 1600 Queen Elizabeth I granted the Company of Merchants of London trading to the East Indies the exclusive privilege of trade between England and the lands 'beyond the Cape of Bona Esperanza to the Straits of Magellan for fifteen years …'[7] A Court of all the stockholders elected a Governor, Deputy Governor and seventeen 'committees' to administer the Company. As there were few English products in demand in the East, an exception was made to the law prohibiting the export of bullion. The Company was allowed to take out silver to purchase a return investment, provoking cries of 'enemies of Christendom' as they 'carried away the treasure of Europe to enrich the heathen'.[8] The first fleets had to lock into the ancient trading system dictated by the seasonal winds in the eastern seas. They followed the Dutch to Acheh and Bantam where valuable cargoes of pepper were acquired, and on to the Moluccas, the only source of the valuable spices nutmeg, mace and cloves.[9] Here they met determined Dutch opposition. From the formation in 1602 of the state backed Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie (VOC), a loosely knit federation of individual states' companies, Dutch policy was to use overwhelming force to control the spice trade by limiting production and maintaining high prices through monopoly. The English were powerless to intervene as the Dutch stormed Portuguese forts and forced the native rulers to make treaties confirming Dutch supremacy in the Moluccas.

Both the East India Company and the VOC set up their headquarters in Bantam in the early voyages. There the factors found Chinese junks laden with velvets and damasks and ships from Surat in northwest

India taking cloth from Gujarat to barter for spices from the Moluccas. The Company recognized that Surat was an important trading base: '… through the whole Indias there cannot bee any place more beneficiall for our country than this, beeing the onely key to open all the richest and best trade of the Indias'.[10] A small fleet which arrived at Surat in 1608 to trade had to overcome a strong Portuguese force, impressing the Indians who had long believed in the invincibility of Portuguese power at sea. A Surat factor wished 'there might a sufficient man be sent to the Emperor's court at Agra … such a one whose person may breed regard, for they here look much after great men'.[11] James I sent Sir Thomas Roe as his accredited ambassador from the Court of St James. He secured from the Emperor a *farman*, or official permit to trade, and permission to rent a house for a factory, though credit must be due also to the strength shown by the Company's fleets. The factors at Surat informed Roe that 'fear of our ships hath and must hold us here if we continue'.[12] Indigo, sugar, saltpetre and fine cottons and silks were soon arriving at Surat by the caravan route from as far away as Bengal, and large stocks of bleached calicoes from Broach and Baroda in Gujarat. The Company joined in the flourishing trade carried on by Indian merchants from Surat with ports in the Red Sea where Egyptian merchants paid in specie for spices obtained from the Malabar coast and the textiles of Gujarat. The Gujarati merchants sailing on the annual *haj* to Mecca welcomed the protection of English ships and the opportunity to freight their treasure on them on the return passage.

The Surat factors were sure that Persian silk would sell at a profit in London while English woollens should find a good market there. The Shah readily gave the English a *firman* for the exclusive trade by sea for his silk, but Portuguese fleets attacked Company ships visiting their factory at Jask. In 1623 the English fleet helped the Persians to conquer the great Portuguese fort at Ormuz. The Shah rewarded the Company with half the customs receipts of Gombroon,[13] which became the headquarters of the Company's operations in Persia, with subordinate factories at Isfahan and Shiraz.[14]

Further east, 1623 was a year of failure for the English in two important trading areas. Dutch patience with the English Company's persistent attempts to benefit from costly Dutch operations against the Portuguese east of Java resulted in hostilities between the Protestant companies. In the Banda islands, the only area where nutmeg grew, the heroic resistance of a handful of Company agents who occupied Pularun ended tragically. In Amboyna the torture and summary execution of several English company servants for allegedly plotting against the Dutch marked the English withdrawal from the area and soured

Anglo-Dutch relations for generations.[15] A fleet had sailed to Japan from Bantam and opened factories at Firando (Hirado) to trade with Siam, attracted by the prospect of earning Japanese silver, which could be used to purchase Chinese goods. But the trade was disappointing and little was lost when the Emperor evicted the English factors.

The Company faced setbacks in its trade centred on Surat soon after it had been made the Presidency of all the factories in northwest India and Persia. In 1629 famine devastated Gujarat and spread to the east coast where the Company had opened a factory at Masulipatam to obtain painted cloths, or chintz. When the economy began to recover, Francis Day acquired a strip of land further south on the Coromandel coast at Madraspatam and built Fort St George which succeeded Bantam as the Presidency of the east coast and the Malay archipelago in 1641. From there several expeditions were made to the north by sea to obtain the beautiful cottons and silks of Bengal. Impressed by the order within the Moghul's dominions, Day opened a factory at Balasore and later at Hooghly, the Portuguese emporium on the River Hooghly. He obtained a *farman* to trade free of internal customs duties.

Just as the Company's prospects began to improve, Charles I granted a charter to a rival company whose ships proceeded to rampage round the eastern seas from the Red Sea to China where the English were consequently outlawed and their name damned for decades. Civil war at home depressed trade still further and the Company, a royal creation, languished after the King's execution.

No one benefited from the free-for-all that followed in the eastern trade. It ended in 1657 when Cromwell recognized that a strong Company and expanding foreign trade would buttress his policy of achieving superiority over the Dutch at sea, already begun with the passing of the Navigation Acts and massive capital investment in the Commonwealth navy. He revived the failing Company by creating a permanent joint stock in which a confident public invested almost three-quarters of a million pounds. This financed the establishment of seventeen trading bases well supplied with capital and men throughout the East.[16] The Company's government remained as before. Charles II renewed the charter several times, extending the Company's powers to enable its servants to make alliances, raise troops, mint money and administer civil and criminal justice.

In the early years of the century the Company had invested heavily in dockyards at Deptford and Blackwall where it built its own ships. Mismanagement and the collapse of trade in the late 1620s and 1630s resulted in the running down of these costly installations in succeeding decades.[17] Now they were sold off as hiring ships for the Company's

service was embodied in the charters. The government's policy of rewarding builders of large ships with bounties and remission of customs encouraged shipowners among the 'committees' to build large ships for hire to the Company. They were further encouraged by the Company's offer of extra freight for any large ship tendered.[18] They used their power in the Company to ensure that their ships were hired for more than one voyage. The Company extended its privilege to trade with the East to the commanders with the navigational skills and experience of sailing to the eastern seas. In addition, the Company ordered a new ship to be built for a commander whose ship was lost or worn out in the Company's service. Both owners and commanders benefited from this policy which developed into the twin customary rights of the 'hereditary bottom' and the 'perpetual command'. Wealthy, influential 'committees' close to the King dominated the provision of the Company's shipping, while their friends were appointed to the commands of the 'great' ships. Small ships were required to carry cargoes from the subordinate factories to the Presidencies where they were transferred to the 'great' ships. They were also employed on exploratory voyages to seek out a trade in those areas where there was likely to be a demand for English woollen cloth and lead to exchange for products which would sell at the Company's sales. Establishing a direct or indirect trade with China and Japan remained the prime objective but none of the many expeditions of the 1670s and 1680s was successful.

Circumstances beyond the Company's control disrupted its trade in some areas where it was well established. A powerful group of Hindu families developed into the Maratha people who pressed northwards into Moghul territory, disrupting the transport of cotton from the producing areas in Gujarat to Surat. In 1687 the President and factors reluctantly transferred the seat of their operations from healthy Surat to the malarial island of Bombay which the Company had received in 1668 from Charles II. It had the best harbour on the west coast of India, approachable at all times of the year. In the Malay archipelago, the VOC advanced relentlessly westwards from its headquarters at Batavia:[19] Macassar, Malacca, Colombo successively fell under the Dutch yoke. In 1683 the English factors were forced out of Bantam, their last foothold in the region. The Company transferred its operations to the west coast of Sumatra, developing pepper plantations administered from a fortified settlement at Benkulen. In South India the English Company successfully foiled Dutch attempts to monopolize the production of Malabar pepper, the best pepper in the world, by entering into treaties with local rulers.

Despite setbacks, the 1670s and 1680s proved increasingly successful. Bengal silk and cotton textiles and raw silk, half of which were re-exported, realized a million pounds a year at the Company's sales. The 'India craze' swept through Europe. Ladies in high society would wear nothing but Bengal silks and muslins and furnish their homes with nothing but chintz. The Company instructed its servants in Bengal to change the patterns every year, the brighter and gaudier the better. Profitable ballast cargoes of Malabar pepper, increasingly popular Mocha coffee and saltpetre boosted profits. In 1682 the dividend rose to a record 50%, falling back to 25% a few years later.

The Company was nevertheless dissatisfied with conditions in Bengal. Local officials stopped boats bringing goods down the Hooghly and demanded customs in contravention of the Emperor's grant of freedom of trade. This annoyed the Company's servants in Bengal who used the *dastaks*, or passes, for their own private trade as well as that of the Company. Difficulties also arose from the frequent appearance with great panoply of interloping English traders who called themselves the New Company. The chartered Company in London and their servants in Bengal all agreed that the trade could never be conducted satisfactorily until they had a commercial and military base from which to impose their will on the native government. The largest force of the Company's 'great' ships ever to sail to the eastern seas arrived in the Bay of Bengal with instructions to seize Chittagong while another force reached Bombay to take Indian shipping hostage. The operation was a complete failure but the Emperor acknowledged the value of the English trade and his reliance on the Company's ships to protect his pilgrim fleets in the Arabian Sea. On payment of a large fine, the Company was allowed to resume trading and established its new headquarters on the east bank of the Hooghly at Calcutta. A few years later Fort William was built to defend this new site on a long broad reach of the river where the Company's ships could moor and protect the settlement with their guns. It became the Presidency of Bengal with subordinate factories at Patna and Kasimbazar.

The war, 'which has rendered the English in all parts of India Odious and Contemptible',[20] and a downturn in the trade reinforced growing criticism of the Company from various groups. The decision by the small inner group of the largest stockholders to permit individuals to trade to the East up to the amount of their stock[21] and to subsidize ships built for the Company's trade with Company money[22] hastened the discredited old Company's demise.

No one questioned the importance of the eastern trade, which by the last decade of the seventeenth century constituted one sixth of the

whole trade of the kingdom in value and profit.[23] Monopoly was accepted as necessary because of the cost of installations abroad and of gaining privileges, which were not transferable.[24] The new Company formed with a new joint stock[25] succeeded in establishing a direct trade with China at Canton in the first year of the new century. The same year that the Company gained access to the prized Chinese silks the British silk weavers and the nascent dyeing industry, suffering from the competition of Indian textiles produced with cheap Indian labour, succeeded in getting restrictive legislation passed. The wearing and use of chintzes and wrought silks from China and India were prohibited but the re-export trade remained buoyant.

The two companies, the old and the new, operated in a spirit of bitter rivalry. After a few years all involved agreed that merger was essential for a successful trade. In 1709 the United Company of Merchants of England trading to the East Indies began operations from the headquarters in Leadenhall Street. The government of the Company remained the same though the names changed: the Governor and Deputy Governor became Chairman and Deputy Chairman and the twenty-four 'committees' became directors elected annually by the stockholders in the General Court. In all other respects it had completely changed. Parliament, not the king, now held the power to renew or end the Company's charter. The whole capital of £3.2 million was loaned to the state, the working capital being supplied by loans from the Bank of England or raised through issuing bonds.[26] Within a few years investors considered East India stock second only to that of the Bank.

On its formation the Company dealt with three issues which had brought the old Company into disrepute: by-law number eight stated that Company money should not be laid out in the provision of ships; by-law number nine prohibited directors from ownership of ships hired by the Company. The first was respected until under changed circumstances late in the century the Company invested money in a few ships; the second was largely ignored for half a century. Equally important was the by-law establishing competition in tendering ships for hire by the Company in order to keep freights at an economic level, but within a few years the more powerful owners used their influence to ensure that all ships were tendered at the same, inflated, freight. They also re-established the customary right of replacing a worn out or lost ship. Though originally introduced to benefit the commanders, the owners were major beneficiaries. The customs of the 'hereditary bottom' and the 'perpetual command' established, in effect, a monopoly of the supply of ships and commanders within the Company's overall monopoly.

The increasing size and number of the ships reflected the steadily increasing trade: by the 1740s an average of twenty ships of 400–500 tons sailed to India and China every year.[27] Bengal textiles remained the staple of the Company's imports.[28] Britain's monopoly of the slave trade after the Peace of Utrecht boosted demand for coarse calicoes and the re-export of all textiles to far wider European markets successfully countered the effects of the restrictive domestic legislation. Demand for pepper remained buoyant and sales of saltpetre increased, and in spite of very high import duties China tea overtook coffee in popularity.

The United Company was determined to deal firmly with anyone who did not observe the Company's privilege. Those wishing to trade with eastern countries sought the protection of foreign flags. Jacobites, Irish, disaffected of all kinds joined in a new joint stock under the authority of the Viennese government when it acquired the southern Netherlands, taking the name of the Ostend Company. The United Company joined with the VOC to force its closure but its backers simply reformed under the authority of the Swedish government and concentrated on buying tea in Canton to smuggle into England. More serious competition came from the lapsed French Compagnie des Indes, resurrected in 1722 with huge state backing, operating from headquarters at Pondicherry[29] about a hundred miles south of Madras. From a subfactory at Chandernagore between Danish Serampore and Dutch Chinsura on the west bank of the Hooghly, its servants traded very successfully in Bengal textiles, overtaking the English Company by the 1740s. In the south, the English and French companies were drawn into the dynastic struggles of native families seeking to improve their position in the vacuum left by the Moghul power, weakened by the Maratha advance. Superior British naval power in the Bay of Bengal and the French government's failure to back its own Company's chief ensured English supremacy in South India. In Bengal, the succession of a weak ruler, hated by all the main groups in society, ended a long period of stability conducive to a growing trade. Some within the local elite turned to the British, who had demonstrated their power in the dynastic wars of the south, to wield the knife. After the Battle of Plassey, by which the English Company became the ruler of Bengal, the nature of the East India Company changed from trader to ruler. In the immediate aftermath the Company's servants lost '… every spark of sentiment and public spirit … in the unbounded lust of unmerited wealth'[30] as they entered on an orgy of abuse of *dastaks*[31] and accepted 'presents' for favours as they installed a succession of native puppet rulers.

This abuse and the non-appearance of the promised Bengal revenues led to government scrutiny of every aspect of the Company's activities.

It revealed the excessive costs of the Company's shipping due to gross overprovision of tonnage and excessive freights. A new by-law[32] prohibited any more building of ships until an economic level had been reached. All those connected with the provision of the Company's shipping combined to form the most powerful group in the General Court to defend its interests.

Government intervention in the Company's activities culminated in 1784 in William Pitt's India Act which limited the Company's powers to commercial decisions. In return, the Government drastically reduced duties on importing tea into Britain, virtually eliminating the foreign companies' smuggling trade and immediately doubling the legitimate imports of tea. As Indian wars and increasing administrative costs continued to absorb the Bengal revenues, the Company henceforth concentrated on its one remaining profitable commercial venture: China tea. The Company allied with the free merchants in India who traded within the eastern seas to acquire sufficient silver to finance its tea investment. The Company increased its exports of woollens and metals while the free merchants exported Gujarati raw cotton, Malabar pepper and sandalwood in their own fine fleet of India teak built ships. They paid the proceeds into the Company's treasury at Canton in return for bills redeemable in London. The private merchants intrigued to extend the Company's powers over the small kingdoms of the Malabar coast and the cotton producing regions of Gujarat to secure supplies and ensured the survival of Bombay as a Presidency.[33]

In the final decade of the eighteenth century, opposition mounted against all aspects of the Company's monopoly. The British northern manufacturers demanded the right to ship their goods to the East, sceptical of the Company's assurance that its own exports and those of the commanders in their privilege trade fully met the demand for British goods in India. The shipbuilders in the outports demanded a share of the lucrative eastern carrying trade. Pressure from these various interests forced a partial opening of the trade at the renewal of the Company's charter in 1793, but the private trade failed to take up the full amount of tonnage made available. The manufacturers blamed the high freight and the slow and cumbersome schedules of the Company's ships.

At the same time, a well-organized attack defeated the shipping interest. For nearly a century the managing owners had successfully resisted all attempts to put into operation the by-law requiring ships to be tendered by open competition and had persistently exacted uneconomic freights. Government support of progressive elements inside the direction and a few independent stockholders succeeded in overturning

the shipping interest's majority in the General Court in 1796. The reintroduction of tendering ships by fair and open competition for the Company's service was reinforced by legislation, ending the customary rights of the 'hereditary bottom' and the 'perpetuity of command'.

The British government was also concerned that their policy of bringing back the produce of the East to the Port of London was being undermined. The British in India had to bring home their accumulated wealth by some means. The Company's financial situation forced it to restrict the availability of Bills of Exchange, the simplest way of transferring money. The returning British therefore left their capital in India in the hands of the Agency Houses which employed some of it to finance the trade of other European countries: the French, the Danes and increasingly the Americans who were fast becoming the world's carriers. This 'clandestine trade', difficult to measure and track down, benefited other European ports and threatened London's supremacy as the port of entry of Asian produce. The Houses of Agency in India and their branches in Britain campaigned for the right to bring back this trade in their splendid fleets of India-built ships and return home with their holds filled with British manufactures. Far from joining with the shipbuilders of the outports, the Houses of Agency claimed that they should have the monopoly of the trade between Britain and India, weakening their cause. They met the intransigent opposition of the shipping interest representing the Thames builders and the owners of East Indiamen. Twenty years of discord ended in 1813 when the trade between Britain and India was opened to all.

The Government agreed with the Company that the China tea trade required special conditions and continued the Company's privilege for another twenty years. When the Dutch possessions were returned after the Napoleonic wars both the Company and the Government recognized the necessity of possessing a base at a strategic point in the Straits of Malacca. The government had for many years tried to obtain territory to develop as an emporium where British manufactures would be exchanged for eastern produce brought from all round the eastern seas. Singapore, acquired in 1819, met both strategic and commercial needs.

The free port of Singapore virtually nullified the Company's special trading privileges with China, and monopoly had no place in the increasingly free trade climate of Britain in the 1830s. On the renewal of the charter in 1833, the Company withdrew completely from commerce, but continued to administer the British territories in India. In 1857, in the aftermath of the 'Mutiny', the British government assumed full responsibility for its territories in the sub-continent.

* * *

The individual voyages made by successive members of three generations of the Larkins family, from their initial involvement in the Company's maritime service in 1746 until its withdrawal from commerce in 1834, form the basis of what follows.

During this time family members progressed from officers to commanders to managing owners of ships employed by the Company. Their careers therefore admirably illuminate the mass of customs and traditions that constituted the monopoly of provision of the Company's ships and the situation following reform of the system in the late eighteenth century. The voyages reveal the role played by the Company's maritime service in the broader context of the acquisition of a territorial empire in South Asia and dominance of the China trade. Throughout this turbulent final century of the Company's commercial life, members of the Larkins family were at the least witnesses and frequently active contributors to the Company's maritime history.

The chapters are grouped into five parts, each comprising a significant aspect of the careers of the different members.

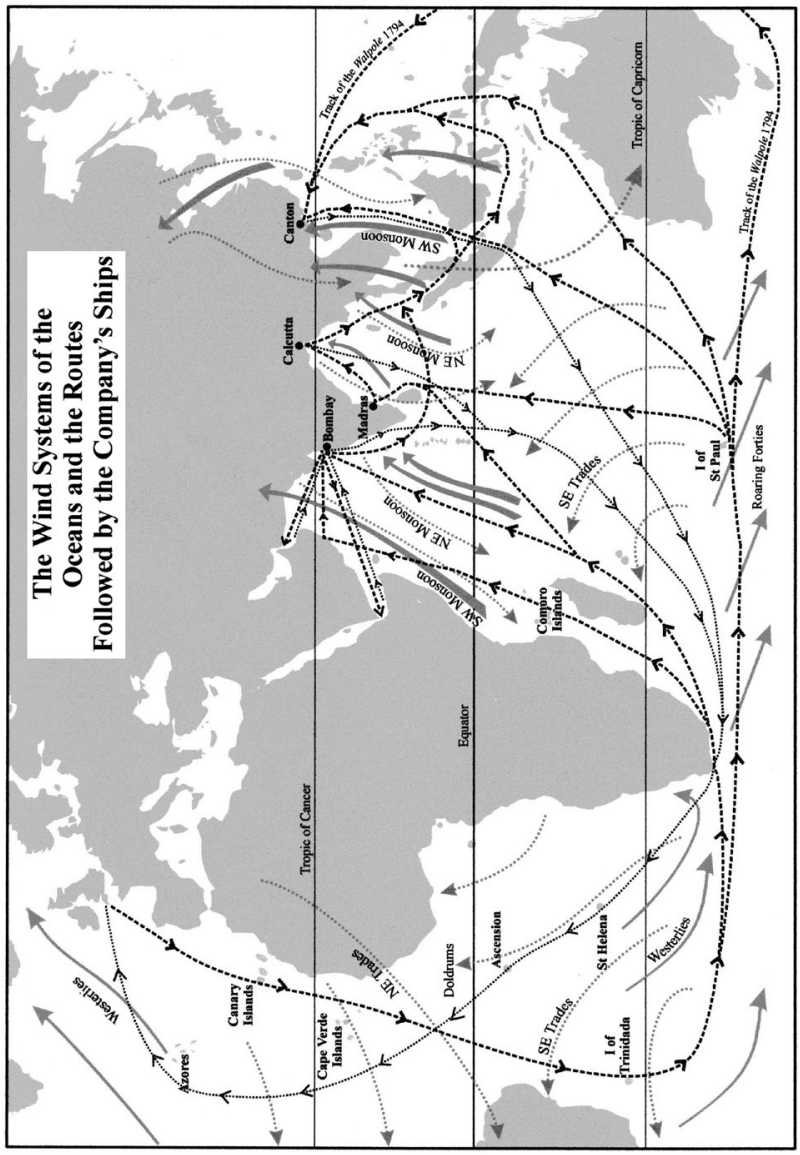
The three chapters making up Part I follow William Larkins's career as he gains experience in the Company's widespread trade during a decade of political and military upheavals in Bengal and South India. Part II concerns William's experiences as commander until his retirement and move into ship ownership. Chapter 4 examines his voyage to Sumatra and to China, where the alien culture and increasingly restrictive conditions of trade were becoming oppressive, but attempts to find alternative sources of valuable Chinese imports failed. Chapter 5 considers how the oversupply of shipping, consequent on the power struggle within the Company following the acquisition of Bengal, put William's command at risk. Chapter 6 explains the effects of the outbreak of war on the supply of ships and describes William's younger son John's active service in the Indian Ocean. Chapters 7, 8 and 9, comprising Part III, examine both John's and the elder son Thomas's careers. Chapter 7 reveals the injurious effects of a war in which the seas were rendered unsafe by the massed naval might of the major European powers. At Canton, John found trade brought to a halt by a particularly serious clash between the British and Chinese cultures, highlighting the inherent dangers of trading with China. Chapters 8 and 9 examine Thomas's management of the family business following William's death at an important juncture: the assumption by government of control over the Indian empire and the eclipse of Indian cotton by China tea as the Company's chief import. The first chapter in Part IV considers

John's management of the business during a period of even greater change following Thomas's untimely death: tendering ships in a competitive market and conducting a distant trade during two decades of war. Chapters 11 and 12 chiefly follow the career of John's nephew Thomas, exemplifying a commander's increasing difficulty in securing the means for a comfortable retirement. Finally, the single chapter comprising Part V concerns John's son, the irascible Captain Thomas Larkins, the youngest and last member of the family employed in the Company's maritime service. His career provides a fitting opportunity to discuss the Company's sophisticated machinery for dealing with those who breached its rules and providing channels of complaint for those who had a grievance. Thomas's career as commander was confined to the China trade during which opium increasingly overtook India cotton as the main earner of silver to pay for the tea in the final years of the Company's commercial life.

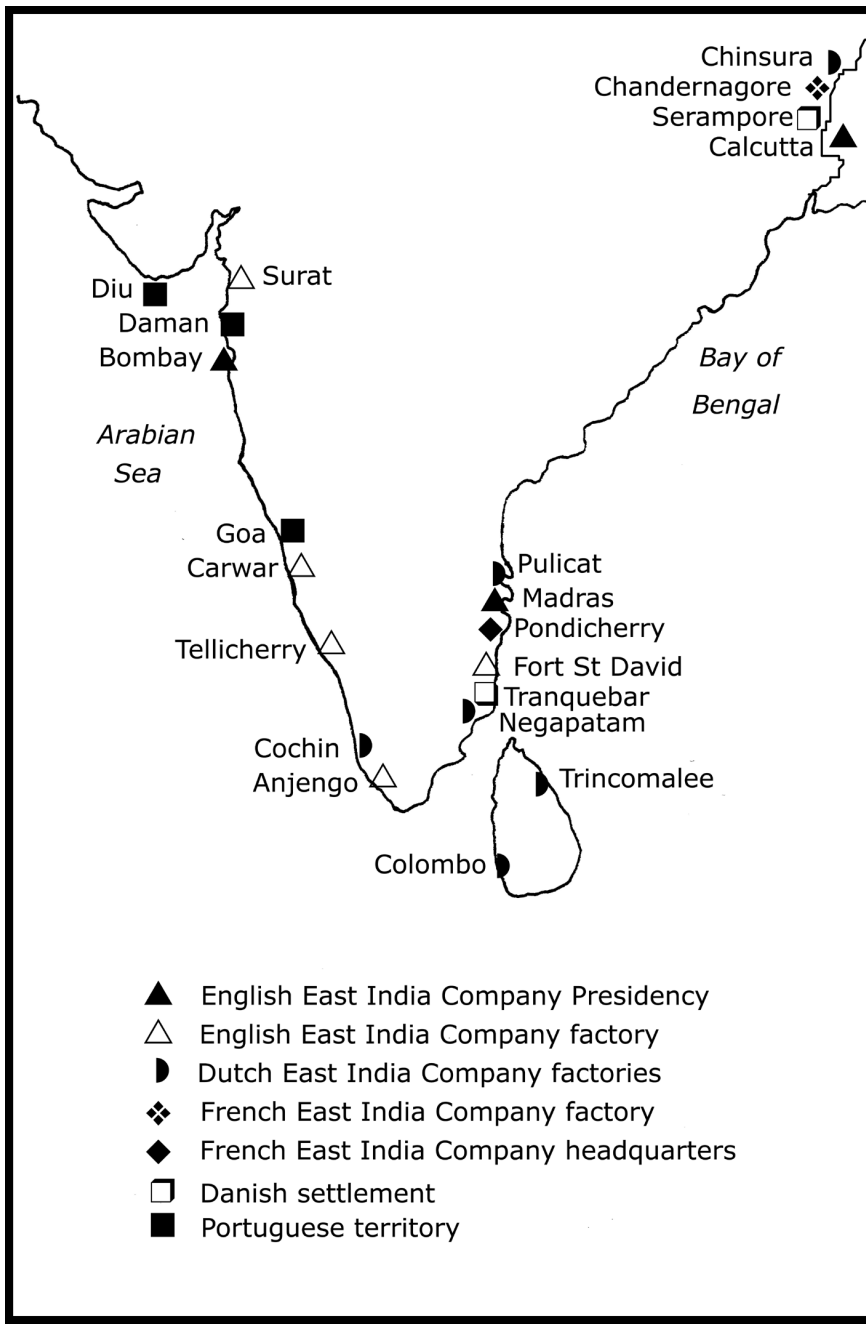
Notes

1 The silver coin known as the *reales de a ocho* or real of eight, later the piece of eight, and throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the Spanish dollar, constituted the medium of international trade in China and most of the east until 1857.
2 In 1493 the Bull of Pope Alexander VI divided the as yet unknown world between Portugal and Spain, the dividing line being 100 leagues west of the Cape Verde Islands. This was changed the following year by the Treaty of Tordesillas between the two rulers to a line 370 leagues west of the Islands.
3 Hakluyt, dedication of vol. 2 of the second edition of *The Principall Navigations*, Maclehose reprint 1903–7, quoted in Sir William Foster, *England's Quest of Eastern Trade* (London, 1933), p. 6, n. 1.
4 The northern ocean was to the north of the central American isthmus, the southern ocean to the south.
5 Foster, *Quest of Eastern Trade*, p. 128.
6 Ibid., pp. 146–7, petition of subscribers to the Privy Council, 25 September 1599.
7 F. W. Madden and D. K .Fieldhouse (eds), *Select Documents on the History of the British Empire and Commonwealth* (London, 1985), vol. 1, pp. 235–6.
8 R. Keale, *The Trades Increase* (London, 1615), p. 32.
9 For an examination of the development of the East India Company and its trade, see two works by K N. Chaudhuri, *The East India Company: The Study of an Early Joint-Stock Company, 1600–1640* (London, 1965), and *The Trading World of Asia and the English East India Company, 1660–1760* (Cambridge, 1978).
10 British Library, Asia, Pacific and Africa Collections (hereafter BL, APAC), Sir William Foster (ed.), *Letters Received by the East India Company from its Servants in the East* (London, 1896–1902), 6 vols, vol. 1, 1603–13, p. 307.
11 Ibid., pp. xxi, 301–2.

12 Ibid., 23 July 1616, vol. 4, p. 321.
13 Bander Abbas, which succeeded Ormuz as the chief port.
14 The Company received a half share of the customs for some years. Foster, *Quest of Eastern Trade,* p. 312.
15 H. H. Dodwell (ed.), *The Cambridge History of India* (Cambridge, 1929), 5 vols, vol. 4, 'The Moghul Period', p. 84.
16 They were: Surat (20), Ahmadebad (3), Tassa (Sind) (5), southwest coast (5), Persian Gulf (6), Fort St George (6), Masulipatam (4), Verasharoon (3), Hooghly (5), Balasore (5), Cazimbazar (4), Patna (4), Macassar (4), Bantam (6), Jambi (4), China (5). This must represent future plans as no foreigner was ever allowed to reside in China. Not until 1700 was a direct trade started with China and permanent residence was never allowed.
17 James Gordon Parker, 'The Directors of the East India Company, 1744–1790', unpublished PhD thesis (University of Edinburgh, 1977), p. 394.
18 BL, APAC, L/MAR/C/1, 'A brief historical sketch of the shipping concerns of the East India Company up to 1796', p. 12.
19 In 1619 Jan Pietersoon Coen conquered Jakarta and founded Batavia as the centre of the VOC's operations in the East.
20 BL, Add. MSS 22185, 'A Brief Account of the Great Oppressions and Injuries which the Managers of the East India Company have acted on the Lives, Liberties, And Estates of their Fellow Subjects …', XI, p. 3.
21 BL, APAC, L/MAR/C/1, 'Brief historical sketch', p. 14.
22 Robert Knox, *An Historical Relation of Ceylon* (Glasgow, 1911), p. 374.
23 William J. Barber, *British Economic Thought and India 1600–1858* (Oxford, 1975), p. 44.
24 Ibid.
25 Actually the winner of an auction to lend money to the impoverished king. See Philip Lawson, *The East India Company* (London, 1993), pp. 55–7.
26 Ibid., pp. 74–5.
27 Anthony Farrington, *Catalogue of East India Company Ships' Journals and Logs 1600–1834* (British Library, 1999).
28 John Keay, *The Honourable Company* (London, 1991), pp. 224–9. In 1717 a United Company delegation succeeded in obtaining the Emperor Farruksiyar's agreement to renew the *farman* granting the Company the privilege of trade without paying internal duties in Bengal.
29 Pondicherry had been French since 1672.
30 Sir John Malcolm, *Life of Robert, Lord Clive: Collected from the Family Papers Communicated by the Earl of Powys* (London, 1836), 3 vols, vol. 2, p. 338, Select Committee to the Directors, 30 September 1763.
31 Passes enabling goods to move around Bengal without payment of internal customs.
32 Number 30: no new ship was to be built until the total tonnage was reduced to 45,000.
33 See Pamela Nightingale, *Trade and Empire in Western India, 1784–1806* (Cambridge, 1970), *passim*, for British expansion in the area.



Map 1: The wind systems of the oceans and the routes followed by the East Indiamen



Map 2: Topographical map showing the principal trading stations belonging to the European East India companies in India

Part I

IN THE COMPANY'S SERVICE

One

A HAZARDOUS VOYAGE

ON 31 JANUARY 1746 William Larkins, a thirty-four-year-old seaman from Dover, entered the headquarters of the United Company of Merchants of England trading to the East Indies in Leadenhall Street. In a committee room 'scarce inferior to anything of the like nature in the City',[1] Thomas Hall, managing owner of several East India ships, introduced William to a few directors who formed the Committee of Shipping.[2] He presented William as the second mate of his ship *Salisbury*, hired by the Company for a voyage to Madras and Bengal. William duly swore the traditional oath not to trade in the goods that the Company traded in or to break bulk of the Company's cargo on the way home.[3] Although from now on he would be employed and paid by Thomas Hall, William would receive the Company's protection. Provided he abided by the Company's rules his feet were now firmly on the ladder leading to a command and a possible fortune from the Company's indulgence of private trade.

Nothing is known of William's early career, but he must have spent many years at sea and acquired a thorough knowledge of navigation to secure an officer's berth in an Indiaman.[4] Influence as well as skill was needed. His marriage the previous year to Christian Pascall, daughter of a banker of Dover and mother of baby Thomas, probably opened the door to investors in ships owned by Thomas Hall, thereby sharing in the valuable patronage. The hostilities between Britain and France favoured him as the navy soaked up skilled navigators from the merchant marine. War always offered the best opportunity for an experienced mariner to walk straight into the post of a sworn officer in the most highly sought after branch of the merchant service.

Emerging from East India House, William probably turned left down Leadenhall Street and Cornhill and into Birchin Lane to the Jerusalem Coffee House, 'the general resort of those who had anything to do with India' and the hub of the Company's shipping.[5] Company regulations, shipping schedules, chart makers' and instrument makers' advertisements were posted up round the walls. With the ships of the season preparing to depart, the bustle was at its height. Commanders and officers shared a last excellent meal with family and friends before embarking for the East. Anxious parents sought reassurance from commanders to whose care they had committed their children for a first voyage as captain's servant. Managing owners made final arrangements with their commanders, urging them to follow their directions rather than use the voyage for their own self-interest.

William found life on board *Salisbury* in stark contrast to the jovial warmth of the Jerusalem. In accordance with her charter party, the contract agreed between her managing owner and the Company, she 'came afloat' out of Stanton and Wells's dock at Rotherhithe. This was where she had been built in 1742 and had returned for maintenance and repairs at the end of her first voyage.[6] On New Year's Day she warped down and moored in mid-stream opposite the Royal Naval Dockyard at Deptford where William joined her.[7] During the following eight weeks he took his turn as commanding officer while a skeleton crew took in stores and provisions for the Company's army and the ships of the Royal Navy in the Bay of Bengal.

In freezing weather towards the end of February, *Salisbury* dropped downriver and moored on her appointed day below Gravesend. Lumpers hoisted aboard the guns and the Company's cargo consigned to Fort St George, the Company's Presidency at Madras. Twenty-five chests of assorted silver dollars comprised the greater part of the value, with some lead, gunpowder and coral.[8] Recruits for the Company's army and some Lascars returning to India at the Company's expense embarked and *Salisbury* prepared to sail in the third week in March. The Company's searcher checked that all the private trade goods were in order, the soldiers were paid and Captain Burrowes went on board to pay all the officers and crew their river pay. Thomas Hall accompanied him and paid the whole ship's company their impress, two months advance wages, and the voyage officially began. After pigs and sheep, milch cows and fodder had been taken aboard, on 26 March the pilot took charge of the ship and nine days later, in company with *Houghton* Indiaman, she arrived in the Downs.

The Downs was the traditional mustering point for all shipping waiting for a northeast wind to carry them to the westward. In wartime, the