

## Swallowfield Park, Berkshire



Swallowfield Park, Berkshire

Viewed from its exterior, Swallowfield Park, Berkshire appears to be an archetypal English country house. Converted in the later twentieth century from a single family residence into luxury flats, Swallowfield illustrates a longstanding English country house tradition that has adapted in successive centuries to major changes in Britain's economic, social, cultural and political landscape. Its architecture and history are caught up in the events that saw England emerge from the seventeenth century as a parliamentary democracy. Yet the evolving biography of this family seat, like the history of so many quintessentially 'English' country houses, was also fundamentally shaped by its entanglement with a wider British colonial world in which exoticism and despotism—qualities often equated by contemporaries with 'Oriental' cultures—held sway. In what follows, we situate Swallowfield within this broad imperial context by tracing the estate's acquisition and transformation in the late Georgian and early Victorian periods. Purchased by Sir Henry Russell, first baronet (1751-1836) in the 1820s, Swallowfield was remodelled, redecorated and recreated in the following decades by its new proprietor's eldest son, Henry (later the second baronet; 1783-1852). Both father and son derived their great wealth from fortunes made in India. Sir Henry's purchase of Swallowfield attests to the crucial role played by Britain's empire in underpinning country house society, culture and politics in late Georgian England. The strategic refurbishment of Swallowfield by the second baronet in the 1830s and 1840s demonstrates the central part played by the East India Company in shaping the aesthetics, sociability and political functions of English country houses.

The 'global' histories of this country seat also illustrate the extent to which the acquisition, furnishing and use of British country houses were collaborative processes, protracted and collective undertakings as opposed to finite and discrete projects launched by individual men of wealth. The cost of building or rebuilding an English country house rose significantly in the period 1660-1860, and new standards of luxurious consumption within the governing elite also rendered the domestic interior an increasingly expensive component of the Georgian country

house.<sup>1</sup> Members of the Georgian and Victorian propertied classes, moreover, typically operated as nodal points in extended reticulations of familial connections, rather than as autonomous individuals.<sup>2</sup> In the East India Company, the pervasive sway of patronage and nepotism, together with the great reliance placed on kin ‘at home’ to raise repatriated wives and children, magnified this collaborative propensity. The history of Swallowfield offers a case study in the country house as a collective and dynamic process through which English domestic interiors were linked, through imperialism in Asia, to both European and global worlds of culture, trade and politics.

### **Royalist Bastion: Swallowfield under the Hyde Family:**

In the seventeenth century, Swallowfield’s history was firmly rooted in English and European political developments. Present-day Swallowfield was built in 1689-91 by Henry Hyde, the second earl of Clarendon (1638-1709), replacing the Tudor mansion of the alchemist and antiquary William Backhouse (1593-1662). Clarendon had taken as his second wife William Backhouse’s daughter, the heiress Flower Backhouse (1641-1700). Owing debts of over £19,000, the second earl sold lands (eventually including the Hyde family seat of Cornbury) to stave off his creditors, and retreated to his wife’s estate at Swallowfield in an attempt to reduce his expenditure. Through its connection with Clarendon, seventeenth-century Swallowfield was associated with both the court party and the Stuart cause. As an infant, Henry Hyde had been taken into exile on the continent by his parents after the royalist defeat in the Civil War. His subsequent political career, with only a few short-lived departures, was staunchly royalist. Having declined to accept the new regime imposed by the Glorious Revolution of 1689, Clarendon was imprisoned in the Tower by William III in 1690 and 1691.<sup>3</sup>

Denied a place in parliamentary politics by his continued allegiance to the Stuart cause, Clarendon turned to the consolations of domestic architecture. In replacing the existing Tudor mansion at Swallowfield with a new country house, he chose for his architect William Talman (c. 1650-1719). Talman, who as comptroller of the king’s works undertook Hampton Court Palace’s interior decoration, has been described as ‘the leading country house architect of the late seventeenth century, responsible for some of the most innovative and influential designs of the period’. He is now known for producing ‘a group of relatively plain Renaissance-style houses’ that includes Swallowfield. Talman was also the architect of Holywell House, St Albans (which he built for John and Sarah Churchill in c. 1686), of Richard Lumley’s Stanstead Park, Sussex (built from 1686 to 1690) and of Uppark, also in Sussex (built for Ford Grey in c. 1690). A small vestibule at Swallowfield is now the

---

<sup>1</sup> For the increased cost of building works, see Richard Wilson and Alan Mackley, *Building of the English Country House*, chap. 7, esp. 246-247; for the increased luxury of the Georgian interior, see Amanda Vickery, *Behind Closed Doors: At Home in Georgian England* (London: Yale University Press, 2009).

<sup>2</sup> See esp. Leonore Davidoff, *Thicker than Water: Siblings and Their Relations, 1780-1920* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

<sup>3</sup> See Jennifer Speake, ‘Backhouse, William (1593-1662)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/985>, accessed 17 September 2011], and W.A. Speck, ‘Hyde, Henry, second Earl of Clarendon (1638-1709)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), online edn January 2006 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/14329>, accessed 17 September 2011].

only surviving Talman interior. Other country houses that bear the impress of Talman's hand include Burghley House, Northamptonshire and Chatsworth House, Derbyshire.<sup>4</sup>

### **Indian Interloper: Thomas 'Diamond' Pitt and Swallowfield:**

Through its association with the Hyde family, Swallowfield was connected to England's tumultuous seventeenth-century transition from Stuart absolutism to constitutional monarchy. The eighteenth century, in contrast, saw the beginning of Swallowfield's long association with the history of Britain's emerging empire in India, as well as a more brief-lived connection with Britain's colonies in the West Indies. For in 1719 this Berkshire country seat passed from Tory into emphatically Whig hands with its purchase by the politician and East Indian merchant Thomas Pitt (1653-1726).<sup>5</sup>



Thomas 'Diamond' Pitt (1653-1726) by G. Kneller - With Pitt's purchase of the estate upon his return from India and sale of his notorious diamond, Swallowfield entered an association with the subcontinent that was to endure well into the nineteenth century.

Pitt's career in India exemplifies the 'freebooting' phase of the Company's history, a period in which the tiny number of Company officials on the subcontinent—and their pronounced tendency to succumb to tropical diseases—offered rich opportunities for opportunist merchants.<sup>6</sup> Born in Dorset, Pitt gained notoriety for his opposition to the East India Company's monopoly of trade on the Indian subcontinent, and for the success he enjoyed in extracting wealth from the Company's domains despite his initial exclusion from its inner circles. He first set sail for India in 1673, and rapidly established himself as a successful interloper in the Company's developing circuits of Asian

<sup>4</sup> Peter Smith, 'Talman, William (*bap.* 1650, *d.* 1719)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), online edn January 2008 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/26956>, accessed 17 September 2011].

<sup>5</sup> Edward Hyde, third earl Clarendon (1661-1723) sold the house to Pitt in 1719, having earlier suffered imprisonment for debt at the hands of his creditors. For this sale, see Lady Constance Russell, *Swallowfield and Its Owners* (London: Longman and Co., 1901), 191-192. [This work is also available electronically: [http://openlibrary.org/books/OL23344301M/Swallowfield\\_and\\_its\\_owners](http://openlibrary.org/books/OL23344301M/Swallowfield_and_its_owners)]. For the endemic culture of debt and credit in Georgian and Victorian England, which often underpinned the sale and purchase of country houses, see Margot Finn, *The Character of Credit: Personal Debt in English Culture, 1740-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

<sup>6</sup> For this early phase of development, and its gradual demise, see P.J. Marshall, *East India Company Fortunes: The British In Bengal in the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976).

commerce—much to the chagrin of the Court of Directors. Having returned to England in the 1680s, Pitt was elected MP for Old Sarum, and lambasted the Company's monopoly over Indian trade from the safety of his seat in the House of Commons. He journeyed back to India as an interloping merchant in 1693, forcing the East India Company's directors to reconcile themselves to his commercial presence on the subcontinent. Although Pitt remained estranged from influential senior figures in the Company such as Sir Josiah Child (c. 1631-1699)<sup>7</sup>, he secured appointment by the Company in the later 1690s as Governor of Fort St George at Madras (present-day Chennai).<sup>8</sup>

From his base in Madras, Pitt accumulated a vast fortune, a process of enrichment perhaps best exemplified by his purchase from an Indian merchant in 1702 of a 410 carat diamond.<sup>9</sup> Acquired by Pitt for £20,400 and shipped to England to be cut and sold for profit, this gem initially proved a vexing investment. Warfare had disrupted the European diamond market, and Pitt (who sailed from India for Europe in 1709) succeeded in selling his Indian jewel only in 1717. The Pitt diamond, purchased for £125,000 by the Regent of France, later came to adorn the French crown, was worn by Marie Antoinette and later decorated Napoleon I's sword. In the meantime, profits from his lucrative Indian commercial dealings and the sale of his diamond had allowed Pitt, the son of a Dorset rector, to purchase extensive estates that stretched from Cornwall to Westminster. Shortly after the sale of his Indian gemstone, Thomas 'Diamond' Pitt established himself as a Berkshire country gentleman at Swallowfield. He died there in 1726, leaving this new country seat to his son Robert (c. 1680-1727), who like his father had traded as a free merchant in Madras before settling in the Berkshire countryside. Intrepid trader and Whig politician, Pitt in India had laid the foundations of a political dynasty that was to include two distinguished Georgian prime ministers: his grandson William Pitt, first earl Chatham (1708-1778) and his great-grandson William Pitt the Younger (1759-1806).<sup>10</sup>

### **The East India Company at Home: The Russells of Swallowfield:**

In the Georgian era, Swallowfield changed hands several times, and its link to Britain's expanding Indian empire was temporarily broken. The Pitt family sold the estate in 1737, reportedly for £20,770 (roughly the price for which Pitt had sold his celebrated Indian diamond). Swallowfield was sold again in 1783 when Sylvanus Bevan purchased it from Colonel John Dodd. Bevan in turn sold the estate in 1788, to Timothy Hare Earle. His son, Timothy Hare Altabon Earle, inherited Swallowfield in 1816. The younger Earle, whose wealth rested on the Caribbean rather than the Indian empire,

<sup>7</sup> Wanstead House, Essex, was purchased by Sir Josiah Child, 1<sup>st</sup> baronet (c. 1631-1699) in 1673. Child was a prominent director of the East India Company. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Child residences included Osterley House, Hounslow, which were furnished with abundant Oriental décor.

<sup>8</sup> For a synopsis of Pitt's career, see Perry Gauci, 'Pitt, Thomas (1653-1726)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), online edn January 2008 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/22333>, accessed 17 September 2011].

<sup>9</sup> For the centrality of diamonds in the Company's trade in this period, see Rosalind Bowden, 'The Letter Books of John and Nathaniel Cholmley, Diamond Merchants', *North Yorkshire County Record Office Review* (2001), 6-57 Bruce Lenman, 'The East India Company and the Trade in Non-Metallic Precious Materials from Sir Thomas Roe to Diamond Pitt', in Huw V. Bowen, Margarette Lincoln and Nigel Rigby, (eds), *The Worlds of the East India Company* (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2002), 97-109; Edgar Roy Samuel, 'Diamonds and Pieces of Eight: How Stuart England Won the Rough-Diamond Trade', *Jewish Historical Studies*, 38 (2003), 23-40; and Edgar Roy Samuel, 'Gems from the Orient: The Activities of Sir John Chardin (1643-1713) as a Diamond Importer and East India Merchant', *Proceedings of the Huguenot Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, 27, 3 (2000), 351-368.

<sup>10</sup> For Pitt, his Indian ventures and his family, see also C.A.N. Dalton, *The Life of Thomas Pitt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1915) and Tresham Lever, *The House of Pitt: A Family Chronicle* (London: John Murray, 1947). For the Pitt Diamond, see Harold Newman, *An Illustrated Dictionary of Jewellery* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1981).

suffered increasingly from the early nineteenth-century depreciation of West Indian property. Swallowfield's lands were enclosed in 1817<sup>11</sup>, an agrarian strategy calculated to drive up its landlord's profits. But by 1820 Earle's declining imperial fortune and his extravagant lifestyle had forced him to sell the estate. Earle retired to 'The Elms', a dower-house near Wokingham, where he died in 1836.<sup>12</sup>

With the sale of Swallowfield by Timothy Hare Altabon Earle, the estate's imperial associations reverted from the West to the East Indies. Sir Henry Russell, first baronet (1751-1836) had been born in Dover, the son of a merchant. Educated at Charterhouse and Cambridge, Russell trained in the law at Lincoln's Inn. His legal ability and a strategic marriage combined to raise his social aspirations and economic prospects. In 1782, as a widower, Russell took as his second wife Anne Barbara Whitworth (d. 1814), the youngest daughter of Sir Charles Whitworth (c. 1721-1778) and sister to Charles, Earl Whitworth (1752-1825). In 1797 Russell was knighted and appointed a judge of the Bengal Supreme Court.

India was to be the making of the Russell family. The judge reached Bengal in 1798, where his eldest son Henry (1783-1852) took up an appointment as a 'Writer' in the East India Company's civil service. The younger Russell children remained in England, but Lady Anne (having given birth to her ninth child in December 1797) soon set sail for Bengal with her nieces Mary Lloyd and Rose Aylmer (1779-1800) in tow—both joining the so-called 'fishing fleet' of nubile British daughters who tried their fortunes on the colonial marriage market. The reunited Russells now settled in Calcutta (present-day Kolkata), where the street on which they lived continues to bear their name.<sup>13</sup> The couple's two youngest children were both born in India. Rose Aylmer (1800-1889) was named to commemorate her cousin, who had died of a tropical fever before she could secure a husband, and George Lake (b. 1802) was named for the first Viscount Lake of Delhi (1744-1808), commander-in-chief of the army in India and a distant relation.<sup>14</sup> Two further sons later joined their father in Bengal. Charles Russell (1786-1856) had arrived at his parents' Calcutta home by 1802, a cadet in the Company's Bengal army. The couple's third son, the feckless Francis Whitworth Russell (1790-1852), was appointed to the Bengal civil service in 1808, and remained in India, with only short sojourns home, until his death.<sup>15</sup>

The processes by which the Russells' protracted engagement with Britain's evolving Indian empire were to shape the purchase and refashioning of Swallowfield are complex and multi-layered. Sir Henry and his eldest sons were so-called 'nabobs', officials of Britain's Indian empire whose sudden access to excessive wealth allowed them to construct new identities through the acquisition and use of

---

<sup>11</sup> For more information see the Berkshire Record Office's New Landscapes project, [http://www.berkshireenclosure.org.uk/find\\_via\\_parish\\_details.asp?parish=Swallowfield](http://www.berkshireenclosure.org.uk/find_via_parish_details.asp?parish=Swallowfield).

<sup>12</sup> Russell, *Swallowfield*, 226-251.

<sup>13</sup> Sir Henry's home was a site of considerable sociability for Calcutta's Anglo-Indian governing classes, as recalled in the memoir of his contemporary, William Hickey. See Alfred Spencer, (ed.), *Memoirs of William Hickey*, 4 vols (London: Hurst & Blackett, 1925), esp. vol. 4: 194-196, 211, 220-222.

<sup>14</sup> For Lake, see Anthony S. Bennell, 'Lake, Gerard, First Viscount Lake of Delhi (1744-1808)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), online edn January 2008 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/15900>, accessed 28 September 2011].

<sup>15</sup> For an introduction to the family, see Stephen Wheeler, 'Russell, Sir Henry, first baronet (1751-1836)', rev. Ainslie T. Embree, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/24311>, accessed 18 March 2005].

new built environments and a global array of material goods.<sup>16</sup> High salaries, gifts from ‘Oriental’ potentates and opportunities for commercial profit swelled the family’s coffers in India, laying the financial foundations upon which Swallowfield’s purchase and refurbishment would later rest. Colonial Calcutta itself was a vast emporium of luxury goods in this period. Ships’ captains purchased fashionable items in London for resale to Europeans in Calcutta. Skilled Indian craftsmen were adept at designing and executing not only ‘native’ textiles and furnishings but also imitations of European luxuries and products in which European and ‘Oriental’ components were melded.<sup>17</sup> Auction houses plied a lively trade in both new items of fashion and second-hand goods—left behind by Company servants returning home, and by the thousands of less lucky men and women who succumbed each year to the tropical climate.<sup>18</sup>

A gendered division of labour appears to have reigned in Calcutta’s distinctive European consumer markets. Auction houses appear to have been male domains in which Indian men appeared alongside European men as consumers. The ledgers that recorded auctions of the possessions of deceased Company officials often note purchasers with Indian names.<sup>19</sup> European women, in contrast, were proscribed from Calcutta’s auction houses in the nineteenth century. Emma Roberts, writing of Tulloch & Company (Calcutta’s chief auction house) in 1835, noted that ‘The auction room is accessible to males alone; it is open to the entrance-hall, but should a lady wander by mistake into the forbidden precincts, she becomes the talk of Calcutta’.<sup>20</sup> Sir Charles D’Oyly’s 1828 depiction of an elite emporium underscored both the conspicuous presence of women and the conspicuous absence of propertied Indian consumers. Our understanding of the processes by which Indian men and women came to engage with these European markets as consumers in the Georgian and early Victorian periods remains fragmentary at best, although we know from Supriya Chaudhuri’s analysis of nineteenth-century Bengali novels that furniture and furnishings loomed large in Indian negotiations of colonial modernity in this period.<sup>21</sup>

---

<sup>16</sup> ‘Nabob’ was an Anglicisation of the Persian term ‘nawab’, or official of the Mughal empire (the Indian empire displaced in this period by the East India Company). The word emerged as a term of abuse in England in the 1760s. Key studies of the nabobs in India and at home include Thomas George Percival Spear, *The Nabobs: A Study of the Social Life of the English in Eighteenth Century India* (London: Oxford University Press, 1932), Tillman Nechtman, *Nabobs: Empire and Identity in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), and Christina Smylitopoulos, ‘Rewritten and Reused: Imaging the Nabob through “Upstart Iconography”’, *Eighteenth-Century Life*, 32, 2 (2008), 39-59.

<sup>17</sup> See for example the discussion of this trade in Amin Jaffer, *Furniture of British India and Ceylon: A Catalogue of the Collections in the Victoria and Albert Museum and the Peabody Museum* (London: V&A, 2001).

<sup>18</sup> For an excellent contemporary account of Calcutta consumer culture in this period, see Captain Thomas Williamson, *The East India Vade-Mecum; Or, Complete Guide to Gentlemen Intended for the Civil, Military, or Naval Service of the Hon. East India Company*, 2 vols (London: Black, Parry and Kingsbury, 1810), esp. vol. 2: 165-172. The role of material goods in knitting together the East India Company’s far-flung imperial families (including the Russells) is discussed in Margot C. Finn, ‘Colonial Gifts: Family Politics and the Exchange of Goods in British India, c. 1780-1820’, *Modern Asian Studies*, 40, 1 (2006), 203-231.

<sup>19</sup> See for example British Library, African and Asian Studies, L/AG/34/27/29, record 150.

<sup>20</sup> Emma Roberts, *Scenes and Characteristics of Hindoostan, with Sketches of Anglo-Indian Society*, 3 vols (London: William Allen & Co., 1835), 2: 12.

<sup>21</sup> Supriya Chaudhuri, ‘Phantasmagorias of the Interior: Furniture, Modernity, and Early Bengali Fiction’, *Journal of Victorian Culture*, 15, 2 (August 2010), 173-193.



“Tom Raw visits Taylor & Co.’s Emporium in Calcutta”

Sir Charles D’Oyly, Calcutta, ca.1828, Watercolour on paper.

Courtesy of the Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

The contrast between luxuriously clothed Europeans and semi-naked Indians is conspicuous in this European image, as is the absence of Indian merchants and consumers.

In this burgeoning consumer culture, the Russell sons developed sophisticated and demanding consumer tastes, domestic sensibilities that Henry and Charles in particular would later elaborate at Swallowfield. Their mother’s return to England with the two youngest children in 1804 connected these two young men to London’s metropolitan markets during their prolonged residence in India, as did the in-laws acquired through Henry’s first marriage, to Jane Casamaijor (1789-1808) in Madras in 1808. Lady Anne travelled between a succession of rented English country homes, spa towns and London dwellings with her younger children while awaiting Sir Henry’s return. This peripatetic life allowed the Russells to sample a wide array of rural retreats and town houses prior to the purchase of Swallowfield. Employment in Madras, Poona (present-day Pune) and Hyderabad exposed the brothers to south Indian craftsmanship and familiarised them as well with the consumer markets of Bombay (present-day Mumbai). The return of first Sir Henry and then his two eldest sons to England between 1814 and 1820 was swiftly followed by their departure for Europe on shopping expeditions to Paris, Rome, Venice, Florence and other European centres of fine art, trade and industry. Recorded in exceptional detail in the letters that passed between the far-flung family members, Swallowfield’s formation as the Russells’ English family seat was a global, not a national, collective family enterprise.

### **Anglo-Indian Tastes:**

The Russell family’s domestic life in India centred around three urban hubs: Calcutta, Hyderabad and Madras. From 1798 until his departure for England in 1813, Sir Henry presided over his often distant family from his home in Chowringhee, Calcutta. His eldest son, Henry, was appointed assistant to the Resident of Hyderabad in 1800. (The Resident was the British political agent, or diplomat, to the Hyderabad court, whose ruler was the Nizam of Hyderabad). Henry’s career later took him to

Madras, where he married his first wife and furnished his first marital home in 1808.<sup>22</sup> After a brief interval in Pune, Henry returned to the Hyderabad Residency, where he served as Resident until 1820 and where Charles long laboured as assistant to the Resident. Charles's assistance to his brother extended significantly beyond his official Company duties. Secretary, companion and confidante to Henry, Charles was also his brother's primary collaborator in the lavish refurbishment of the Hyderabad Residency, a role that prefigured his fraternal assistance years later in Georgian and early Victorian Britain, when the purchase of Swallowfield Park allowed the Russells to repatriate and reconfigure their Indian fortunes through the acquisition, renovation and strategic deployment of an English landed estate.

Sir Henry's house in Calcutta functioned as a clearinghouse for goods sent to and from his sons in south India. It was through this channel that Henry and Charles received fashionable goods from their kinfolk in England, and through this conduit too that the brothers sent gifts of exotic luxuries to their political patrons at home. When Charles arrived in Calcutta from England in 1802, his brother Henry promptly wrote from Hyderabad to discover whether Charles had brought him any fashionable European goods, and to enquire whether his aunt, Lady Aylmer, had received his gift of Oriental fans.<sup>23</sup> Equipping his sons with appropriate domestic goods as they established their imperial careers was a task that Sir Henry took seriously. When Charles was appointed to a junior post in Hyderabad in 1804, his father sent him household items by sea from Calcutta. The list of these goods underlines the Russells' ambitions to genteel status: it included a writing table, a chest of drawers, a stand for a *chillumchee* (basin for washing hands), a looking glass, book shelves and language and history books. Having supplied his second son with these gentlemanly accoutrements, Sir Henry, alive to the tendency of young Company men to succumb to the allure of the Oriental marketplace and fall into debt, admonished Charles that from this time he must financially 'be on your own bottom'.<sup>24</sup> This individualistic directive was, however, to have little impact on Charles's behaviour as a consumer of furnishings: both in India and England, the following decades were to see Sir Henry's two eldest sons operate in tandem as they sought to translate their Indian wealth into fashionable domestic interiors that reflected their new social aspirations and status.

During Henry Russell's brief interval of employment in Madras, furniture and matrimony converged at the forefront of his sensibilities.<sup>25</sup> Although the East India Company had earlier discouraged the arrival of European women, by the early nineteenth century colonial Madras had both a flourishing (if small) marriage market and a thriving consumer culture inspired by conceptions of fashionable gentility.<sup>26</sup> New domestic furnishings were closely associated with marriage in Georgian England,<sup>27</sup> and Charles naturally suspected his brother of harbouring matrimonial intentions when Henry wrote to him requesting that Charles send 'the large Bed, with the Bedding, [and] the net Counterpane' which he had left behind in Hyderabad. Henry acknowledged that 'The Precision of my Orders about the

---

<sup>22</sup> Henry's complex love life prior to his second marriage is discussed in William Dalrymple, *White Mughals: Love and Betrayal in Eighteenth-Century India* (London: HarperCollins, 2002), chap. 9.

<sup>23</sup> Finn, 'Colonial Gifts', 223.

<sup>24</sup> Sir Henry Russell to Charles Russell, Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS. Eng. lett. c. 152, fols 13-14.

<sup>25</sup> For the English experience of marital home-making at this time, see Amanda Vickery, *Behind Closed Doors: At Home in Georgian England* (London: Yale University Press, 2009), esp. chap. 3.

<sup>26</sup> Henry Dodwell, *The Nabobs of Madras* (London: William and Norgate, 1926), chaps. 11-13; Amin Jaffer, *Furniture from British India and Ceylon* (London: Victoria & Albert Museum, 2001).

<sup>27</sup> Vickery, *Behind Closed Doors*, chap. 3.



Bedding and Irish Net was certainly very suspicious’, but hastened to deny that these instructions were a token of his intentions toward ‘the charming Jane’ Casamajor.<sup>28</sup>

In the event, in October Jane and Henry indeed married, and settled into a home that Henry had furnished with lavish abandon. Jane’s agonising death from a tropical disease in December led to Henry’s dispersal of these marital goods, which reminded him too painfully of his loss. In January 1809 Henry wrote to Charles announcing that he would sell off his furniture and plate. His subsequent letters detailed his sale of items that were the height of Madras fashion at the time, blending venerable European motifs with the current craze for all things Egyptian. The list of goods he disposed of underscores the importance of colonial consumption in shaping the domestic tastes of Company men. Items sold by Henry included twelve black varnished chairs with a red Etruscan border, a twelve-foot long ottoman covered in chintz, a bookcase with Egyptian bronze figures, two couches in the Egyptian style and ‘a pair of the newest fashioned Sofa Tables on Pillar Legs inlaid with Brass and fitted up with Brass Ornaments’.<sup>29</sup> The intermingling of furnishing genres in Henry’s marital possessions speaks to a broader tendency to *bricolage* in Anglo-Indian domesticity: here European and ‘Oriental’ styles, forms and materials coexisted, and fashion derived from an amalgam of ancient and modern tropes.



Chintz cape, Coromandel Coast, ca. 1775-1780

Cotton, printed and dyed, IS. 104-1950

Courtesy of Victoria and Albert Museum, London  
Chintz is a type of glazed calico cloth usually printed with flowers and other patterns in different colours.

The chintz cape shown above demonstrates the intricacy of the fabrics imported from India in the eighteenth century (an intricacy that substantially challenged British producers to change their techniques).

From Madras, Henry was appointed to a post at Poona, and from Poona he was at last appointed to the Hyderabad Residency. Hyderabad, where Charles and Henry lived together for nearly a decade upon Henry’s appointment as Resident in 1810, afforded the brothers a rich canvas for domestic design. It was here that they developed a dynamic partnership, carefully calculated to deploy material culture to establish their family’s social status and political power. This domesticating campaign of familial aggrandisement was later rehearsed and refined in the brothers’ collaborative project to establish Swallowfield as the Russells’ English family seat.

Although Hyderabad’s fortunes were on the wane by the early nineteenth century, the city and its surrounding state remained a vital centre of wealth, luxury and power in this period. Its opulence fed in part by the diamond trade, Hyderabad was known for its rich bazaars and elegant pleasure gardens. The British Residency was located opposite the old city, across the river Musi, a site now occupied by the [Osmania University College for Women](#). Both Henry and Charles had served at Hyderabad during

<sup>28</sup> Henry Russell to Charles Russell, 9 March 1808, Bodleian MS. Eng. lett. c. 155, fol. 128, and Henry Russell to Charles Russell, 1808, Bodleian, MS. Eng. lett. c. 156, fols. 3 verso-4.

<sup>29</sup> Finn, ‘Colonial Gifts’, 213.

the Residency of James Achilles Kirkpatrick (1764-1805; Resident 1797-1805). At the outset of Kirkpatrick's tenure, the Residency complex had been a disorderly assemblage of buildings. Poorly constructed and rapidly deteriorating, the Resident's two-storey house was surrounded by his staff's many bungalows, each including a *zenana* wing to house the men's Indian wives, concubines, children, servants and slaves. Kirkpatrick himself, scandalously, had not only settled with but married a Hyderabadi Muslim noblewoman, Begum Khair un-Nissa, with whom he had two children.<sup>30</sup>

In 1800, Kirkpatrick conceived an ambitious building campaign which, within a few years, transformed the Residency into a Palladian palace notable for its combination of European and Indian stylistic elements. Gardens laid out along conventional Mughal lines surrounded Khair's capacious *zenana*; a veranda surrounded the Resident's new house, which boasted a durbar hall for which Kirkpatrick ordered a carpet measuring sixty by thirty feet. But the Residency's new structures, ornamentation and furnishings also emphatically pronounced the Company's waxing power in Hyderabad. Its classical Palladian exterior commanded a deer park overlooked by a pediment carved with the East India Company's arms. The house itself boasted a grand salon, a gallery with a painted ceiling and a chandelier that had been sold to the Company by the ever-indebted Prince of Wales—in whose Orientalised fantasy, the Brighton Pavilion it had previously hung.<sup>31</sup>

Henry Russell took up residence at Hyderabad only in 1811. In the months after his appointment was announced and before his arrival from Poona, he wrote repeatedly to Charles, who assumed oversight in Henry's absence for the Residency's refurbishment. Thomas Sydenham, who had replaced Kirkpatrick as Resident, had sought to reduce the Residency's close links—enhanced by Kirkpatrick's liaison with Khair un-Nussa—with Hyderabadi culture. Henry Russell was not immune to the allure of the East: after Kirkpatrick's death and prior to his marriage to Jane Casamaijor, he had entered into a romantic relationship with Khair, and remained in contact with her and her female relatives for years thereafter. Russell, like Kirkpatrick and unlike Sydenham, insisted on adherence to strict Indian caste rules in the Residency kitchens.<sup>32</sup> But Henry Russell, nouveau-riche and immensely ambitious, was keen to stamp the Residency with an elite European impress. He wrote to Charles that he was willing to pay Sydenham a thousand pounds for his library, and was also happy to purchase his predecessor's sporting prints. New furnishings were ordered from Calcutta's select emporia: on 29 August 1810, Henry informed Charles that as the Residency's alterations reached completion he had resolved to purchase 'an entirely new Set of Furniture adapted to it from Calcutta' and wished to have Charles's advice on its selection. The purchase of fashionable European goods also threw Henry upon the mercy of his Casamaijor in-laws in London. He remitted £3,500 to Elizabeth Casamaijor (Jane's mother) in London, and reported happily on 26 June 1812 that she had despatched busts, glassware and china to him on the *William Beasley* and *City of London*. The goods were shipped to Madras, to be forwarded to Henry from Madras by his deceased wife's father, yet another example of the key roles played by family and in-laws in mediating colonial consumer relations.<sup>33</sup>

---

<sup>30</sup> Dalrymple, *White Mughals*, xxxii, 327, 118. For the social and gender dynamics of the bungalow in Anglo-India, see E.M. Collingham, *Imperial Bodies: The Physical Experience of the Raj, c. 1800-1947* (Cambridge: Polity, 2001), 99-102.

<sup>31</sup> Dalrymple, *White Mughals*, 125, 369-373. Kirkpatrick was not alone in grandiose construction of dual public-private residences in India at this time: Wellesley's rebuilding of Government House, Calcutta in 1803 used Kedleston Hall, Derbyshire [<http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/kedleston-hall/>] as its model. Dalrymple, *White Mughals*, 346.

<sup>32</sup> Dalrymple, *White Mughals*, 417, 420-21, 426-62.

<sup>33</sup> Henry Russell to Charles Russell, 27 May 1810, Bodleian, MS. Eng. lett. d. 151, fols 87 verso-88; Henry to Charles, 31 May 1810, MS Eng. lett. d. 151, fol. 95; Henry to Charles, 29 August 1810, Bodleian, MS. Eng. lett.

The furnishings selected by Henry were not uniformly European. His prints of fox-hunting, for example, were complemented in the Residency by pictures depicting scenes from the *Arabian Nights*. But European styles and motifs increasingly supplanted Kirkpatrick's more cosmopolitan furnishings. Henry's furniture included gilt chairs, 'splendid beyond anything I could conceive', as he wrote to Charles, while 'Wilton's Vases are very elegant, and exquisitely worked'. The Residency's library projected with particular force Henry's determination to be numbered among the empire's gentlemanly elite. Forty feet long, it included busts of the 'Ancients' on one side and the 'Moderns' on another. Here the knowledge systems that underpinned colonial power were encapsulated in sculptures that depicted Aristotle, Homer, Cicero, Shakespeare, Milton, Newton, Locke, Burke, Fox and Pitt.<sup>34</sup>

Family portraits, specifically commissioned by Henry for the Residency, served both to enhance its European emphasis and to remind visitors that the Russells were a powerful and well-connected imperial clan. Sir Henry Russell's appointment of Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Bengal had been marked in 1807 with a commission by 'the native inhabitants of Bengal' for a vast portrait of the newly elevated judge. Brought from Madras to Calcutta to execute this commission, George Chinnery (1774-1852) was Russell's private guest during the three months it took to complete the painting, which was freighted with allegorical emblems of the virtues of British justice for Bengal's indigenous and colonial populations. A more modest replica of this portrait was sent to London, where an engraving by Samuel William Reynolds underpinned circulation of Russell's image—and his new status—in the metropolis.<sup>35</sup> Intent to build upon this precedent and to delineate his paternal genealogy (and thus his natural place in the imperial governing elite) on the walls of his Indian home, Henry in 1812 commissioned Chinnery—now the premier society artist of colonial Calcutta—to paint a portrait of Sir Henry for the Hyderabad Residency.



“Sir Henry Russell, 1<sup>st</sup> Baronet (1751-1836)”, George Chinnery, engraved by Samuel William Reynolds Mezzotint, Courtesy of Government Art Collection. In this copy of Chinnery's 1807 portrait, Sir Henry embodies the power (however imaginary) of the imperial state. It was an impressive ascent for the son of a Kentish merchant, a rise to influence within the state, which the Russell family was keen to circulate.

d. 151, fols 228 verso-229 verso; Henry to J.H. Casamaijor, 26 June 1812, Bodleian, MS. Eng. lett. d. 163, fols 119-119 verso; Henry to J.H. Casamaijor, 18 July 1812, Bodleian, MS. Eng. lett. d. 163, fol. 126 verso ;

<sup>34</sup> Henry Russell to Charles Russell, 26 September 1814, Bodleian, MS. Eng. let. c. 157, fols. 92 verso-93; Henry to Charles, 1812, MS. Eng. lett. d. 152, fols 252-252 verso; Sir Henry Russell to Lady Anne Russell, 11 February 1813, MS. Eng. lett. c. 153, fols 28-29.

<sup>35</sup> Patrick Conner, *The Flamboyant Mr Chinnery* (Bangkok: River Books, 2011), 30.

To this paternal line of images, Henry at Hyderabad added portraits of his female relations that sought to weave together his natal and birth families. Memorial images of Jane Casamijor were supplemented by portraits of her surviving female kinfolk, commissioned together with portraits of Henry's mother and sisters. His mother's portrait was undertaken by Thomas Phillips (1770-1845), that of Elizabeth Casamajor by John James Masquerier (1778-1855) and the portrait of his sisters by Eldridge.<sup>36</sup>

By the time that Henry (in some disgrace) left India for England in 1820, the Residency had gained international renown for its magnificence. Its splendour was celebrated in countless engravings, lithographs and watercolours in the following years, a reputation that Henry was keen to burnish. The Hyderabad Residency set a high bar for the Russell family in England. Establishing an English country seat that could match Henry's Indian home was to tax the Russell men's financial and cultural capital heavily in the next quarter of a century.

### Testing the English Market:

Lady Anne Russell led the first stage of the Russells' protracted migration back to England from the subcontinent. She sailed from India in the *Preston* in 1804, taking with her the two youngest children (Rose and George) and two female Indian servants (known in the family as 'Black Mary' and Anne Ayah, albeit the latter was re-named Mrs Williams when she began to serve as a lady's maid in England).<sup>37</sup> In the decade before she was joined by Sir Henry, Lady Anne established a succession of transient households for her five daughters and three youngest sons in London, Bath, Tunbridge Wells, Dover, Walmer (a convenient spot for smuggling goods from Indian vessels ashore) and the countryside. By spring 1806, assisted by her brother Whitworth, she had taken an extended lease on a house at Hookwood, Surrey, surrounded by several acres of garden.<sup>38</sup> A few months later, she and her family were residing in town, occupying a small rented house in Park Lane opposite the Grosvenor Gate and adjacent to the residence of a Whitworth aunt. The Park Lane house had been taken to allow the Russells' eldest daughter, Anne (d. 1808) to be presented at Court, an essential step in the family's international campaign to secure their status within the upper gentry. Her younger sons' fortunes were cultivated by ensuring that they enjoyed privileged access to her brother Whitworth, by being placed in schools near his stately home in Kent, Knole.<sup>39</sup>

Concern about Hookwood's healthiness as well as its expense encouraged Lady Anne to seek alternative quarters. Complaints from Sir Henry about the excessive cost of her peripatetic lifestyle in

---

<sup>36</sup> For traditions of Anglo-Indian portraiture in this period, see Mildred Archer, *India and British Portraiture, 1770-1825* (London: Philip Wilson, 1979). For Henry's commission to Chinnery and his request for portraits of the Russell and Casamijor women in England, see Henry Russell to J.H. Casamajor, 13 February 1813, Bodleian, MS. Eng. lett. d. 163, fols 89 verso-90, Henry to Casamajor, find date, Bodleian, MS. Eng. lett. d. 164, fols 164-165, and Henry to Sir Henry, November 1813, MS. Eng. lett. d. 164, fols 90-91. See also Finn, 'Colonial Gifts', 214-217.

<sup>37</sup> Lady Anne to Charles Russell, 20 January 1805, Bodleian, MS. Eng. lett. c. 154, fols 63-63 verso. An *ayah* was an Indian nursemaid or lady's maid.

<sup>38</sup> Lady Anne Russell to Charles Russell, 24 May 1806, Bodleian, MS. Eng. lett. c. 154, fol. 81 verso. This may be the Grade II listed house, Hookwood House, at Limpsfield, Surrey.

<sup>39</sup> Lady Anne Russell to Henry Russell, 24 May 1806, Bodleian, MS. Eng. lett. c. 154, fols 78-78 verso, 81 verso; Lady Anne to Charles, 13 August 1807, MS. Eng. lett., c. 154, fol. 112 verso.

England were a leitmotif in the couple's correspondence. She wrote to Charles in 1809 about her chronic worry regarding 'money concerns: they so much vex and hurt me that at times I feel entirely wretched'.<sup>40</sup> A month later, she took her children to visit their uncle Whitworth at Buckhurst Park, his East Sussex estate. Here her younger sons enjoyed their uncle's largesse, prompting their mother to write to India to petition her second eldest son for Indian shawls, luxury items that figured prominently in the family's patronage networks.<sup>41</sup> In 1811, she took at house at Riverhead, Kent, near her brother's Knole estate, but this proved only a temporary settlement. Early in 1813 she was back in London, based at Baker Street, and informed Sir Henry that she had taken a lease on a house and stables at Clifton for £350 per annum. It was from the Clifton residence that she reported to her husband how much her London friends had admired the family portraits she had sent to Henry in Hyderabad. Clifton too, however, proved only a temporary way-station. Caroline Russell wrote to her brother Charles in April 1814, shortly before their mother's death, that she had taken a three-year lease on Cannon Hill, a large villa with a park five miles from Windsor Castle.<sup>42</sup>

Sir Henry sailed for England in the *Metcalfe*, which departed Calcutta on 13 December 1813. His reunion with his wife, who died on 1 August 1814, was only brief. For the next several years he headed a household at 62, Wimpole Street, London that—until their marriages—included his four surviving daughters, Caroline (1792-1869), Kate (1795-1845), Henrietta (b. 1797) and Rose (1800-1889). His two youngest sons, the clergyman William Whitworth Russell (1795-1847) and the lawyer George Lake Russell (b. 1802), resided at Wimpole Street when not absent at school or university. Sir Henry, who had critiqued his wife's apparent extravagance in England from his base in Calcutta, was shocked to learn at firsthand about the cost of genteel English life. In January 1816, he wrote to Charles that 'the expense of living in England is not to be conceived: the furnishing my House, which I have done elegantly; & the portioning [that is, the allocation of a marriage settlement to] Kate, which I must do liberally, have reduced my Finances very much: but by keeping as much of my property as can be prudently kept, at Hyderabad, at 12 [%]...Interest, I hope in a short time to be recruited'.<sup>43</sup> His descriptions of the furnishing of the house at Wimpole Street help to explain Sir Henry's perceptions of the high cost of living in London. He had travelled to Hyderabad shortly before sailing to England, and the magnificence of his son's palatial residence there had clearly captured his imagination. Returned home, Sir Henry promptly took his daughters to the continent to shop.<sup>44</sup> The house at Wimpole Street, he wrote to Charles, 'is magnificently furnished; the clocks, candelabras, & vases, which we brought from Paris, added to the Ebony Chairs, crimson & gold curtains...large Mirrors, & several beautiful cabinets, make it really very superb & the taste of Caroline has preserved aptness & uniformity in the colouring'.<sup>45</sup> The extent to which Sir Henry eschewed Asiatic styles of *chinoiserie* for French furnishings upon his re-immersion in Georgian culture and society remains opaque. Caricatures of the tasteless and effeminacy of 'Oriental'

<sup>40</sup> Lady Anne Russell to Charles Russell, 9 July 1809, Bodleian, MS. Eng. lett. c. 154, fols 159-159 verso.

<sup>41</sup> Lady Anne Russell to Charles Russell, 10 August 1809, Bodleian, MS. Eng. lett. c. 154, fols 1164 verso-166.

<sup>42</sup> Henry Russell to J.H. Casamaijor, 15 November 1811, Bodleian, MS. Eng. lett. d. 163, fol. 60 verso; Lady Anne Russell to Sir Henry Russell, MS. Eng. lett. c. 153, fols 6-7 verso; Caroline Russell to Charles Russell, 27 April 1814, MS. Eng. lett. c. 177, fols 122-122 verso.

<sup>43</sup> Sir Henry Russell to Charles Russell, 25 January 1816, Bodleian, MS. Eng. lett. c. 152, fols 232-232 verso.

<sup>44</sup> The interpenetration of and distinctions between English and French luxury trades in the Georgian era are detailed by Maxine Berg and Helen Clifford, (eds), *Consumer Culture in Europe, 1650-1850* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999) and Helen Clifford and Maxine Berg, 'Selling Consumption in the Eighteenth Century: Advertising and the Trade Card in Britain and France', *Cultural and Social History*, 4, 2 (2007), 145-170.

<sup>45</sup> Sir Henry Russell to Charles Russell, 25 January 1816, Bodleian, MS. Eng. lett. c. 152, fol. 234 verso.

excess were widely pervasive in English literature and culture at this time, but we have little textured understanding of how imperial careers mapped out on domestic interiors upon Britons' return home.<sup>46</sup>

Although Sir Henry settled in London, neither he nor his eldest sons had abandoned their collective intention to translate their Indian fortunes into English landed estates. Sir Henry's elevation to a Baronetcy expanded their ambitions to join the governing elite. In 1813 he had written to his wife that he intended to combine his wealth with that of his sons: Sir Henry proposed to pay £100,000, his son Henry £60,000 and Charles £40,000, with the rents divided proportionately.<sup>47</sup> Henry Russell was reluctant to return to England from Hyderabad until he could ensure an annual income of £3,000, which he estimated would require an investment in land of £80,000. Desire for wealth vied with social ambition in Henry's investment calculations. The yield on government bonds was greater than that on land, but gentility held sway over mere profits as he contemplated his return to England: 'I had rather have 3000 a Year in Landed Property, than 5000 in the Funds', he wrote to Sir Henry in 1815.<sup>48</sup>

Henry Russell's second marriage, to a Catholic woman from the French colonial enclave of Pondicherry, complicated these plans. Solemnised in Hyderabad in 1816, this was the second marriage Henry had undertaken precipitously and without his father's consent. As a union with a French Catholic, it presented obstacles to his establishment as an English gentleman of the governing elite at home. Henry broke the news of his second marriage to his father with a characteristic combination of bravado and emotional blackmail. 'My Marriage will hardly affect the Amount of my Fortune, or require me, on that Account, to stay longer in India than I otherwise should have done', he wrote to Sir Henry in October 1816. 'But when I find that you are estranged, and that your Door will be shut against me, I shall have lost one of the strongest inducements I had to return to England, and shall probably therefore remain more years at Hyderabad, and amass a greater Fortune, than I have hitherto intended.'<sup>49</sup>

Clotilde Mottet (c. 1795-1872) bore Henry four children in rapid succession in India, of whom two (Henry and Anne) survived to sail with the couple for England in 1820 ([for an image of Henry Russell sketched in 1821 by Sir Francis Leggatt Chantrey, click here](#)). In the event, Sir Henry was readily reconciled to his new daughter-in-law (not least because she bore him several grandsons), and the purchase of country seats again moved to the forefront of the Russells' ambitions. Sir Henry had contemplated the purchase of Summer Hill estate (near Tunbridge Wells, one of his wife's many resting-places on her transit through town and countryside upon returning to England) for £125,000 in 1815, but ultimately decided against the purchase.<sup>50</sup> He also sought to negotiate the purchase of

---

<sup>46</sup> See for example Vanessa Alayrae-Fielding, "'Frailty Thy Name is China': Women, Chinoiserie and the Treatment of Low Culture in Eighteenth-Century England', *Women's History Review*, 18, 4 (2009), 659-668; Margot Finn, 'The Homes of England', in James Chandler, (ed.), *The Cambridge History of English Romantic Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 307-310; and D.L. Porter, 'Monstrous Beauty: Eighteenth-Century Fashion and the Aesthetics of the Chinese Taste', *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 35, 3 (2002), 395-412.

<sup>47</sup> Sir Henry Russell to Lady Anne Russell, 16 March 1813, Bodleian, MS. Eng. lett. c. 153, fols 56 verso-57.

<sup>48</sup> Henry Russell to Sir Henry Russell, 20 April 1815, Bodleian, MS. Eng. lett. c. 151, fols 107-108.

<sup>49</sup> Henry Russell to Sir Henry Russell, 3 October 1816, Bodleian, MS. Eng. lett. c. 151, fols 176 verso-177.

<sup>50</sup> Summer Hill was mentioned, and illustrated with a plate, in Anthony Hamilton's popular *Memoirs of Count Grammont*, of which Sir Walter Scott produced an edition at this time: 2 vols (London: William Miller and James Carpenter, 1811), vol. 2: 210, 213, 226, 332-334. It had earlier been the home of Sir Thomas Walsingham.

Gosfield Hall in Essex for £120,000, but the Duke of Buckingham had insisted on 150,000 guineas, and this sale too was unsuccessful.<sup>51</sup>

While his father debated the merits of such properties, Henry Russell upon his return to England plunged into fashionable European consumer markets. January 1822 saw him write to Charles from Paris, where he and Clotilde had already begun their campaign to furnish their prospective home. Here Henry acquired bronze horses for 1,500 francs and a chest of drawers for 500 francs, holding back from other purchases only because he lacked a house in which to put them. As in Hyderabad, he relied on Charles for furnishing advice. ‘I wait for your Opinion before I decide whether to buy some pieces of very fine Bowle [*sic: boulle*] Furniture which are for sale here’, he commented to his brother, supplementing this plea with instructions for a vase, adorned with an elephant’s head, that he had commissioned to be made in London.<sup>52</sup>



Writing Table - Paris, France, 1700-1715

Boulle marquetry (tortoiseshell and brass) on a carcass of oak, with walnut and ebony veneers: gilt-brass mounts. 1014:1.2-1882. Courtesy of the Victoria & Albert Museum, London. *Boulle* furniture was conspicuous among Henry Russell’s European purchases when he returned from India and began to lay the foundations of his life as an English landed gentleman.

Back in England, Henry and Clotilde now joined the landed gentry, if only vicariously, when they took a lease on Sutton Park, Bedfordshire in 1822. The family seat of the Burgoyne family, Sutton Park was connected to both the North American and the Indian empire through its proprietors’ military service. The seventh baronet, Sir John Burgoyne (1739-1785), for example, was a cavalry officer in India in the 1780s, marrying and dying in the Madras Presidency.<sup>53</sup> Leasing Sutton Park nonetheless helped Henry to reconfigure himself as a truly English gentleman. ‘The place that we have taken belongs to the family of the Burgoynes, and has...for generations’, he wrote to a friend in

<sup>51</sup> Henry Russell to Sir Henry Russell, 22 October 1815, Bodleian, MS. Eng. lett. c. 151, fols 142 verso-143 verso; Sir Henry Russell to Henry Russell, 13 March 1824, MS. Eng. lett. c. 151, fols 278-278 verso.

<sup>52</sup> Henry Russell to Charles Russell, 12 January 1822, Bodleian, MS. Eng. lett., c. 157, fols 152 and 154.

<sup>53</sup> H.M. Chichester, Philip Carter, ‘Burgoyne, Sir John, Seventh Baronet (1739-1785)’, rev. Philip Carter, Oxford Dictionary of National Biography (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) [<http://oxforddnb.com/view/article/4012/>], accessed 29 September 2011]. Henry leased Sutton Park from the ninth baronet, John Montagu Burgoyne (1796-1856).

Hyderabad. ‘They are one of the oldest Families in England: the Hall is lined with the Pictures of their Ancestors.’ Costing Henry only £300 per annum, the house was also ideally placed to preserve his links with the families that had provided him with powerful political patronage in India. Its location near the Great Northern Road made Sutton Park a convenient staging post for the family of the late Gilbert Elliot, first Earl Minto (1751-1814)—who as Governor General had promoted Henry to the Hyderabad Residency, and whose son John Elliott had married Jane Casamaijor’s sister, Amelia—as they travelled between London and their family seat in the Scottish Borders, Minto. ‘The Dowager Lady Minto, when she was coming here, actually drove past the Park, not thinking it possible such a place to be had for so low a rent as she knew I paid’, Henry wrote proudly. ‘The habits of Country life too are much more like those of India, and I do not like them a bit the less on that Account’, he concluded with satisfaction.<sup>54</sup>

### Swallowfield’s Reformation:

Residence at Sutton Park served to whet Henry Russell’s appetite for settled life as an English country gentleman, and the purchase of Swallowfield now brought this longstanding family aspiration to fruition.<sup>55</sup> He moved his family to Reading and then to Brighton while extensive renovations were undertaken at Swallowfield in 1826. The long-suffering Charles, unsurprisingly, stepped in to supervise in Henry’s absence, as he had done years ago at the Hyderabad Residency. In October 1826 he wrote to Henry to describe designs for Swallowfield’s mantelpieces and statuary prepared for Charles and Sir Henry by the London tradesman Atkinson, and debated the relative merits of Sienna and black and gold marble for the dining room.<sup>56</sup> Soft furnishings for Swallowfield preoccupied Charles a month later. Cotton fabrics that, a century before, had been exotic luxury handicrafts imported from India to England were now available for Swallowfield’s refurbishment at short notice from domestic British manufactories—a shift in production that reflected India’s precipitous fall from its place of ascendancy in global textile production under British colonial rule.<sup>57</sup> Charles wrote that their supplier, Deacon, had sent Henry ‘a parcel of patterns of chintz for bed furniture. If you like them, but would prefer them in other colours, they can be printed in any colour you please, in the course of three weeks’, he marvelled.<sup>58</sup>

Although new British manufactures were often appealing, his cosmopolitan knowledge of the consumer luxury market often caused Charles concern ([for an image of Charles Russell by William Holl Jr, after Abraham Wivell that was published in 1847, click here](#)). As the family increasingly familiarised itself with French fashions—a development assisted by visits to Clotilde’s Parisian

<sup>54</sup> Henry Russell to Robert Pitman, 14 September 1822, Bodleian, MS. Eng. lett. c. 169, fols. 80-80 verso, 82, 83.

<sup>55</sup> It is not clear whether Charles, as originally intended, was a co-proprietor of the estate with his father an elder brother, or what proportion of the cost of its purchase was met by Sir Henry and Henry Russell. Lady Russell in *Swallowfield and Its Owners* (page 252) states the year of purchase as 1820, but internal evidence from the family’s correspondence suggests the mid 1820s.

<sup>56</sup> Charles Russell to Henry Russell, 4 October 1826, Bodleian, MS. Eng. lett. c. 159, fols 79-79 verso.

<sup>57</sup> For this broader economic trend and its entanglement with the East India Company’s history, see Prasannan Parthasarathi, *Why Europe Grew Rich and Asia Did Not: Global Economic Divergence, 1600-1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

<sup>58</sup> Charles Russell to Henry Russell, Bodleian, MS. Eng. lett. c. 159, fols 85 verso-86.



relations—a preference for continental material culture increasingly challenged the brothers’ British and colonial tastes.<sup>59</sup> Upon returning from a French excursion in 1827, Charles reported to Henry on progress at Swallowfield, but fretted about the quality of the new wallpaper. ‘Where the pattern of the paper is pretty & full, the rooms look handsome, but in two or three of them the paper looks rather common; perhaps more so from my having just seen such rich papers in France’, he commented.<sup>60</sup> Their London supplier had shown Charles patterns for Swallowfield’s silk furnishings, but again Charles worried that silks from Lyons that he and Henry had seen in France were superior.<sup>61</sup> March 1828 saw Charles recommend Belgian carpets—available in London at a shop at 145 Leadenhall Street or directly from the Belgian warehouses—to Henry both for Swallowfield and to send to his Mottet in-laws in Hyderabad. In May, the brothers travelled to Tournai to visit the factory itself, and selected a carpet with a pink ground for Swallowfield’s dining room.<sup>62</sup> By November 1828, Henry and Charles had spent a small fortune of their father’s money on Swallowfield’s embellishment. ‘My Father last night got Atkinsons [sic] account of outstanding bills amounting in London & Swallowfield to £5276’, Charles wrote on 26 November. ‘He takes it astonishingly well.’<sup>63</sup>

Although Sir Henry Russell received rents from Swallowfield and was an occasional house guest there, it was Henry and Clotilde Russell—together with their six surviving children—who made this house their home. Charles, who served as a Tory MP for Reading for many years, was a constant visitor, and continued to work in harness with Henry both at Swallowfield and from London to make Swallowfield a venerable English family seat.

Family portraits, which had featured prominently in Henry’s refashioning of the Hyderabad Residency, were likewise central to the brothers’ plans for Swallowfield. Retired from the Company service, Henry now enjoyed the wealth, leisure and connections to raise his collection to new heights. Both Charles and Henry entered eagerly into genealogical research from the later 1820s onward, intent to familiarise themselves with the biographies as well as the portraits of a family they had left behind as adolescents to seek their fortunes in India.<sup>64</sup>

Commissioning new family portraits, and retouching existing ones, occupied the brothers throughout the 1830s, connecting them with the flourishing English art trade. In 1831, Henry Russell commissioned David Wilkie (1785-1841) to complete a portrait of his uncle, Earl Whitworth, a picture begun by Sir Thomas Lawrence (1769-1830).<sup>65</sup> His mother’s family was far more socially exalted than his father’s, but Henry was careful to ensure that his paternal line was well-represented on Swallowfield’s walls. He was also eager to continue to use portraits to maintain links with his in-

<sup>59</sup> For French influences in Georgian country house furnishing, see esp. Ivan Hall, ‘French Influence at Burton Constable’, *Furniture History*, 8 (1972), 70-77; Christopher Rowell, ‘French Furniture at Uppark: Sir Harry Featherstonhaugh and His Friends in Post-Revolutionary Paris’, *Furniture History*, 43 (2007), 267-292; and Charles Cator, ‘French Furniture at Wanstead’, *Furniture History*, 43 (2007), 227-236.

<sup>60</sup> Charles Russell to Henry Russell, Bodleian, MS. Eng. lett. c. 159, vols 139 verso-140. For wallpaper as a signifier of taste, see Vickery, *Behind Closed Doors*, chap. 6.

<sup>61</sup> Charles Russell to Henry Russell, 20 November 1827, Bodleian, MS. Eng. lett. c. 159, fols 158-158 verso.

<sup>62</sup> Charles Russell to Henry Russell, 22 March 1828, Bodleian, MS. Eng. lett. c. 159, fols 183-183 verso; Henry Russell to Clotilde Russell, 25 May 1828, MS. Eng. lett. d. 150, fols 17-17 verso. Tournai had long been a production centre for high-quality draperies and tapestries and was now also known for its carpets.

<sup>63</sup> Charles Russell to Henry Russell, 26 November 1828, Bodleian, MS. Eng. lett. c. 160, fols 44-44 verso.

<sup>64</sup> See for example Charles Russell to Henry Russell, 11 February 1830, Bodleian, MS. Eng. lett. c. 160, fols 127-128 verso. For country house portraiture and the making of Georgian family identities, see Kate Retford, *The Art of Domestic Life: Family Portraiture in Eighteenth-Century England* (London: Yale University Press, 2006).

<sup>65</sup> Henry Russell to Charles Russell, 10-11 August 1831, Bodleian, MS. Eng. lett. d. 153, fols 127-128, 130.

laws. The artist George Richmond (1809-1896) was a frequent visitor at Swallowfield in the 1830s, welcome as a houseguest, an artist and an art-consultant. Portraits of Henry and Clotilde, completed by Richmond in 1834, were sent to Clotilde's sister and brother-in-law, now resettled from Hyderabad to Exeter; another sister, still in India, received a drawing of Clotilde by Richmond in 1836.<sup>66</sup>

Both English and Indian subjects featured in Henry's art collection at Swallowfield. When he wrote to Charles with instructions for Wilkie about the painting and framing of family portraits in 1836, Henry thus also mentioned two pictures of 'Indian subjects' in Wilkie's care.<sup>67</sup> Perhaps the most celebrated of the Indian portraits in his English home was Chinnery's evocative painting of the mixed-race children of Henry's predecessor at the Hyderabad Residency, James Kirkpatrick. Born to Kirkpatrick by Khair un-Nissa—who subsequently became Henry's lover—Mir Ghulam Ali (later baptised William George Kirkpatrick) and his sister Noor un-Nissa (christened Katherine Aurora Kirkpatrick) were depicted in this painting in 'Oriental' dress on the eve of their separation from their parents and departure for Britain, where they were to be raised as Europeans by their father's relatives.<sup>68</sup> The display of this portrait at Swallowfield—in full view of Henry's wife, sons and daughters—captures the contradictions (between legitimacy and illegitimacy, between Asia and Europe and between home and away) that shot through imperial family life in English domestic settings.

Over time, however, first English and then, increasingly, continental European subjects supplanted Indian items in his collection. In 1840, newly returned from the continent, Henry debated with Charles the best way to display his growing collection. By October he had decided that the breakfast room would contain his portraits of Mrs Casamaijor (Jane's mother), their paternal uncle, Henshaw Russell, various Italian prints, pictures on classical themes and a Madonna. The paintings in the hall, he had decided, would include pictures of St Anne and the child Jesus as well as Chinnery's portrait of Sir Henry, painted for the Hyderabad Residency. Perhaps concerned by the increasingly continental emphasis of his collection, Henry in December purchased or reframed a series of paintings that depicted key figures in England's royal history: Charles II, the Duke of Marlborough, Lord Portland and Queen Anne.<sup>69</sup>

The death of Sir Henry in 1836 elevated Henry to the baronetage, and appears to have given him new licence to develop his European tastes. The family spent much of the next few years travelling on the continent, where Henry discovered a passion for Renaissance Italian art that was to contribute significantly to Swallowfield's revised interiors. He wrote to Charles from Venice in 1837 to report his enjoyment of paintings by Titian, Veronese and Tintoretto, as well as 'a host of first rate masters whose names even I never heard of before'. He purchased copies of a painting by Titian of the Assumption, and one by Veronese of supper at the house of Levi. The two boxes of purchases he was sending back to Swallowfield, he reported, were filled with a cornucopia of artefacts: books, rolls of prints, old bronze knockers, an ebony writing box, a bust, a sleeping cupid, a marble basin, carved wooden heads, female figures and his Renaissance reproductions.<sup>70</sup> Writing from Naples in 1838,

<sup>66</sup> Henry Russell to Charles Russell, 26 October 1834, Bodleian, MS. Eng. lett. d. 155, fol. 146; Henry Russell to Charles Russell, 22 May 1836, MS. Eng. let. c. 161, fol. 260 verso.

<sup>67</sup> Henry Russell to Charles Russell, 7 July 1836, Bodleian, MS. Eng. lett. c. 162, fols 48-49 verso.

<sup>68</sup> For an image and interpretation of this portrait, see Conner, *Flamboyant Mr Chinnery*, 28-29.

<sup>69</sup> Henry Russell to Charles Russell, 12 July, 6 October, 19 October and 15 December 1840, Bodleian, MS. Eng. lett. d. 156, fols 9, 111-111 verso, 119-120, 163.

<sup>70</sup> Henry Russell to Charles Russell, 14 March 1837, Bodleian, MS. Eng. lett. c. 163, fols 128-129.

before the family moved on to Rome, Henry told Charles to expect a further eight cases of continental goods—maps, prints, a marble table-top, bronze and Etruscan ware. From Rome, he sent a further ten cases of goods home to Swallowfield.<sup>71</sup>

It was by refreshing the first baronet's Wimpole Street furnishings with continental materials that the second baronet now prepared to integrate these inherited goods from London into his home at Swallowfield. From Paris, shortly before the family's return to their home, Henry wrote to Charles in August 1838 asking for the dimensions of their father's ebony couches. 'Clotilde has the dimensions of the seats of the small & circular chairs, and she thinks some of the yellow flowered silk she bought at Genoa, will do to cover them, but we shall want something rich to cover the couch with', he commented. 'If it be not too expensive, Beauvais tapestry would agree admirably with the carpet and curtains, and would be much stronger and more durable than silk.'<sup>72</sup> To bind these new European acquisitions more securely with English traditions, Henry upon his return to Swallowfield immersed himself again in genealogy. 'Now for genealogy', he wrote to Charles in 1839. 'I am making out such an account as I can of our family for the Baronetage, and am, at the same time, preparing notes to be affixed to the backs of the old Dover pictures.'<sup>73</sup> His place in the gentry now secured by the family's inclusion in Burke's *Peerage and Baronetage*, by Swallowfield's establishment as the Russell family seat and by his ability to identify the paternal lineage from which he had sprung, Henry Russell—nabob and nouveau riche though he had been—had now arrived at home.

### Conclusions:



'Mr Joseph Entangled'

Wood engraving, c.1861

[www.victorianweb.org/art/illustration/thackeray/4.1.html](http://www.victorianweb.org/art/illustration/thackeray/4.1.html).

Here the returned East India Company official appears to be both domesticated and out of place in the effeminate interior of the English home; the Russell brothers' experiences of furnishing in England and on the subcontinent suggests a far more active level of agency on the part of male consumers in the Company service.

<sup>71</sup> Henry Russell to Charles Russell, 13 February and 6 May 1838, Bodleian, MS. Eng. lett. c. 163, fols 8, 21-21 verso.

<sup>72</sup> Henry Russell to Charles Russell, 15 August 1838, Bodleian, MS. Eng. lett. c. 163, fols 60 verso-61.

<sup>73</sup> Henry Russell to Charles Russell, 3 March 1839, Bodleian, MS. Eng. lett. c. 163, fols 184-184 verso.

Since its development in the 1760s, the image of the nabob has figured in British caricature as a quintessentially possessive individual. Consumed by his individual needs, addicted to Indian tastes and incapable of casting off his commercial origins to acquire gentility, the returned Anglo-Indian was a byword in Georgian England for the failure of social, cultural and national integration. William Thackeray, himself the son of an East India Company civil servant, captured this stereotype with great acuity in *Vanity Fair* (1847-48): his anti-hero, the returned Company official Jos Sedley, is an object of continuous ridicule for his failure to display English patterns of masculine behaviour focused on the wider social good.

The history of the Russell family suggests many of the ways in which this stereotype falls short of social practice. Whereas the archetypal nabob was a single-minded individualist, the Russell correspondence reveals Sir Henry, his wife and his two eldest sons to have been key collaborators in a collective family enterprise. The flow of material goods—between Calcutta and Hyderabad, between London and Madras, between Paris, Venice, Rome and Berkshire—was an essential marker of this shared endeavour, which was designed to translate a new fortune acquired in India into secure, genteel landed wealth and power in England. Male consumers—too often written out of histories of Georgian consumer culture—were essential players in this familial campaign.<sup>74</sup> Family networks were also vital to the Russells' success in fashioning their place in Georgian society. In-laws as well as blood-kin played key roles in this process of family formation. In India, Henry Russell relied on the family of his first wife, the Casamajors, not only for emotional support, but also for fine furnishings from the metropolis that would embellish the interiors of the Hyderabad Residency, and for family portraits that would help to underpin his status as Resident. In England, the French in-laws acquired through his second wife later became an asset, connecting him to Parisian fashion and to a wider continental tradition of art and culture that was to transform Swallowfield's interiors.

English and European influences appear increasingly to have displaced Indian motifs in Swallowfield's decor over time, but Anglo Indians remained central to sociability at Swallowfield through the lifetimes of the first two baronets.<sup>75</sup> Clotilde's French origins and her Catholicism may have been bars to Swallowfield's use as a domestic focal point of parliamentary politics: Charles's electioneering activities were largely confined to nearby Reading, his constituency. But Swallowfield nonetheless emerged as a key gathering place of Anglo-Indian families, and thus as a site of Company politics. The men and women recorded as visitors in the family correspondence include names that recur in the Company's lists of officers over successive generations. The Casamajors, the Clives, the Elliots of Minto and the Duke of Wellington—who had first risen to military fame in the Madras Presidency and had known the first Sir Henry in India—were all repeated visitors at Swallowfield. The seat's location near Windsor Park helped to solidify these social connections: the region was awash with returned Anglo-Indians who had purchased estates in the surrounding countryside. Swallowfield was only one spoke within a wider Berkshire hub of East India Company families at home.

---

<sup>74</sup> For men in Georgian consumer culture, see Margot Finn, 'Men's Things: Masculine Consumption in the Consumer Revolution', *Social History*, 25, 2 (2000), 133-155, and Vickery, *Behind Closed Doors*, esp. chaps 2 and 4.

<sup>75</sup> The next generations of Russells had predominantly literary, rather than Company, circles of friends to visit, although this did not preclude Indian themes from shaping Swallowfield sociability. Dickens, Thackeray and Wilkie Collins were all friends of George Russell (who became the fourth baronet after the death without issue of his brother Charles). Family tradition held that Collins' novel *The Moonstone* (1868) was inspired by tales of Pitt's diamond heard at Swallowfield. Russell, *Swallowfield and Its Owners*, 211, 303

If Swallowfield exemplifies a long and English country house tradition, its history as the Russell family seat can only be understood if its Englishness is situated within wider global networks in which both India and continental Europe were conspicuously present. The brothers Henry and Charles laboured for decades to trace their family line backwards through successive English generations, but in constructing the family seat, they drew upon a more cosmopolitan genealogy. Swallowfield's acquisition rested firmly on Indian wealth and was shaped by colonial India's vibrant patterns of consumption; over time, without ever effacing these Asian foundations, its material culture increasingly reflected a broadly European style of furnishing that combined English and continental tastes and products. The country house, the Russell correspondence repeatedly demonstrates, must be understood as an ongoing process that occurred across both time and space, rather than as a fixed fabric rooted in a single style, period or locale. The fashioning of Swallowfield reflects a highly mobile confluence of interlocking family histories. The senior family members' familiarity with Calcutta's exotic emporia, the many mansions through which Lady Anne and her younger children made their peripatetic way while waiting for Sir Henry's return, the two-fold Palladian and Oriental opulence of the Hyderabad Residency during Henry and Charles's residence there and the brothers' discovery (mediated by the French connections of Henry's second wife) of continental European art and luxuries all combined in the making of this English home. To understand the Georgian country house it is essential to move beyond the individualising perspective of the nabob, to jettison the notion of English heritage as purely English, and to situate Company homes such as Swallowfield in a dense and dynamic global web of interlinked persons, objects and homes.

**Authorship:**

Prose text: Margot Finn

Illustrations and 2<sup>nd</sup>-level text: Kate Smith and Margot Finn

Additional information and suggestions supplied by: Colonel John Chown, Vicky Coltman, Pauline Davies, Julie Day, Georgina Green, Caroline Jackson, Beverly Lemire, Margaret Makepeace, Glenys Marriott, George McGilvary, Jon Stobart and Sir John Sykes.

Copyright © 2012 University of Warwick

Material may not be reproduced without the express permission of the author

Research for this project is led by Professor Margot Finn with funding from the Leverhulme Trust.