

# The Strange Case of Lord Pigot



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By

Sudip Bhattacharya

**CAMBRIDGE  
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P U B L I S H I N G

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by Sudip Bhattacharya

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This book is dedicated to the girl who makes my life meaningful:  
My daughter, Saranya



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The Principal of the college where I teach, Swami Shastrajnananda, encouraged my research and, more importantly, granted me sufficient leave so I could write uninterruptedly.

## FOREWORD

The urgency of our daily lives compels us to categorise everything we come across. When we cannot categorise, we theorise. So when we refer to Job Charnock or Francis Day as ‘empire-builders’, we are hurriedly engaged in casting them into roles they would not have recognised or comprehended. On the other hand, a postcolonialist standpoint would equally render unto them bewildering garbs and motives. My opinion, for what it is worth, rejects both categorisation and theorisation. Instead, I have learned to stroll through history, and to admire its innumerable great and small narratives, without bias. The reason for this is simple. I would not be here, living in this city, writing in this language, or even been alive, had it not been for a long series of events, both nationalist and colonialist. The acceptance of one and rejection of the other would be untruthful. Henry Louis Vivian Derozio was buried in South Park Street cemetery, where also lie Sir William Jones and many others who sought to understand our different cultures. On the other side of the road, in the Lower Circular Road cemetery, lie David Drummond, John Drinkwater Bethune, and Charles Freer Andrews. Across the road once more to the Scottish cemetery, and we come to the graves of the Revd Lal Behari Day, writer, and pastor, and Rai Bahadur Poran Chunder Bose of the Indian Political Department. Across the road again, back to the office of the Lower Circular Road cemetery, where one may meet the great-great-grandson of the Rai Bahadur, Ranajoy Bose, who is the Executive Member of the Christian Burial Board. Ranajoy Bose has done signal but sadly unrecognised service to the city in preserving its heritage. As Mr Bose sits talking on the phone on some complex matter of maintenance and administration, one may see through the window behind him the 100-acre burial ground whose existence and importance to the great confluence of nationalist and colonialist discourses is undeniable.

This aim of this book is to retell the curious tale of George, Lord Pigot, and not to analyse the politics of the Carnatic during last quarter of the eighteenth century. Since Lord Pigot’s story is deeply connected to events in the Carnatic, we shall view its political history from the same perspective as his. Investors in the East India Company’s shares kept as close a watch as they could, upon the effects of its political aspirations on its business. Herein lay the central paradox of the Company’s character in

India: the relation between its role in local politics versus its mandate for trade. By the end of the eighteenth century, one would consider this paradox to have been resolved in favour of the former, purportedly as a guise for the latter. Other, severally interesting, motives were thereafter conjoined to mere territorial gain, such as good governance, and the local need for European education. Lord Pigot's case represents in this sense an episode, comparable to the recall of Warren Hastings, in a period of flux. The Directors of the Company were at that time required to report to their investors, as much as Whitehall had to take note of upheavals in its largest mercantile undertaking. What is one to think of a trading company with its own army and navy, and the right to execute treaties (as a sovereign body) with heads of states? No matter how many times one re-reads the tale of Lord Pigot, this unanswerable anomaly strikes one. Other significant differences with British society and culture in the nineteenth century may be found in the singularly charged atmosphere in Madras during 1777, echoed by violent disagreements in the Governor-General's Council at Calcutta. Such scenes would never again occur. Never again would a Governor-General duel with a Councillor, and never again would his dissenting Councillors imprison their Governor. By the second decade of the nineteenth century, when the time came for the renewal of the United Company's Charter, Whitehall had begun exerting still more its authority in the affairs of the Company, and in administering the Company's possessions in India.

For the sake of the congruency of this work with its sources, I have generally kept to the older, colonial spellings of peoples' and place-names.

## PROLOGUE

Mr George Andrew Ram, ‘the King’s Coroner for Madras and its districts’, received a letter from the Hon Edward Monckton on the afternoon of Sunday 11 May 1777. While this letter did not contain information likely to surprise Mr Ram in his personal capacity, on the professional level it would certainly have spoilt his Sunday afternoon. The letter read, ‘The Right Hon Lord Pigot having died under confinement this morning at the Company’s Garden-House at 11 o’clock, I am to request that you will be so good to hold an inquest upon the body before it is removed’. Even if he had wanted to, Ram could not have remained unaware of the turbulence and uncertainty in local government circles during the last 2 years, following the arrest and imprisonment of the Governor, George Lord Pigot, by order of the majority of the Council. The new council, reconstituted and headed by George Stratton as President without sanction from London, was governing Madras instead. Mr Ram realised the immense seriousness of Monckton’s letter since the demand for an inquest contained in itself the allegation of unnatural death and, by extension, of murder.

The Coroner at once issued his summons, requesting the presence of 20 Englishmen for the selection of the Coroner’s jury. Their names were George Smith, Andrew Ross, George Baker, Thomas Powney, Thomas Pelling, John De Fries, Robert Ewing, George Taswell, Alexander Cuthbert, Robert Farquhar, William Parsons, Quintin Crauford, John Turing, Andrew Majendie, George Savage, Edward John Holland, George Proctor, Hall Plumer, William Sedgley, William Ross, and Kenelm Digby.

The wording of his letter to them is significant: ‘Gentlemen, I request your attendance to hold an Inquest on the body of George, Lord Pigot, deceased, under confinement at the Company’s Garden-House; for which I beg the favour of you to meet me at the said Garden-House, at 3 o’clock in the Afternoon’. All knew Lord Pigot had been in confinement. Undoubtedly, Ram wanted it to be particularly noted, for purposes of record, in anticipation of a verdict antagonistic to the President and Council, even though they had no authority over the Coroner. Mr Ram sent a similar summons to the three doctors in Madras, Pasley, Anderson, and Mallet. Dr Gilbert Pasley had attended Lord Pigot during his illness, and his presence was vital.

The Coroner reached the Garden-House, situated about a mile away from Fort St George, a little before 3 pm, and found there the Hon Edward Monckton, who was Lord Pigot's son-in-law, having married his daughter Sophy, and Claud Russel and John Maxwell Stone, councillors who were supporters of Lord Pigot, and Dr Pasley. Those called for jury selection soon arrived, as did the other doctors. The Coroner then proceeded with his work, swearing in the first 12 persons on his list as jurors. George Smith, whose name was first on the list, was appointed Foreman of the jury. At half past 3 Ram swore in the doctors, and asked Dr Pasley whether he felt from his inspection of Lord Pigot's body that dissection would help the doctors understand 'to a certainty' the cause of his demise. Pasley replied that he understood the jury wished to know the cause of his Lordship's death but the disease due to which death had occurred, could not be made evident to them through post-mortem dissection. The Coroner put the same question to Anderson, the surgeon, and his reply was the same, with the additional information that, should the jury decide upon a post-mortem dissection, he had brought the necessary surgical instruments for an autopsy. The jury felt that if the majority of the medical men present thought that dissection of the corpse would yield no definite information about the disease that had caused death, there was no need for it.

Since Lord Pigot's family wanted his burial that evening, the Coroner gave permission for the body to be removed. The jury was ordered to meet at 9 am the following day at the home of the Foreman, George Smith.

One can imagine the pall of tension that descended on Madras that evening, and the rumours, which must have been doing the rounds, recounted in low voices by Europeans and locals: Monckton had refused a formal military funeral for Lord Pigot, offered by the president, George Stratton; Stratton had decided to override this refusal and issue necessary orders, but had later relented to the family's wishes. In any case, the governor, whose administration had been usurped, had died in confinement. There were loud whispers that he had been killed, since it was only a short while ago that William Randall, an English officer holding a commission in the Nawab of Arcot's army, and posted as aide-de-camp to the Nawab's younger son, Amir-ul-Umra, had created a sensation by swearing before John Turing, the Mayor of Madras, that he had been offered a huge bribe to help assassinate Lord Pigot. Writing from Trichinopoly as early as 1768, Christian Friedrich Schwartz, the missionary, had noted that the Nawab's younger son was 'inclined to cruelty'. Rumours flew about Madras, from the Nawab's palace at Chepauk, to Fort St George. Philip Dormer Stanhope wrote that these

rumours had been ‘industriously circulated’ and ‘obscure hints artfully thrown out’ that the ‘assassins’ would soon be apprehended.

## CHAPTER ONE

### MADRASPATAM, 1640-1659

The oldest English settlement on the Coromandel Coast was at Masulipatam, set up during August – September 1611. Like the later settlements, it was called a ‘factory’ although it consisted of little more than some warehouses, and offices and residences, for the ‘factors’ and their attendants and guards. Masulipatam was the largest port in the region, but the English probably decided to move because they felt that a port further south would provide a more convenient staging point for onward connection to Bengal and Java, and also greater opportunity for inland trade. The climate was another aspect, since Masulipatam and its surrounding areas were (and are) prone to cyclonic storms. To this was added the turbulent politics of the kingdom of Golconda, which held Masulipatam, and whose ruler had permitted the English to trade from that port. The English had explored the feasibility of a change by shifting to Armagaum, but this had been very unsuccessful. Clearly, the answer was that they would have to find, establish, and operate from their ‘own’ port. To this end, the coast further south had been discreetly surveyed around 1630.

Francis Day, a member of the council at Masulipatam, and chief of the Armagaum factory, negotiated the purchase, from Damarla Aiyappa Naik of Poonamallee, of a piece of land 6 miles long and 1 mile broad, along the coast, about 3 miles from the Portuguese settlement of San Thome. J Talboys Wheeler, in *Madras in the Olden Time* (1861), tells us that this piece of land ‘possessed one crowning advantage’: there was a small island, separated from the mainland by a river. This was ideal for fortification. Eventually, this island, 400 yards long and 100 wide, became Fort St George, where only Europeans were allowed. The native or ‘Black’ town (the civilian European part was named Georgetown) was settled on the mainland. One does not know why the Portuguese did not object. However, they had been in India for over 150 years already, and probably did not mind another European settlement in the immediate vicinity. The yearly rent for Madraspatam agreed to by Day was £600 a year. After considerable discussions within and among the councils and

committees at Masulipatam, Armagaum, Surat, and London, the dismantling of the settlement at Armagaum was ordered, and the move to Madraspatam sanctioned.

The English sailed from Armagaum in two ships, the *Eagle* and the *Unity*, reaching Madras on Monday, 20 February 1640, the same date on which, back in England, the Short Parliament was summoned. The first to land there were Andrew Cogan, and Francis Day, accompanied by one or two more factors, three or four Writers, a gunner, a surgeon, and a garrison of 25 British soldiers, commanded by a lieutenant and a sergeant, a certain number of English blacksmiths, carpenters, and coopers, and a small staff of English servants as attendants and kitchen staff. Political division in England was rapidly heading towards civil war, even as Madraspatam was being settled.

Andrew Cogan's own career, like those of most of his fellows, had its dark phases. His great-grandfather had been Mayor of Bristol, and his family was permitted to display the arms of an esquire. After joining the service of the East India Company in 1615, Cogan served in the factories at Bantam and Macassar, and made considerable money from private trade. The Company did not charge him for this because he then proceeded to marry the daughter of Sir Hugh Hammersley, a Director of the East India Company, and a former Lord Mayor of London. Instead, he was sent to Surat as a member of the council in 1638. From Surat, he was ordered to Masulipatam, where he became second in council. A letter to the Company, dated 5 September 1639, signed by Thomas Ivie (Agent), Andrew Cogan, Francis Day, Thomas Morris, and Thomas Winter, asking for permission to reconnoitre the coast for a possible settlement at Madraspatam, gives us the names of the English factors then present on the Coromandel Coast.

Fort St George was formally proclaimed on 23 April 1642. By 1672, Fort St George had 50 houses along 12 streets, with a large, three-storied, quarter for the Governor, which also housed some councillors as well as the Council's meeting room in an upper-storey. These houses were described around 1674 as 'fine mansions' of the same height as the fort's battlements. Their terraced walks, porticoes, and fine rows of trees were also noted, as was the cleanliness of the streets. However this may have been reported, the original fort, which lasted until 1714, does not seem to have been of very large dimension, since Charles Lockyer's report of 1711 informs us that the fort was 100 yards wide and 108 yards long. The council met every Monday and Tuesday at 8 am to transact business. The members included the Governor, the Book-keeper, the Warehouse-keeper, and the Customer (whose work was to collect customs and taxes, and



whose responsibilities were later divided between the Land and Sea Customers). There was also a Secretary, whose work was to record all proceedings of the council in a diary, and to dispatch a copy of this, with a covering letter of summation, to London, each year. The usual Company hierarchy was followed. While the Governor was paid £300 a year, the Book-keeper got £100, the Warehouse-keeper £70, and the Land and Sea Customers £50. Next came 6 Senior Merchants, who got £40; 2 Junior Merchants, at £30 annually, followed by 5 Factors at £15 per annum, then some Writers, required to live on £10 a year and, finally, the Apprentices, very young men, mere adolescents, who were paid £5 a year. Two Chaplains looked after matters spiritual on a salary of £100 a year each, while the Schoolmaster imparted education on £50 annually to English children, and also to Portuguese and native ones, provided they received instruction in Christianity as well. The Surgeon got £36 annually. There were also two Essay-masters, who were paid £120 a year, while the Judge got only £100. There seems to have been a garrison of 250 European officers, non-commissioned officers, and soldiers, and 20 experienced gunners, in 1711.

Governance was very difficult. Nearly all major decisions had to be referred to the next higher body, the Governor and Council at Bantam or Surat. The arrival of a ship from home carrying clarifications relative to the same issues automatically meant the supersession of orders received from Bantam or Surat. This caused administrative confusion. Waiting for directives from London caused loss of time and money. While the Agent (later Governor) had the privilege of occupying the great three-storied residence to which he was entitled, he was also required to keep a liberal table at which Merchants, Factors, and Writers, would dine. On the other hand, he was an important personage, given to considerable pomp and ceremony later in the Company's history. For Andrew Cogan and Francis Day, it was an extremely trying period, because the civil war was about to begin in England, and insecurity clouded the minds of traders and shareholders alike. The Treasury did not meet the Company's liabilities, and in the meanwhile, civil war broke out in August 1642. Francis Day, at any rate, was not above suspicion. The minutes of the Court of Committees in London on 10 June 1640 record the receipt and reading of a letter from Andrew Coggan (*sic*) stating 'that Francis Day is accused of being a great private trader'.

Experienced Senior Merchants like Day, who had thus far survived, and could be expected to survive the rigours of further voyages, were rare. Hence, Francis Day underwrote by £500 the next major trading expedition, the First General Voyage, and when asked by the Committee in London

what salary he expected for undertaking this voyage, for the round trip, he suggested £200 a year, and permission to carry out private trade to the value of an additional £100. The minutes say that Day was asked to withdraw, while the Committees discussed this regrettable practice among the factors of private trade. The Committees unanimously resolved that 'henceforth no factor shall be permitted any private trade either in the outward or homeward voyage or when in the Indies'. Realising that increased compensation for greater trading experience would remove corruption, the Committees offered Day unusually favourable terms. They would pay him a yearly salary of £400, if the voyage were to be concluded in 18 or 20 months. If it took longer than 2 years, they would pay him £200 a year from the expiration of 24 months, provided he indulged in no private trade. Should he be discovered doing this, he would forfeit his salary as well as the profits accruing to him from his investment of £500. This Day agreed to with alacrity.

The ship *Hopewell* was chosen for the voyage, and Andrew Trumball as her captain. She was to carry stock worth £15000 for quick trade. Moreover, Day took with him his son, also named Francis, as writer and accountant, on a salary of 20 shillings a month, again standing security that the junior Day would not engage in private trade. Trumball was placed under similar strictures against private trading, even though he had been allowed to carry goods worth £100 for this purpose by the Committees. *Hopewell* sailed on 31 December 1641. Glyn Barlow presents us with an imaginative description of Francis Day: 'His garb is that of a substantial merchant in the days of King Charles I ... He wears a purple doublet and hose, a broad white collar edged with lace, and a gracefully short, black velvet, cloak. Curly hair falls beneath his broad-brimmed black hat.... He is in every way a fitting representative of the Honourable Company'. James Mill, in the first volume of his monumental work, *The History of British India* (1840), however, raises several pertinent questions as to who the members of these Committees might have been, unless they were directors of stock, and again, if they were, what means of representation did they exercise, and how? At any rate, the Committees obviously exercised great power. The success of this voyage was crucial to the Company, since it was deep in debt. The King had bought its entire stock of pepper, 607,522 pounds of it, for a total sum of just over £63,000. Charles I then sold this pepper in the market at a cost lower than the purchase price, and made £50,000 in ready money, which answered his immediate needs. Nevertheless, in doing this, the King contracted the Pepper Debt. To repay the Company, he had the Farmers of the Customs and Lord Cottington issue 4 bonds worth £14,000 each, and

one worth £7,283. One bond was to be repaid every 6 months. The details of this deal were not made public, which in effect meant that those, who had invested in pepper, were cheated. In the event, only one bond was honoured, and the cash-strapped Company had issued a call for subscriptions to the Fourth Joint Stock. This realised only a small sum. Then the Company issued another subscription, this time for the First General Voyage. The tale of the Pepper Debt must end, at least so far as this book is concerned, with the Company's Petition to the House of Commons in 1642, under the head of 'Arrears of the Pepper Debt.' The following year Parliament wrote to the King suggesting he sell some of his houses and land to repay the debt. Civil war soon became unavoidable due to the King's Pepper Debt.

The bane of the Company had always been private trading. This would continue to ail until it culminated in emotions so strong as to lead to the overthrow of governors and, still later, to incarceration, and even allegations of homicide. Trumball in all probability was a disciplinarian, for a good ship's captain then had to be as fine a mariner as a martinet. It was his business to sail the ship to trading ports and bring back goods and money. Francis Day was a merchant, and his primary aim was to trade, chiefly for the Company and a little more on the side for himself and, secondarily, to survive to return home a rich man. Ideally, Trumball and Day should have been working in tandem, and thereby earning profits for their cash-starved Company. Trumball's 'Declaration of Some Passages and Observations', made to the Company on 18 September 1644, demonstrates why this never happened.

The *Hopewell*, having reached Madraspatam around 5 July 1642, anchored there for 15 days, and then sailed to Masulipatam. At Masulipatam, after some of the cargo had been dropped off, Day had a load of cloves taken on by way of private speculation. The ship then reached Balasore, where some more of the Company's cargo and the cloves, were unloaded. Trumball's intention, in keeping with his instructions, was to sail next to Bantam, and thence to Persia and home. Day disagreed, and the ship, having been at Balasore for 3 and a half months at the cost of £180 per month, sailed again for Masulipatam and Persia. This time there were passengers on board, taken against Trumball's consent. 16 passengers were for Masulipatam at 15 rupees per head, and 35 for Persia, at 40 rupees per head. The main issue lay elsewhere. Day overruled Trumball and took on private freight: 76 bales of cloth for 15 rupees per *maund* of 64 lb, 355 bales of sugar at 7 rupees per *maund* of 128 lb, and 42 bales of calico on the personal account of Day and some fellow merchants, at 15 rupees per *maund*. Moreover, Day so filled the

hold with ‘hampers’ meant as ‘gifts’ for Persians that 60 bales of the Company’s cargo of cinnamon had to be left behind. Still further, the freight money amounted to 17,854 rupees, of which Day paid only 6,345 rupees into the Company’s account. To this must be added the fact that Day charged 1,400 rupees for provisioning the ship while she was at anchor at Balasore. Trumball adamantly stated in his Declaration that anyone who knew Balasore would realise that the ship could have been fully provisioned there at 60 rupees a month. The Company, according to Trumball’s version, benefited with only 700 bales of sugar and 34 of calico being carried on its account, in its own ship.

Masulipatam was reached on 8 December 1642, and along with 22 bales of cloth and 100 of sugar for the Company, the ship took on 76 bales of calico for Day, who now had 118 bales of calico for private trading. From Masulipatam the *Hopewell* sailed to Madraspatam, where 11 bales of cloth and 39 of cinnamon were loaded for the Company. Sailing resumed on 24 December 1642, the ship arriving at Gombroon (present-day Bandar-Abbas) in March 1643. Here Day handed over the Company’s cargo to the local agent, and at once hired a house where he sat all day dealing with brokers and selling his own bales of calico. To help him, Trumball complained, Day employed one of the ship’s mates, Thomas Clarke, the purser, and some seamen, so that the captain was left short-handed. The strangest incident recorded by Trumball is the murderous attack made upon him by Day because Trumball had insisted on checking the weight of the calico being carried out by the Persians in order to ensure that the Company was not cheated. Trumball says he was followed and set upon by Day, while out walking alone to a fort beyond the town, and he had only a rattan stick to defend himself with.

The *Hopewell* left Gombroon on 13 April 1643, made a brief stopover at Dabhol on 1 May, and then sailed on to Madraspatam. Day was miffed because Trumball had refused to stay longer at Dabhol. At any rate, they had taken freight and 95 passengers for Dabhol, and Day, as usual, per Trumball’s account, again short-charged the Company. Matters must have been coming to a head. Day received a tip that betel-nut was available at Tranquebar, and the ship would have been invaluable for some more private trading. Knowing that Trumball would have been absolutely right in refusing this voyage, since it had nothing to do with the Company, Day seems to have conspired to have Trumball removed from command following complaints made to the chief, Andrew Cogan, and his council, by officers and sailors from the *Hopewell*. These complaints addressed Trumball’s harshness and haste in handing out punishment. Cogan, probably preferring to disbelieve Trumball, ordered his removal. The

ship's command was handed over to Francis Day, with permission to sail to Tranquebar and return within a month. Day sailed away in the *Hopewell*, and seems to have made the best of it. He returned with 30 bales of calico for the Company and 400 of betel-nut for himself, in addition to more loads of betel-nut privately conveyed aboard smaller vessels on his account as well. Trumball was then reinstated as captain, the ship having served its purpose. Trumball's 'Declaration' continues in this way, listing still more means of private trade, arriving lastly upon the issue of moral laxity. He names three Merchants, Henry Greenhill, Thomas Winter, and Thomas Penniston, who, in connivance with Francis Day, 'are all sworn brothers; and when they perceive they may benefit themselves in any project, they pass an oath one to another to prosecute their intendments and not dissent one from another until their ends be obtained'. They were the richest men around, with enough cash to invest in huge amounts of private trade, from which they derived profits of at least 50 per cent. When ships arrived to buy calico, Trumball narrates that these men told all weavers and brokers living within 16 miles of Madraspatam, not to sell below the price settled by the tetrarch, and in this way, they cheated both the Company and the locals. Finally, they were also moneylenders, using this as a means for obtaining property.

Andrew Cogan was not a member of this tetrarch, and he chose to leave Madraspatam at this point, handing over charge to Francis Day on 27 August 1643. He sailed to Bantam on the *Hopewell* in the company of Trumball. From there Cogan went to England, where he arrived towards the end of the same year. At home, Cogan faced the charge of having needlessly incurred costs on the establishment of the new fort and factory at Madraspatam. The first charge which Cogan addressed, in his written statement dated 13 January 1645, was 'To answer for the building of the Fort St George, the charge whereof hath cost from First March 1639 to the 30<sup>th</sup> June 1643 the sum of pagodas new 9250'. Following a long inquiry, both he and Francis Day were cleared of the charge. The committee conducting the inquiry concluded in its report dated 13 May 1645 that it had been a 'very indiscreet action to go about building such a Fort when the Company's stock was so small, yet if ever the Company have a plentiful stock, it may be very commodious and advantageous for them; ... and if it should not prove so advantageous for the Company hereafter, it can be charged upon no man more justly than on Mr Day: and this Committee were jointly of opinion to clear Mr Cogan of this charge'. Having thus adroitly used his elevated connections, and passed on all financial liability for Fort St George to Francis Day, Andrew Cogan decided to try again for further gains from his trading experience. His offer

for an investment of £3000 in stock was refused. Thereafter Cogan purchased an estate and planned to settle down to a well-deserved retirement. The times, however, being most troubled, he was soon drawn like all persons then living in England, into the great political maelstrom. Despite being fined by a Parliamentary Committee, Cogan continued to try living quietly upon his estate in Greenwich until 1648. In July 1648, Cogan joined the Royalist force under the command of the Earl of Norwich, which set out to occupy London. Comprehensively defeated by the Roundheads, the survivors of Norwich's command, including Cogan, crossed the English Channel. In June 1650, Andrew Cogan was named an enemy of Parliament, and his property was sequestered. Cogan's worth may be understood from his having lost a sum of more than £34,000 in the Royalist cause. Charles II raised him for his loyalty to a baronetcy while in exile. Sir Andrew Cogan returned home with the Restoration, but died within the year.

Cogan's resignation and departure thrust upon Day the responsibility of the Fort. Day realised that this would keep him from the kind of free-wheeling 'trade' he had been indulging in thus far, and so he too sent in his resignation on 30 August 1643, being relieved on 4 August 1644 by Thomas Ivie. He might have been afraid of being caught out. Governor Cartwright and his council, writing to the Company on 9 December 1643, note the existence of debts on the Coromandel Coast, for which there seem to be no explanations, the factors there being 'in obscurity, being destitute of a light to direct them, notwithstanding they have Day there all day long'. Immediately after this sideswipe, the letter seems to recant hastily, its writers clearly unwilling to be drawn into controversies, which would not bear scrutiny: 'And here we suppose it's not amiss to let your Worships understand that Mr Francis Day was the first projector and contriver of that fort or castle in Madraspatam.'

By 1643, the Company was in need of goods to sell in the home market, while being able to offer little in return, due to the uncertainties contingent upon the civil war then ensuing. The Coromandel Coast was particularly looked to for the supply of goods.

However, Thomas Ivie's Agency need not detain us, even though it passed through considerable travails including one of the worst famines of the time, and the conquest of the Carnatic by the Nawab of Golconda. Ivie wisely sided with the Nawab, with the obvious result that the change in rulers made no difference to the fort, factory, and its people. Ivie resigned, and handed over charge to Henry Greenhill on 23 September 1648. Greenhill's first administration ran for 4 years, until, in 1652, Fort St

George became the Company's centre in the region. Aaron Baker took over governance as President of the Council from 1 September 1652.

Aaron Baker's presidency was fraught with disagreements in council, which had as their source the same affliction as before, private trade. Considering the geographical distance between Britain and the furthest trading posts of her East India Company, one wonders that the system worked at all. One is also amazed at the way in which the hierarchy was sustained, orders given and taken, merchants appointed and dismissed, goods bought and sold. Given the scale of business, and the fact that private speculation was possible, provided no one reported it and most had shares in it, the Company, in trying to stop it, might have only been fighting its own shadow. Trumball, in his 'Declaration,' said that he had once at a moment of familiarity, asked Francis Day what he thought of private trade: 'he said to me at one time he would private trade so deep that he would neither value his wages nor his stock that he put in with the company ....' Francis Day was a man of uncommon ability; his purported reply to Trumball, however, sums up the general attitude of the East India trader, whose chief aim was to get rich, helping the Company along wherever possible, without overly compromising in that primary aim. Nonetheless, it would be wrong to accuse only the East India trader of the urge to accrue as much personal wealth as possible in the shortest time. The establishment of Madraspatnam also brought prosperity to local inhabitants. While the English, as traders, recognised and sustained the old administrative, legal, and functional systems as they had found them, such as the *Adhikari* or Headman. Even during the most serious stages of the Right-Hand Caste versus the Left-Hand Caste dissension at Madras in 1652, Baker had not interfered other than to identify localities to which these castes were to confine themselves against serious penalty for any violation. That this demarcation had not had the desired effect was not Baker's fault. The English did not have enough troops to defend their fort, which was still in need of completion. They would not be able to quell caste riots. In any case, European prosperity, whether through private or Company trade, was filtering down to the local population but some people were siphoning off more than others were, and this began another problem.

The Company employed locals in two capacities: as Company Merchants, who purchased and sold and otherwise interacted with their countrymen by contract on behalf of the Company, and the *Dubashes*, who performed similar tasks, but for the private trading carried on by most Europeans. The Company Merchants reported to a Chief Merchant, who was selected from among them. The Company Merchants and the

*dubashes* essentially performed the same task, that of brokerage, the only difference being that the one was officially sanctioned, and the other not.

Sometime around 1647-48, Seshadri Nayak, who from the time of the establishment of the fort, had worked as Company Merchant, and his colleague, Koneri Chetty, were replaced by Venkatapathi, the Brahmin who had accompanied Walter Littleton on his journey to meet Nawab Mir Jumla of Golconda, then encamped at Gandikotta. Around the same time, Venkatapathi's brother, Kanappa, succeeded to the post of governor and magistrate of the town, in keeping with the ancient practice of hereditary succession. Seshadri and Koneri felt themselves fallen out of favour, as they indeed were. Thomas Ivie's departure and Greenhill's Agency changed nothing for them. Venkatapathi was a boastful man, and his power, combined with the magisterial office of his brother, worsened matters, wrote C S Srinivasachari, in his *History of the City of Madras* (1939). Greenhill did not assist Venkatapathi and Kanappa in driving away Seshadri and Koneri, and those Company Merchants who had sided with them. The ire of the disaffected Brahmin brothers was now directed at Greenhill, and upon Aaron Baker's arrival, they presented declarations claiming malfeasance on the part of Greenhill. He had, they said, compelled the Company Merchants to take up goods obtained through private trade rather than Company merchandise, at excessive prices, for sale. This was a very serious accusation. Baker took it up at once, but not much could be done until Greenhill, who had been away at another post, had returned. On being questioned, Greenhill accused Baker of having taken sides against him by recognising the accusations of Venkatapathi and Kanappa. A conflict resulted, with the councillors taking sides, until Baker preposterously concluded that he was about to be deposed. This led him to have his opponents, Agent Henry Greenhill, and the Merchant John Leigh, arrested and imprisoned in melodramatic fashion on 4 April 1654 for a conspiracy of which there was no evidence. They were taken after sunset, from the wedding festivities of a soldier of the garrison. However, as there was no proof against them, they were soon released.

This event, like that between Trumball and Day, shows once more the ugliness of blatant greed. There was easy money to be made at Madraspatam, and everyone wanted to, by the easiest way possible, that is, by cheating the Company. Greed is not unique, nor were these merchants and their adherents extraordinary in being greedy. Their pay was poor, and if they had families, so much the worse, since the Company's gratuity was nominal and limited. Seshadri and Koneri wanted money as much as Venkatapathi and Kanappa did. The sale at high prices of goods obtained through private trade by European merchants through their local contacts



was usual. Trumball had written about the 'group of four' including Greenhill, who were engaged in this. Hence, there was enough mud to cover all concerned.

Another rather vile outcome of this mud-slinging was the accusation that because Seshadri and Koneri belonged to the Right-Hand and Left-Hand castes respectively, and their opponents were Brahmins, the aim of the brothers was to foment rioting. This was made murkier by Greenhill's implication of the Dutch and the Nawab in a complicated conspiracy theory centring on trade at Madraspatam that is hard to unravel even today. Add to this the suppressed mutual hatred between Puritans like Leigh and members of the council like John Chambers and Christopher Yardley, whom the former accused of cheating the Company. Leigh had particularly disliked Captain James Martin, of the garrison, whom he had accused since 1653 of being a Royalist. Martin died on 27 June 1654 at Madraspatam, following which Leigh's anger turned against Baker. While it is often claimed that the Company's administrators did not allow home politics to interfere with their judgment, one fails to see how this could have been implemented, even allowing for the fact that news was often very late in reaching these trading outposts. Sir Andrew Cogan was a Royalist, and lived abroad until the Restoration, and as will be seen later, in the case of Sir Edward Winter, political inclination often coloured reasoning completely. Sadly, John Leigh died by drowning on 24 July 1656 at Masulipatam, when the boat on which he was going out to board the ship *Mayflower* for England, suddenly capsized.

As one goes through the numerous letters couched in the spelling and syntax of an age long gone that these persons wrote to each other, one is astounded at their propensity for accusing each other, at implicating without basis third parties, and of moving from resentment to fawning within the space of a few paragraphs. Amidst all this, the Brahmin brothers submitted to Aaron Baker a list of 118 new accusations against Henry Greenhill. Baker passed on the list to Greenhill on 2 December 1654, and he, as amazingly, replied to each article on the list. For merchants and factors serving at trading posts abroad, the excessively closed society in which they lived was a problem. The end of council meetings did not mean dispersal to means to relax the mind. Instead they met again for meals, where the same official matters were again discussed, often more vigorously, with arguments and anger fuelled by alcohol. Sobriety brought with it repentance, and the swing from rage to penitence was common, but it took a toll on those who held positions of responsibility. Fortunately, for Aaron Baker, relief came soon and he sailed for England on 20 January 1655, having passed on command to Henry Greenhill. Baker sailed from

Madras, having suffered personal loss sadly typical of the time. He left his first wife, Elizabeth, buried in Bantam. Later Baker married Anne Cobham, and settled on an estate at Bowhay, Exminster. He died in 1683, aged 73.

Greenhill, enjoying his second administration, was not destined to be a President for long. The Company sent out its Commissioners to Madraspatam, with orders to reduce it from the status of a Presidency to an Agency, subordinated to Surat, with effect from December 1655. This reorganisation could have been the result of domestic financial problems, which had become serious in the final years of the Commonwealth. In a Petition to Cromwell in 1656, the Company argued desperately for exclusive trading rights. Free competition by 'licensed' traders had reduced the prices of Indian goods by 50 per cent, and reduced that of English merchandise by the same amount. However, the demotion of Madras could also have been the consequence of the Company's recognition that Madraspatam was riddled with corruption, and unsuited to the decorum of a Presidency. The other side of this was the weakening of the defences of Madras. The garrison had been reduced, and the Europeans had to depend on Portuguese and native troops. Nevertheless, the fort itself, with its bastions and artillery, proved its worth when the Nawab of Golconda blockaded Madras for 7 months in 1657. The following April there was an agreement, whereby the English regained the rights to their fort and town in lieu of an annual levy. In a sense the honours were even, since the previous year the Nawab's ship had been seized at Madras. In any case, all political dealings henceforth would be with the Nawab of the Carnatic, who drew his authenticity from the last great Mughal Emperor, Aurangzeb. However, Madras was no longer as it had been in Francis Day's or even Aaron Baker's time. The dire financial straits of the Company at home forced merchants to write to the Directors for permission to borrow money on the English market at 4 per cent interest rather than have to pay 8 or 9 per cent in India. Nonetheless, the Directors managed to send 5 ships with bullion to India, one of which carried £15,500 for Madras.

Agent Henry Greenhill died of illness on 4 January 1659 at Madras, his final days possibly hastened by the knowledge that the fiscal situation of the Company had worsened. His passing marked the end of the first era of the settlement, which had come a long way since 1640. Greenhill's problems with the Brahmin brothers remained unresolved at the time of his death. Thomas Chambers succeeded him.

In England, the political situation resolved itself within a year. The monarchy restored, and the Royalists were once more in favour. One

would like to see this as a period of gaiety, of the abundance of colours and entertainment among the people, who were free of the strictures of Puritanism. The Company could look forward to healthy trading in cloth and spices, coffee and chocolate, now that social life had revived and relapsed into typical dissolution. J Talboys Wheeler writes that 'The reign of the Puritans – sad coloured gentlemen and pinched up sombre ladies – was gone at a bound'. The recovery of the Company's finances would take some time, since the Restoration did not fill the Treasury. James Mill writes that there is no account of the Company's equipments for 1659-60, and 1660-61. He inferred that their advances to India must have been small. However, things picked up to the extent that by January 1661 bullion had again been sent to Fort St George, which then proceeded to mint its own coins. The King, Charles II, would continue to tussle with Parliament for royal prerogatives. Dissidents would deliberately loose the spectre of a Catholic revival in England. This, in turn, would result in another upheaval before the century turned. The Company itself would undergo changes in its mandate at the same time. However, we anticipate. Chambers' Agency was poised on the brink of historic and tumultuous times in Britain and India: the Restoration, the long rule of Aurangzeb, and the rise of Maratha power under Shivaji.

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE CASE OF SIR EDWARD WINTER

Edward Winter, like his elder brother Thomas, was a merchant with long experience of service in India. Their younger brother, Francis, also became a factor. Thomas Winter died in Fulham in 1681, aged 66. The Winters were an ancient family who had distinguished themselves in the service of Elizabeth I. Thomas's father, Sir John, was a staunch Royalist, and his estate confiscated by order of Parliament in 1648. Thomas restored the family's fortune through his long service and private trading in the Company's employ, since he had been one of the infamous tetrarch named by Andrew Trumbull.

The first reference about Edward occurs in 1644, when he is named as one of the Writers at Pettipoolee (Peddapalli, or Nizampatam), in a report dated 8 September of that year, by Thomas Ivie to London. Some time later, he moved to the small factory at Versashroone (Viravasaram). Winter remained in charge of this outpost until 1655, when the reduction of Madras from Presidency to Agency required him to take over Masulipatam. There trouble soon arose when the Nawab, Mir Jumla's, ship, which had been seized at Madras and subsequently released following the treaty, was once more taken, this time by Edward Winter. Despite being ordered to return the ship, he disobeyed, and was recalled to England in 1660 to explain his actions, for, like the others, he too seemed to have engaged in private trade. We come across a Court of Committees report dated 15 August 1660, accepting a bill of exchange from Fort St George, for £4,856, 'payable at two months' sight' to Edward Winter, on Thomas' undertaking that 'all the goods now returned for his said brother shall remain in the Company's custody until any difference that may arise shall be settled'.

For a politically minded person, this was the right time to be in England, and to declare one's fealty to the monarch. Edward Winter must have done so. It is also possible that Edward Winter had no desire to go back to India, as he had already put together enough money. We must note that with the ascent of Charles II, the Company presented its Charter for renewal. This was done on 3 April 1661. We may presume that Edward

Winter was then at the centre of matters. In any case, he was knighted in February 1662.

Thomas Chambers' Agency seems to have been coloured by an older style of functioning, which became increasingly redundant, whereby the Agent alone took all or most decisions. This soon caused serious problems, provoking a thundering rebuke from President Andrews and his Council at Surat on 15 December 1661: 'You say that you have given us timely notice. We ask where you had the Authority to give us timely notice to be obedient to your orders. You might learn better manners, but that a horse that never had oats could eat none'. 'We are very glad that Mr Chambers hath an Estate to pay for such Losses he puts upon the Company', Surat wrote, considering that Chambers was 'just like the Fish that leaps out of the frying-pan into the fire; for fearing, for his former unjustifiable Actions, the Company may seize upon his money that he may lend, he will send a ship empty home'. The intemperate tone of this letter is usual for those times. Administration and supervision over huge distances coupled with slow and unreliable communication, together with frequent illness, excessive eating and drinking, much quarrelling, and the ever-present spectre of imminent death, made for evil tempers. The democratic style of functioning of the Company's Agencies considerably neutralised these defects. Chambers' autocracy was an intolerable danger. Were he to be allowed to continue in this manner, others would soon follow, and the corporate structure of the Company, already beset by licensed privateers as well as competing agencies from other European nations, would collapse. By itself, such a collapse would not be a calamity. The President and Council in Surat had their own financial interests involved in the Company's continued survival, including private trade. This was the true cause of the anger directed at Chambers, and of the need to have him removed at once. The latest news at Surat must have summarised the financial crisis the Company was going through, during this period of transition from the Commonwealth back to the monarchy.

With the renewal of its Charter by Charles II, the Company felt emboldened to deal effectively with its internal problems, which it had been unable to do for the last 20 years. For the Company to survive, Chambers had to go, and so he was removed. William Blake replaced him with retrospective effect, as may be seen from the letter of dismissal dated 1 August 1662: 'Mr Thomas Chamber [*sic*], by virtue of the Honourable East India Company's Commission, given us, bearing date the seventh day of February, 1661, we discharge you, the said Mr Thomas Chamber [*sic*], of their service'. Chambers stayed on in Madras until 1665, when he left for England. He was knighted the following year, and survived until the

last decade of the century. Similarly the Company dismissed Matthew Andrews from Surat, and John Trevisa from Bengal. Sir George Oxenden replaced Andrews with effect from 25 October 1661 and Sir Edward Winter from Chambers with effect from 11 December of the same year. William Blake was to move to Bengal and relieve Trevisa, and *en route*, Chambers.

Edward Winter's selection was not unanimous. The records of the Court of Committees for 6 December 1661 show that Edward Winter and Quarles Browne (a very experienced merchant who had been to Japan, later Agent at Bantam) had been named as candidates for the Coast Agency, but there was some objection against the former. The Court of Committees therefore ordered a special committee to look into these objections before anything was decided. The next meeting on this subject was on 11 December, and the clauses, which determined Edward Winter's appointment, show that he was quite willing to accept under any circumstance. The first clause fixed his salary at £100 and 'any further gratuity according to deserts [*sic*] and usual security given' but if Edward Winter became Agent, he would have to pay an additional security of £2000. The seriousness of this may be understood when one is told that the candidate chosen for the post of President at Surat had to provide a security of £5000. The demand for an additional security demonstrates that there must have been serious objections to Edward Winter's candidacy, backed by sufficient proof, for the Court to state this condition. Thomas Winter agreed to this additional payment and Edward, duly chosen, was called in, and informed of these conditions, which he accepted. On 30 December 1661, the Court, at Edward Winter's request, promised that he would remain Agent at Fort St George for a definite period of 3 years, and an additional 2 years if needed. This seems to have satisfied him.

Another significant change in policy was that the Company had decided to try once more to rid itself of private trading, which was a constant irritant, making serious inroads into its earnings. To this end, a Royal Warrant under the Privy Seal, dated 21 February 1662, was issued to Sir George and Sir Edward, permitting them to seize and deport to England all 'unlicensed' English subjects trading within the jurisdiction of their respective agencies. Both Sir George and Sir Edward were particularly instructed to report, dismiss from service, seize, and deport, all Company's servants engaged in private trade, under authority of the same Warrant, since such trade was also 'unlicensed.' Englishmen found sailing ships for local persons were also to be seized and deported. Sir Edward was to issue proclamations that all subjects of the King, who might have gone to India and settled in territories owned by local rulers, on whose