

# The Indian Connection with Tasmania

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For a century or more there has been a romance about Australia's relationship with India, although the links between the two go back much further – to the beginnings of settlement.

The romance is potent in William Hardy Wilson's evocation of the homestead *Horsely*, beyond Liverpool in New South Wales – the most Indian of all colonial houses. Wilson wrote, in prose of the most aniline purple:

Of the many beautiful homesteads there is one which I shall single out because it is the pleasantest home in New South Wales. *Horsely* was designed by an officer from the Indian Army who planned his home with memories of bungalows in India to guide, and built it on the top of a serene hill surrounded by a ring of lower hills. At the edge of the plateau where the path ascends, there are two Moreton Bay figs intermingled with sweet-bays forming an entrance archway through which the homestead appears half-submerged in formal shrubs and tall waving grasses. The front has an attractive verandah. There are coupled Doric columns, dark jhilmils with folding white casements between, and round-arched bays at the ends.

Within there is a punkah hanging idly from the lofty ceiling, a mark of past luxuriousness. There are high double doors glistening under white paint and polished brasses. On the walls there are remaining a few old portraits, crudely done, and other canvases that present fat tigers pausing in the act of seizing relatives of the Captain Charles Weston who, having escaped these perilous adventures, left India, and came to New South Wales where in 1817 he established himself on this tranquil hill.

Well, much of what Wilson wrote is fanciful. Weston was George, not Charles, his rank is dubious and he doesn't appear in the Army lists – and his house was built in the early 1830s, not in the age of Macquarie, and as to the fat tigers, there was once a painting of a horse and its syce in the house – but the house and the household was Indian – as Anglo-Indian as it could be – teak abutments of Indian craftsmanship, Indian brass hardware, Indian punkah and Indian cedar or town furniture, Indian servants and Weston's (illegitimate) Anglo-Indian (in the modern sense) children. It was extraordinary, and an aberration, both architecturally and socially.

Intriguingly it seems to have aroused no contemporary comment – architecturally or socially. Coming to the colony Weston had married quickly and well – financially – but Blanche Weston was the illegitimate daughter of Colonel Johnstone. It seems they were not visited and there is no hint as to why this shadowy Anglo-Indian (in the old sense) from a respected Anglo-Indian and Surrey gentry family should have chosen – uniquely it seems – to replicate Anglo-India in the Australian bush.

Hardy Wilson can be forgiven for predating the house to the Macquarie period, linking it with Macquarie's own buildings – or at least some of them – and the architecture of late eighteenth-century British India.

But the wish to emulate India, or at least to regard India as an exemplar, is only part of the story and I think an often over-stated part. As is usual with such things the reality is often prosaic, the motives and influences more pragmatic and even contradictory. The

romance is largely what we bring to the story – and the story begins, appropriately, at the beginning.

I don't know how many officers on the First Fleet had experience or knowledge of India. My hunch is that more had served in North America than India – and had come to Australia 'on the rebound' – directly or indirectly from the loss of the American colonies.

It was not planned that the new colony should be serviced by India – rather the opposite – but critical shortage of supplies determined otherwise. In October 1791 Governor Phillip forged the first direct link between the fledgling colony and India when he dispatched the ship *Atlantic* to Calcutta for supplies. It returned in June 1792, to the 'inexpressible joy of all ranks of people in the settlements', with a cargo of rice, souji, dhal, clothing, livestock and seeds.

Trade with India had begun; trade, rather than a romance or even a discrete friendship. However, by 1796 a few less-essential commodities – hardly luxurious – were included in the cargo of the ill-fated *Sydney Cove* – the subject of Linda Clark's paper – and by 1806 the Sydney shopkeeper, Mrs Eliza Rafferty was advertising globe lamps, table and wall shades – 'the great staple commodity of Indian furniture', as Emily Eden described them, and Indian-made furniture was beginning to be advertised.

Slowly – very slowly – tentatively, through an analysis of what we now call 'material culture' we can begin to construct links between the societies of the convict colony and British India. Trade increased, until, between 1816 and 1822, £103,840 worth of goods, or nearly 55% of all goods imported into New South Wales came from Indian and Chinese ports, so William Charles Wentworth estimated. A similar, or perhaps even higher percent is probably true of Hobart which was often the first port of call, before Sydney.

With Governor Lachlan Macquarie's arrival we can discern an overt desire to emulate something of the society of British India – and something of the concrete expression of that society, its buildings – in the colony. How much this focuses solely on Macquarie, and solely on his first public buildings – before Francis Greenway's influence diverted Macquarie's fancy back to metropolitan Georgian England – is debatable. There seems little doubt that various Macquarie-era hospitals and barracks, surrounded by, mostly, two-storeyed verandahs, were the result of what might be called inter-colonial influences – from the former colonies of North America, from the East Indies, the West Indies, the Cape – or India.

The great General Hospital in Sydney was Governor Macquarie's first major public building. It stretched three hundred yards along the eastern ridgeline of the town – a proscenium to the town, built to be seen from the harbour entrance. Each of its three buildings was surrounded by two-storeyed colonnades – the first in the colony and, quipped the architect Henry Kitchen to Commissioner Bigge, like so much unremoved scaffolding. The idea of a general hospital for the benefit of the settlement was Macquarie's, but also was the decision to emulate the 'pillars, plaster and pea-green paint' of British India – on all sides and at the expense of adequate kitchens and latrines. Typical Macquarie – his good intentions thwarted by his vanity.

The apogee of colonial Indian architectural influence comes in the early 1830s with the building of *Horsely*. The 1830s also saw the verandah becoming a feature – the feature – of Australian vernacular architecture. It had taken a surprisingly long time to arrive from India – or did it? I will be interested to hear Lionel Morrell's views this afternoon.

Where did the verandah come from? The word derives from India – but was it Indian, Anglo-Indian, from America, from Brighton, any fashionable English Regency watering place, from any of England's other colonies or did it just evolve through convenience and practicality?

Any – or all – of these may be true. I believe that the first Australian verandah – that added to the Lieutenant Governor's house in Sydney by Francis Grose in 1794 was largely, if not wholly, of North American influence – from the verandahs he had seen when serving in the American War. He had never served in India. Also serving with Grose in North America was Colonel Montresor whose so-called 'American Cottages' in Kent – vernacular cottages with added verandahs – were the first verandahs illustrated in an English architectural book – John Plaw's *Ferme Ornee*, published, significantly, in 1794, the same year as Grose built his verandah in far off Botany Bay. Twenty years on, by Macquarie's time, verandahs had become – with French doors – fashionable architectural details in Regency England and were slowly taking on in Australia.

And just as Colonel Montresor's cottages were a pair of vernacular houses with verandahs added to them, so in the colony, with only a handful of exceptions, the most exceptional being *Horsely* – the soi-disant Australian bungalow was usually no more than an elongated vernacular English cottage with English planning and details, wearing a sun-hat.

I think there is no single influence that determines the Australian verandah, and the ranking of the several influences will always be debated. What seems clear to me is that the idea that verandahs were all brought from India by returning officers is as romanticised as Captain Weston fighting off fat tigers.

The 1830s also saw a great change in India's influence on the colony's material culture. It is a gross oversimplification to say that, before 1830 the colony's kitchen dressers were laden with Chinese blue and white export ware – largely traded through India – the sort of things that the *Sydney Cove* first brought, and yet after the 1830s the export ware had been replaced by pseudo Chinese 'Willow Pattern' transfer ware from the potteries of Staffordshire. Or that the Indian shops and nankeens and muslins of servants' and children's and ladies' clothing of the first quarter of the century were replaced by worsteds and cottons from the mills of Glasgow and Manchester in the next. An oversimplification but essentially true.

Trade patterns had altered, economies had altered. Cultural attitudes followed. The lifting of the anomalous restrictions on trade, and the end of the monopolies of the Honourable East Indian Company meant, from the end of the Macquarie period, a great increase in direct trade with Britain – and incidentally the decline of the 'Honourable Company' into not very honourable drug-running to China, which culminated in the Opium Wars of the late 1830s and had further implications for the colonial trade with Asia.

This easing of the restrictions on trading with Britain coincided with the rise in industrialised manufacture of ceramics, textiles and metalware – in Staffordshire, Glasgow, Manchester, Birmingham and Sheffield.

Australia's seesaw of trade – the colony at the fulcrum, Britain to one side, India and Asia to the other – tilted, weighted emphatically by increased imports from England. In the 1830s in New South Wales and Van Diemen's Land, newspaper notices of the latest cargoes from India and China were supplanted by advertisements for the stock of various Birmingham and Sheffield warehouses that had sprung up in Sydney and

Hobart. Who wanted hand-decorated blue and white ceramics from China when Chinoiserie transfer-printed crockery was available from Stoke-on-Trent? Who wanted hand-woven, hand-embroidered muslins from India when machine lace was available from Manchester? 'Brummy' had not entered into Australian slang and Birmingham's reputation in the colony was still as shiny as its metal wares.

Curiosities, and 'Fancy Goods' as they were called, continued – as indeed they still do – to have an appeal, but when all the trappings of genteel, early Victorian cosiness were attainable in the colony, who wanted the exoticism of Anglo-Indian punkahs and punkah wallas' association of heat and dirt and crowds and discomfort? Who would buy 'the newest Fashions from India' from Mrs Plomer in Upper Pitt Street, when there were French ribbons and mastic mantels from London available for ready money?

This attitude is why I think that *Horsely*, in the 1830s, although the apogee of the British in India, in Australia is also an aberration. Who wanted it? An English villa was the thing – by John Verge or James Thompson.

Anglo-Indians – again I am using the term in its nineteenth-century sense of the British in India, not its twentieth-century sense of mixed race – leaving India and emigrating to Australia wished, it seems, to escape, not recreate, architecturally at least, the oppression of India. In Van Diemen's Land they could build an English cottage, not a bungalow, although a verandah may be useful. To these immigrants the concept of 'home' was still English – not Indian – although they chose not to return to England.

If all of what I am saying seems like mixed messages, it's because that's what I receive when looking at our early colonial society and its culture:

- India as an essential source of supplies
- India as a convenient trade source
- India as a model to aspire to, the sine qua non of colonialism
- India a wistful regret from the gaol of Botany Bay
- India as offensive and somewhere to escape from
- India as a market for horses in the desperate years after the 1840s depression
- India as a source of labouring coolies in the desperate years after the cessation of convict transportation
- India as a source of respectable immigrants.

Except for *Horsely*, India as 'home' has very little currency it seems to me. As these historical relationships have varied in their nature, so too have contemporary attitudes to India in studies of colonial society, architecture and the decorative arts. The social links between India and the colony have long been recognised, but imprecisely and often romanticized: the more obvious aspects, such as the influence of the military, have often been crudely over-rated, and the more subtle links of kinship and business overlooked.

For New South Wales at least, we might consider their military, mercantile and family links – not only in relation to each other but in relation to the wider context of changing colonial society. The change, generally taking place in the 1820s, from a military establishment to a civil establishment is, I think, greatly underrated in studies of colonial society. The replacement in administrative positions of serving officers by civil servants had a profound effect on colonial culture – directly in such aspects as the demand for better and more substantial houses where formerly there were government-owned houses, and indirectly in the impetus given to cultural institutions and cultural attitudes by a generally better-educated class of professional administrators, keen on establishing their place in society without recourse to rank. I think, and here I am venturing beyond my limits of research, that intricate inter-colonial

military relationships and networks – brother officers knowing or having introductions to or influencing brother officers throughout the colonies – India and Australia included – had largely given way, or at least lost their importance to, colonial affairs by the 1830s.

The new networks were those of the civil servants – many Scottish – who took up major posts throughout the growing British Empire. For these in the 1830s India had neither the significance nor the cachet that it had for military officers a generation earlier. There were also, either parallel to these, or closely or casually related to them, the trading networks. These networks could be subtler, intricate and complicated and I look forward to Paul Edwards' paper.

I will only give one New South Wales example – the family connections of Hannibal Macarthur, John Macarthur's nephew.

It runs like this:

- Hannibal Macarthur never lived in India but had traded, unsuccessfully, to China for his uncle in 1808. That began a network of interrelated family and business connections.
- Hannibal's son-in-law was Hugh Gordon. Gordon epitomises that complex web of diverse threads that stretched back and forth between Britain – more specifically Scotland – India, China and Australia.
- Gordon was the son of Hugh Gordon, a watchmaker and silversmith in Madras from 1792 to 1802. In 1804, having made his fortune – substantially through dealing in pearls from the Gulf of Manar – he returned to his native Aberdeen. Buying an estate, he built a large house, naming it *Manar*.
- Gordon's near neighbour was William Leslie, 10<sup>th</sup> Laird of Wathill. Mrs Leslie's brother was Walter Stevenson Davidson, whose uncle was Sir Walter Farquhar, physician to the Prince of Wales and patron of John Macarthur, with whom WS Davidson arrived in Sydney in 1805.
- In 1807 Davidson traded in India for Macarthur and for Robert Campbell. In 1813 he set up trading in Canton, but continued to increase his pastoral holdings in New South Wales, managed by his old friend the colonial merchant, Richard 'China' Jones.
- Davidson provided his Leslie nephews with endowments and sent the eldest, William, to Canton where he became a partner in Dent & Co., the great rival to Jardine Matheson. Patrick Leslie migrated to New South Wales in 1835.
- In the following year his friend, young Hugh Gordon set sail for Sydney with letters of introduction from Walter Davidson. Both young men became intimates at Hannibal Macarthur's house. The two youngest Leslies, George and Walter, arrived in the colony in 1839, accompanied by Hannibal Macarthur's son Charles, returning from school in England.
- A few months later Hugh Gordon sailed to China for his health, staying with Lancelot Dent in Manila, then William Leslie in Macao, where he had his portrait painted by the famous George Chinnery, which he sent to May Macarthur, Hannibal's daughter, whom he married in 1841.
- Patrick Leslie had married Catherine Macarthur the previous year, and in 1844 George Leslie married Emiline, Hannibal's youngest daughter.

It was the old story of 'who you know' and the Macarthurs knew people everywhere.

If all that sounded complicated and was difficult to follow – it was. This only seems to underline the extraordinarily complex and varied interconnections that many colonial families had – and the interconnection often stretched to India. Such networks beginning in the last years of the eighteenth century or first of the nineteenth, probably peaked – certainly for military based networks – in the Macquarie period and

decreased in the 1840s. And such networks were reflected in the furniture and furnishings of those colonists' houses.

At *Vineyard*, on the Parramatta River, Hannibal and Anna Maria Macarthur had tall glass shades, 'Indian fashion' shielding their candles from draughts in the dining room. Their drawing room had Chinese tables and a case of preserved Indian birds; a further Chinese table and a leopard skin finished the beautiful room. There were Chinese ceramics and carved ivory trinkets and, as at *Horsley*, there were Indian servants, supplemented by necessity by assigned ones. In such houses Indian furniture stood with pieces of colonial make – and both were likely to be of cedar.

This has led, in recent decades to some consternation amongst connoisseurs, collectors and dealers: No! Indian cedar and Australian cedar are quite different; one can easily tell. But botanists couldn't, and have decreed – botanically – they are identical; same genus, same species.

Still one can surely tell – now – an Anglo-Indian piece of furniture from a colonial-made one. Or at least we think we can – by stylistic details and quirks and by constructional details. And all this is recent.

One has to look at our museums' collections of colonial furniture for salutary lessons. The cedar chairs from the first Government House and the desk from Dr Craig's collection in the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery are now accepted as being of Anglo-Indian make, not colonial, and the two sofas in the National Trust collection at Clarendon agreed as Tasmanian-made no longer look colonial at all but are obviously Chinese. And not only furniture but silver has been re-assessed: the Plunkett entrée dish in the Powerhouse Museum, once attributed to the Sydney silversmith Richard Lamb is now – quite obviously in hindsight – the work of Canton silversmith Lyn Chong.

That these pieces were regarded by experts, quite recently, as colonial made provides an interesting sidelight to our renewed interest in the colony's influences from associations with India and the East. It is not to disparage the work of Dr Craig, Kevin Fahey and various museum curators, myself included, that they failed to identify these things as Anglo-Indian or Chinese export.

Although there were romanticised notions of Indian/colonial connections, there was not, thirty years ago, the appreciation and knowledge of the historical contexts that there are today. These things did not *register* as Anglo-Indian. To use TS Eliot's phrase they were 'not seen, because not looked for'. Now, with the contexts established, the reference marks established, it seems so obvious and only a few die-hard dealers and collectors, fearing a loss in value of their goods, resist this revision.

For most of us, I think, it has been exciting to escape from the purely colonial or colonial/English mindsets to colonial/Indian, colonial/Chinese or colonial/American contexts. As a result, the make-up of our colonial decorative arts has become as polyglot as the make-up of our colonial society – to its great enrichment.

The goods that survive – Indian or Chinese – and I would also add American, for that is the great influence yet to be fully acknowledged in our colonial trade in decorative arts, are touchstones for assessing the colony's culture. Comparing, in style and craftsmanship, the colonial-made with the Anglo-Indian relates Australia to its siblings, however richer, older and grander. It deepens an appreciation of the colony, not isolated as England's remotest province, but as part of a pan-imperial network, and it deepens an appreciation of the colony's place in that intercolonial hierarchy.

The re-assessment of and reattribution of pieces, rather than the cultural worth of these pieces, repositions them and our own colonial arts in a wider more complex context of intermediate cultures. But the contexts need always to be re-assessed, the ground maps constantly redrawn. That, I think, is the value of a symposium such as this and I greatly look forward to today's papers.

