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Growing up in a Company town

The East India Company presence in South Hertfordshire

Chris Jeppesen

Situated just north of the M25 in south Hertfordshire, Brookmans Park is an affluent but otherwise unremarkable commuter village of around 3,500 inhabitants. Perhaps best known today for its assortment of minor celebrities and acclaimed in glossy property magazines for its desirable village living and good transport links, it has always proved attractive to those looking to move beyond, but remain within easy reach of, London's boundaries.¹ The village is centred upon a railway station and small green surrounded by shops and restaurants, its residential streets spreading across the eastern part of the parish of North Mymms.² Even as redevelopment proceeds apace, the dominant mix of mock-Tudor detached residences alongside more modest semi-detached housing and bungalows betrays its mid-twentieth-century origins as a middle-class commuter village. Taking advantage of the post First World War building boom, developers began to construct 'a country village with all modern conveniences' on land that formed part of the large Brookmans estate.³ Over the next four decades the village grew steadily, and by the mid-1960s boasted just over 2,500 residents, served by a golf course, a primary school and secondary school, and large areas of protected parkland.⁴ It is here that I grew up in the 1980s and 90s.

In 1800 the area looked very different. Largely agricultural, it was dominated by four grand houses and their estates: Brookmans, Gobions (sometimes spelt Gubbins), Potterells and the smaller Moffats House.⁵

Today only the latter survives intact, albeit in partitioned form, the others having been destroyed by fire or demolished at various points from the 1840s to the 1980s. Much of the local history I learnt whilst attending both village schools recounted an insular past shaped by the rise and fall of these country estates and the coming of the railway. It was a narrative populated with an eclectic cast of characters ranging from Sir Thomas More (1478–1535), whose family owned Gobions in the sixteenth century, to Little Miss Muffet of nursery rhyme fame, purportedly written by an inhabitant of Moffats House.⁶ This history has been carefully woven into the village's civic identity: the primary school's crest combines a hart (the area formerly being a royal hunting ground) and a spider's web in testament to the nursery rhyme, whilst the senior school, Chancellors, owes its name and crest (a chancellor's wig) to the connection to Henry VIII's unfortunate counsellor. Growing up, this local history sparked little interest in me, always seeming so mundane compared to the excitement of learning about wider horizons at school: while my village provided a happy place to enjoy childhood, as a teenager it never seemed anything other than parochial.

It thus came as a surprise when research for the *East India Company at Home* project revealed that between 1700 and 1850 all four of these estates were owned, at one time or another, by families with intricate connections to the wider imperial world. Throughout these decades, wealth derived in India and the Caribbean was channelled into the purchasing and redevelopment of the area. Owners and residents included two East India Company (EIC) Directors, three EIC officials, an elite Huguenot family operating at the intersection of trade to Asia and the Caribbean, several West India merchants (including one whose family network spread across three continents), and the son of an early Deputy Chairman of the EIC, whose own fortune came through investments in the South Sea Company. Collectively these families formed a community that exchanged land and property, intermarried, socialized together and, in so doing, remade the landscape upon which my village now stands.

This chapter examines the local world these men and women helped create but also situates this within the entangled web of trade, kinship and patronage that spread from rural Hertfordshire, to the City of London, across Britain and outwards to encompass an expanding global empire. In so doing, it poses questions about how these wider perspectives force us to reconsider entrenched narratives that so often serve to partition the histories of Britain and its empire.⁷ Even though wealth from overseas fundamentally changed the area in which I grew up, the empire remained utterly inconsequential to the local history I absorbed. This historical

amnesia is partly explained by the fact that these houses no longer remain. Nevertheless, as recent research highlights, the prevailing image of the country house as the most quintessential of English settings frequently belies the legacies of empire embedded in the fabric of buildings and contents.⁸ Recovering the forgotten histories of the country estates that now form such a focal point for the heritage and tourism sectors, often within rural settings adamantly resistant to changing cultural realities, forces us to reconsider the dominant narratives associated with these sites and the often exclusionary vision of Englishness they help sustain.⁹

Over the last decade, the process of remembering the empire in Britain has become ever more contested.¹⁰ New voices, often born after formal decolonization into an increasingly multi-cultural society, have disrupted entrenched, self-congratulatory narratives that posit a benign British colonialism as a source of pride and worked to identify a less insular and more diverse national history than 'our island story' permits. At times this battle over memory has erupted around overtly imperial sites, such as the recent Rhodes Must Fall campaign in Oxford, or through former colonized peoples' efforts to gain restorative justice for past crimes.¹¹ Yet, as the multitude of local history projects undertaken in 2007 to mark the bicentenary of the abolition of the slave trade and the findings of the *East India Company at Home* and *Legacies of British Slave-ownership* projects have laid bare, the impact of slavery, and empire more broadly, permeated the daily lives of groups and individuals across Britain in less obvious but nonetheless profound ways.¹² In challenging the assumption that empire was something that happened elsewhere this work has underscored the contribution made by the new imperial histories over the last thirty years in disrupting the false dichotomy of 'here and over there' that has for so long stood at the heart of many assessments of the empire's impact on British society.¹³ It is not, as Catherine Hall has shown, happenstance that a celebratory narrative shaped around abolition and the bringing of modernity to colonial peoples has come to dominate how empire is remembered in Britain. Rather, over the last 200 years this has depended upon a carefully coordinated process of selective remembering and calculated omission.¹⁴

Recovering this past necessitates a clearer understanding of the relationship between the local and global. As Katie Donington reminds us '[L]ocal areas do not operate in isolation, they were and are places that reach out and connect to different geographic locations. People, capital, goods and ideas constantly circulate, leaving traces of themselves behind.'¹⁵ Empire inflected the daily lives of individuals across Britain in diverse and unpredictable ways. Wealth generated through

global trade funded the remaking of local landscapes through the construction of large houses and lavish gardens; exotic items and commodities percolated throughout British society, reconfiguring domestic spaces and individual consumption habits; diverse individuals with experience of life in colonial settings settled across Britain, challenging established social hierarchies and sometimes transgressing entrenched norms of gender and race.¹⁶ By shifting focus from the institutional foundations of imperial authority onto the family as a central structure in the operation of the pre-Victorian empire, scholars have recently opened rich new perspectives on the circuits that enmeshed local and global contexts.¹⁷ In exploring these entanglements within a specific parish, it becomes possible to expose the significance of empire in even the most unlikely of settings and thus escape the illusion that these were insulated bastions of an autochthonous Englishness.¹⁸

If wealth from overseas and overt connections to empire remained most concentrated amongst the landed elite that dominated local structures of power, country estates also stood at the heart of parish life across rural Britain for much of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Despite the impression of permanence and order they might conjure today, these country estates were never static spaces but rather sites of contestation in which the politics of class, gender, race and empire were negotiated by the families who owned the properties and those who lived and worked on them. These dynamics reveal intimate insights into the economies of labour and community that underpinned the structure of eighteenth-century British society and which helped support an expanding global empire.¹⁹ Tillman Nechtman's recent assessment of the 'Nabob controversy' neatly illuminates how returning wealth and cultural practices from India, personified in the figure of the EIC official-cum-oriental despot, provoked fierce debate around the perceived corrupting effects of empire on core qualities of Englishness. For Nechtman, it exposed the fraught entangling of competing concepts of nation and empire within a febrile late-eighteenth century public sphere. Focusing on this episode as public spectacle, he has less to say about how these individuals reintegrated at a local level or about what happened to their wealth over time, however.²⁰ This longer narrative of adaptation, integration and transformation starts to emerge with greater clarity when rooted in specific contexts. Examining how parish life intersected with, and was reshaped by global forces, allows us to begin to appreciate more clearly the multifarious ways in which empire entered the daily rhythms of very different people, living in very different places across Britain and, in so doing, integrate them into a conception of British

history that situates the enduring connections between empire and metropole at the heart of any national narrative.²¹

The East India Company in Hertfordshire

Within south Hertfordshire’s dense belt of country estates, described by Robert Morden in 1704 as running almost as a continual street of beautiful houses from Totteridge in the west to Ware in the east, North Mymms’ East India connections were no anomaly.²² Recent research by Stephanie Barczewski fortifies Lawrence Stone’s earlier findings that Hertfordshire was especially popular amongst those looking to reinvest wealth accumulated not just in India but across the empire in English country estates.²³ My own findings indicate that the number of former EIC officials, merchants and directors who lived in the county between 1700 and the 1850s was at least 32 more than previous estimates suggest. As the *Legacies of*



Figure 12.1 John Cary, Map of Hertfordshire, in *Cary’s new and correct atlas: being a new set of county maps from actual surveys* (London, 1787), not paginated <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Hertfordshire-Maps-Cary-1787-49.jpg>

British Slave-ownership project has uncovered, Caribbean derived wealth flowed into the county throughout the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, with 26 residents claiming over £624,000 in slavery compensation money in the 1830s (and an additional £100,000 claimed by trustees and unsuccessful claimants).²⁴ The geographical spread of these associations is also revealing. While those claiming slavery compensation money were distributed across the county, the estates of EIC officials and directors congregated in the south, often proximate to the major roads running north from London.

Unlike the flat, arable landscape of north Herts, the southern half of the county offered picturesque rolling hills, river valleys and woodland, as well as good land for grazing and hunting, which drew especial admiration from mid-eighteenth century writers and landscapers (see Figure 12.1).²⁵ On a more practical level, south Hertfordshire's proximity to the capital has always ensured its attractiveness to those looking to supplement commercial wealth with country property. Compared to other parts of England, as Stone has shown, the makeup of county society remained in many ways exceptional until the late nineteenth century. From before the English Civil War, Hertfordshire had a higher turnover of property, higher marriage rates outwith the limits of county society and a higher density of estates than almost any other county.²⁶ Its relatively small size and high land costs meant that, unlike their counterparts in counties with less developed links to London, many Hertfordshire landowners did not derive their incomes from land alone, with most estates not exceeding 1,000 acres.²⁷ Instead, owners tended to retain close commercial links to the city, whilst developing their country estates in an ostentatious display of wealth and status.²⁸ For these reasons the county proved especially permeable to new streams of wealth and thus particularly attractive to EIC officials and merchants desirous of remaining close to London in order to participate in Company politics, global trade or to sit as MPs.²⁹

East India Company families first appeared in Hertfordshire in the early 1700s and proliferated as British control in India expanded. A century later, Haileybury was selected as the site for the new EIC training college in 1806, both reflecting and further cementing the close associations between Company and county.³⁰ Before 1759 the Company presence centred on an axis running north along the Hertford road. Notable owners included Edward Harrison (1674–1732) of Balls Park, John Deane (d.1751) and Alexander Hume (1693–1765), successive owners of Wormleybury, Thomas Rolt (c.1631–1710) of Sacombe Park and Joseph Collett (1673–1725) of Hertford Castle, all of whom accumulated wealth and status in – or, in the case of Hume, sailing

to – India and remained active in Company politics upon their return. In the aftermath of the Battle of Plassey in 1757 opportunities for personal enrichment proliferated. As Company control solidified in the presidencies of Bengal, Madras and Bombay, its identity transformed from trader to conqueror and occupier. Amongst the generation of ‘nabobs’ who returned to Britain during the period styled ‘the shaking of the pagoda tree’ (c.1757–80s), many brought vast fortunes with them, which they reinvested in land, property, luxury commodities and political capital to facilitate entry to the highest echelons of the British elite.³¹ Unsurprisingly, it is during the period 1760–90 that the highest number of individuals (10) with a direct personal connection to India purchased estates in Herts.³² These included such notorious figures as Laurence Sullivan (1713–86) of Ponsbourne Park, Thomas Rumbold (1736–91) of Woodhall and Governor Charles Bouchier (1726–1810) of Colney House. Many spent lavishly on rebuilding older manors, constructing new houses and landscaping gardens. Rumbold, for instance, expended £85,000 of his £200,000 plus fortune purchasing Woodhall and then built a new Palladian mansion designed by Thomas Leverton (c.1743–1824), which he filled with items brought back from Madras.³³ Bouchier outlaid almost £60,000 purchasing and renovating Colney House, bankrupting himself in the process.³⁴ A further six London-based merchants grown wealthy from the East and West India trades, and often connected to the EIC Court of Directors, also purchased estates during this 30-year period.

In the wake of Warren Hastings’s impeachment trial (1788–95) measures were taken to better regulate the Company’s activities, thereby making it more difficult to replicate the fortunes of the nabob generation. Nonetheless, the period between 1790 and 1820 still saw notable numbers return from India to purchase Hertfordshire land and property. Amongst them was the controversial Paul Benfield (1741–1810), who not only bought Woodhall from Thomas Rumbold’s executors but also became heavily involved in the Hertfordshire property market and West India trade before going bankrupt in 1799.³⁵ Others included George Sullivan Marten (1763–1826) of Sandridge Lodge, John Fann Timins (1767–1843) of Hilfield Castle, George Shee (1758–1825) of Lockleys and Patrick Hadow (1770–1861) of Colney House. By 1800 the typical profile of purchasers was starting to shift, however. A growing number came from a mercantile and banking background in the City of London, where they were embedded in the East India, China and West India trades and the provision of capital in the expanding banking sector.³⁶ For instance, in 1799 West India merchant, EIC Director, MP and city banker,

George Woodford Thellusson (1764–1811) purchased Wall Hall (later renamed Aldenham Abbey) for £24,000. Likewise, EIC Director and MP, Robert Williams (1735–1814) used his fortune accumulated through East India shipping to purchase Moor Park in 1801 from the executors of former owner and fellow director, Thomas Bates Rous.

After 1820, ever fewer returning EIC officials could afford to purchase new estates, although several, such as William Raikes Timins (1808–66) of Hilfield (1843) and Thomas Powney Marten (1807–89) of Sandridge (1876), inherited estates originally purchased with wealth accrued in India by their fathers. Others who retired from India without great personal wealth used family networks to transition into careers in the city or banking. Powney Marten offers one such example. He joined his brother as partner in the bank founded by their father, Marten, Call & Arnold, while Augustus Henry Bosanquet (1792–1877) – nephew of EIC Director Jacob Bosanquet (1756–1828) – retired in 1821 after 11 years in Bengal to join the family West India merchant firm. Bosanquet acquired considerable wealth during the mid-Victorian period, purchasing Osidge House near Barnet, and leaving an estate valued at £70,000 in 1877. Although this later period saw fewer new arrivals in the county, many established families remained involved with imperial trade, whilst a growing number of sons from the emerging professional middle classes left the county to take up careers across empire.

It is highly unlikely that the arrival of so many EIC officials in Hertfordshire was a coincidence. The constellations they formed once settled frequently reflected commercial associations, strategic alliances and friendships made in India. For instance, Laurence Sullivan purchased Ponsborne near his friend and business associate Stephen Law (1699–1788), who owned neighbouring Broxbourne House, and with whom he shared an adjoining pew in St Etheldreda's church, Hatfield.³⁷ Owners competed for county positions, with the post of County High Sheriff being held 19 times between 1730 and 1830 by individuals with an EIC connection. A Hertfordshire estate could also support wider political aspirations. Nineteen became MPs (albeit rarely in local constituencies), a position often used to protect ongoing interests in India. The injection of capital from overseas, combined with rising rents and agricultural production during the late eighteenth century initiated a flurry of building and landscaping activity.³⁸ The extravagance of scale and style that characterized many renovation projects suggests that these were undertaken with a keen eye on what else was occurring around the county. In hiring leading architects and landscapers, owners showed themselves attuned to the dominant fashions of the day. While nabobs

have commonly been associated with the Orientalism most conspicuously displayed at the house of Charles Cockerell (1755–1837), Sezincote, those in Herts tended towards more conventional, neoclassical tastes. This did not mean that the influence of India was rendered invisible in either interior decoration or garden display. Rather, it was carefully integrated amidst European styles.³⁹

Nabobs, merchants and planters: networks of empire and North Mymms

In 1801 North Mymms was the largest parish in Hertfordshire (see Figure 12.2). Covering just under 5,000 acres and totalling nearly 16 miles in circumference, it sat astride the southern belt of estates. The parliamentary census of that year recorded a population of 838, living in 150 houses; 170 employed in agriculture, 70 in manufacturing or trade and 598 in other occupations.⁴⁰ From the early 1700s this community started to be transformed by wealth from overseas. Confounding the caricature of the nabob, those who purchased land in North Mymms did not conform to an easy stereotype. Their careers were varied and patterns changed over time but all shared and benefitted from an investment in the expanding empire and networks of global trade.⁴¹



Figure 12.2 Close-up of North Mimms [sic], in Cary's new and correct atlas: being a new set of county maps from actual surveys (London, 1787), not paginated <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Hertfordshire-Maps-Cary-1787-49.jpg>.

Substantial wealth from overseas first arrived in the parish when Jeremy Sambrooke (d.1754) purchased Gobions in 1707. Although lacking a direct career in India himself, Sambrooke came from a family permeated by EIC connections, with his grandfather, father and brother all having been in the Company's service.⁴² He inherited a large fortune from his father and capitalized on investments in the South Sea Company shortly before that bubble burst, which allowed him to undertake extensive renovations at Gobions where he resided until his death in 1754. He passed the estate to his sister for life, before settling it on his nephew, John Freeman (c.1722–94), in 1765.⁴³ Freeman's family had their own extensive empire connections predating the marriage of his father John Cooke Freeman (c.1689–1752) to Susanna Sambrooke (c.1685–1770). John Cooke Freeman had been a merchant in Madras in the early 1700s before inheriting Fawley Court, Buckinghamshire, from his mother's uncle, the Jamaica planter William Freeman (c.1610–1707).⁴⁴ John Freeman Jr did not stay long in North Mymms, however. Having built another house in Hampshire, he sold Gobions in 1777 to John Hunter, an exceptionally wealthy nabob who had accumulated a fortune in excess of £100,000 as a free merchant in Bombay (see Figure 12.3).

Little is known of Hunter's life before his arrival in India, beyond that he was born in the mid-1720s and reputedly sailed for Bombay in the late-1750s with no more than £100 to his name; however, over the next 20 years he established himself as a prominent merchant in the city with close links to leading Company officials.⁴⁵ Hunter became partner in the firm Hunter, Fell & Ramsay (subsequently Hunter, Fell & Iveson), which was heavily involved in shipping and insurance, and it is likely he had commercial links to Laurence Sullivan. He returned to Britain in the 1770s and was elected to the Directorship in 1781. Despite *The Monthly Magazine's* suggestion that upon purchasing Gobions Hunter settled into the life of a country squire 'fattening oxen' for sale, he by no means retreated into bucolic seclusion.⁴⁶ An EIC Director until his death in 1802, Hunter used his position to safeguard his extensive investments in Bombay. Writing from Gobions in the 1790s, he asked his friend John Tasker, then Master Attendant for marine operations at Bombay, to manage his investments in India, look out for new openings and begin to remit his money back to Britain. For all returning officials, this was a complex and risky process that necessitated careful management, and Hunter went to great lengths to instruct Tasker on the best way to proceed. He directed him to invest his cash with Indian agents in Bombay at 9 per cent interest, who would travel to Canton where they would draw bonds of remittance in the name of the Directors at the Company bank,



Figure 12.3 Portrait of John Hunter of Gobions, by Sir Thomas Lawrence (1789/90). Reproduced by kind permission of Musée des Beaux-Arts, ville de Bordeaux. Image courtesy of L. Gauthier, F. Deval.

which in turn would be sent to Hunter to deposit them in London.⁴⁷ Such networks of information, patronage and trust were utterly crucial to the circulation of goods between Britain and Asia, as well as making possible the remittance of EIC officials and merchants' fortunes.⁴⁸

As well as extending the Gobions estate, Hunter deployed his wealth to support his extended family network. He purchased a farm in the neighbouring parish of South Mimms for Margaret Carpenter, his niece (or illegitimate daughter – it is not clear which) and her husband Daniel, an officer in the EIC Army. Upon his return from India, Daniel Carpenter

looked to the Caribbean for investment, purchasing Providence Pen, a Jamaican sugar estate in 1793, which he owned until his death in 1821.⁴⁹ Even as his financial interests diversified, Carpenter remained tightly connected to East India networks of patronage and association. During the 1790s and early 1800s, he opened his house to the five sons of his friend and fellow East India Company army officer, General John Bellasis. As Bellasis planned his sons' future careers in India from Bombay, Carpenter was charged with their care in England, a task in which he failed to impress. Once the boys arrived back in India, they complained to their father of mistreatment at Carpenter's hands, which led to a rift between the friends over Carpenter's 'duplicity and mismanagement'.⁵⁰ Hunter acquired another property in South Mimms, Oakmere House, which in the 1820s became the home of Carpenter's brother William Leonard, also an EIC army officer, following his marriage to Amelia Chauncy.⁵¹ She was the daughter of the West India planter and Herts resident, Charles Snell of Snell Hall, Grenada, and Theobalds Park, whilst her brothers Nathaniel and Charles Snell Chauncy (owners of neighbouring estates in Little Munden, Herts) claimed a staggering £62,329 in compensation for 3,468 enslaved people in the 1830s.

Hunter's wealth increased rapidly after his arrival in Bombay. In 1763 he married Ann Dick (c.1719–86), a widow whose husband had served in the Bombay Marine. In addition to the 100,000 rupees settled on her by Hunter at the time of their marriage, she inherited property in Bombay from her first husband making her a wealthy woman in her own right.⁵² At her death in 1786 at Gobions, her estate totalled £28,000.⁵³ Her daughter, Ann Atkins (1740–77), married Governor William Hornby (c.1723–1803) thereby sealing a close alliance between the families. Hunter became a keen defender of Hornby during the nabob controversy, and Hornby's children were the principal beneficiaries in Hunter's will.⁵⁴ Three younger daughters inherited £20,000 each; Hornby's son John (1764–1832), also an EIC writer, was appointed joint-executor and received £25,000; whilst the eldest daughter Hannah Holmes (1757–1845) received £20,000 and her husband, Thomas Holmes (c.1751–1827), became executor and the new owner of Gobions on condition that he take the name Hunter.⁵⁵

Holmes-Hunter became the fourth successive owner of Gobions to have made his wealth through empire. The son of Worcestershire gentry, he joined the EIC as a Writer in Bombay in 1767, and during his time in India remained a close confidant of his father-in-law and patron Governor Hornby.⁵⁶ Nonetheless, Holmes's career ended in disappointment after he was beaten to the position of Governor by Jonathan

Duncan (c.1756–1811) in 1795.⁵⁷ His time at Gobions was similarly dispiriting and mired in controversy. In 1801 his 15-year-old daughter eloped and married an Irish soldier about to embark for India. Four years later she left him for another man, which led to Holmes-Hunter being sued for damages.⁵⁸ These problems were compounded by family squabbles over John and Ann Hunter's wills, leading to several Chancery cases against Holmes-Hunter as the Hornbys struggled to gain access to legacies they claimed were being withheld.⁵⁹ It is not clear why he chose to sell Gobions in 1815, but money troubles certainly seem to have been pressing. By the time of his death in 1827 his effects were sworn at under £450, and his wife and younger daughter do not appear in his will.⁶⁰ With Holmes-Hunter's sale of Gobions to a local brewing family its EIC connection disappeared; however, two years later wealth from the Caribbean was flowing back into the estate after it was purchased by West India merchant, Thomas Kemble (1759–1821). In turn, it passed to his son Thomas Nash Kemble (1791–1833), who received over £10,000 in slavery compensation money and left an estate of £120,000 in 1833.⁶¹ Upon his death, the estate was purchased by the owner of Brookmans, Robert William Gaussen, who tore the house down in the early 1840s and amalgamated the grounds into his own.

John Hunter's nearest neighbour was another EIC Director, and coincidentally the uncle of Holmes' victorious rival for the Governorship. Like Hunter, John Michie (1720–88) made his wealth working closely with the Company but not in its direct employ. He initially leased Moffats House in the early 1770s, before purchasing it at the end of the decade. It is not clear how much he initially paid but in 1779 it was insured with the Sun Insurance Company for £7,900.⁶² A native of Glenesk, Michie moved south in the early-1750s, taking advantage of the complex trans-imperial networks of Highland Scots to establish himself as a victualler in London.⁶³ Initial success proved elusive, however, and by 1755 he was imprisoned in the Fleet for debt.⁶⁴ After his release from prison, he became a purchasing agent for the Royal Navy in Indian waters, where he acted as secretary to Sir George Pocock (1706–92) and was awarded a share of the prize money for the capture of several enemy ships in 1760.⁶⁵ He gained further opportunity in the Caribbean in 1762, where Pocock held a command during the capture of Havana, and subsequently secured the commission to distribute the campaign's prize money, from which he is likely to have derived considerable personal benefit.⁶⁶ On returning to Britain, Michie used his wealth and contacts to establish himself within the 'Shipping interest', which provisioned the East India

Company fleet and offered access to powerful patronage networks at the Court of Directors.⁶⁷ Based in St Martin-in-the Fields, he did not limit his activities to supply, also entering into partnership with his brother Jonathan as a wine merchant – a role that appears to have combined business and pleasure, with one friend leaving Michie a cask of 40-year-old rum ‘because he loves a tiff of punch after supper’.⁶⁸ Possessing £2,000 of EIC stock, Michie was first elected to the Directorship in 1770 (the same year he arrived at Moffats) as a nominee on the ‘House list’, and he remained there until his death in 1788, including serving as Chairman in 1786. He left Moffats to his brother Jonathan Michie (d.1802) and property in St Martin-in-the Fields to be shared between two nieces and his illegitimate daughter.

Tracing individual careers or the ownership trajectory of a single estate provides a sense of how wealth from overseas percolated into Hertfordshire, but to situate North Mymms properly within a wider imperial world it is necessary to map the webs of marriage, wealth and patronage that sustained these families. For the Gaussens of Brookmans and Casamajors of Potterells these liens spread across Britain, India and the Caribbean, incorporating overlapping networks that made viable a variety of commercial and political interests. Prominent Huguenot merchant and governor of the Bank of England, Peter Gaussen (1723–88) purchased Brookmans manor for £16,000 in 1787 as a gift for his son Samuel Robert (1759–1812).⁶⁹ The Gaussens first arrived in London from Geneva following the revocation of the Edict of Nantes and quickly established themselves within the influential Huguenot cousinhood.⁷⁰ Peter Gaussen’s success in the City facilitated his election to the directorship of the Bank of England in 1761 and he became the bank’s first foreign-born Governor in 1777, as well as owning £4,500 in EIC stock. Family connections smoothed his rise. In 1755 he had married Anna Maria (1728–1804), daughter of Samuel Bosanquet (1700–65), another prominent Huguenot merchant in the Levant trade and with extensive property in the Caribbean. The marriage agreement underlines both families’ prosperity, as well as their confidence that this would continue to flourish. Anna Maria’s portion stood at a sizeable £6,000, with Peter promising a further £12,000 for her and their younger children upon his death – a promise far surpassed when he left an estate worth £57,340.⁷¹ Unusually, the marriage ended a decade later in formal separation but, even then, Peter was careful not to sever the relationship with his in-laws who remained close commercial partners, particularly his brother-in-law and fellow Bank of England director Samuel Bosanquet Jr (1744–1806).⁷²

The marriages of Peter and Anna's children served to reinforce the connection to the Bosanquets, as well as to other local elites. In 1783, their eldest son and owner of Brookmans, Samuel Robert Gaussen Sr, married into another branch of the Bosanquet family, one involved more in India than the Caribbean. His wife Elizabeth was the daughter of Jacob Bosanquet Sr (1713–67, brother of Samuel Sr), Turkey and East India merchant, and sister of Jacob Bosanquet Jr, East India Company director and leading figure in the London silk trade. This match brought both families considerable financial and commercial benefit.⁷³ Although it is unclear whether Jacob Jr's decision to purchase the nearby estate of Broxbournebury in 1789, two years after Samuel and Elizabeth settled at Brookmans, was based upon a desire to be close to his sister, his presence nonetheless ensured a strong family network in south Herts, which was augmented further by a third branch of the Bosanquets in the Hadley/Barnet area. Like many of his contemporaries in the City elite, Samuel Robert Gaussen Sr's enthusiasm for commercial life was undiminished by ownership of a country estate. Over the next twenty years he established himself at the centre of overlapping networks that supported the expanding fiscal-military state and empire.⁷⁴ He became director of the South Sea Company, an MP and a major EIC shareholder in the 1790s, although he divested himself of his Company shares in the decade before his death. Instead, he bequeathed £10,327 in South Sea Stock and over £100,000 in government securities, leaving each son £30,000 and each daughter £20,000 invested in 3 per cent consols.⁷⁵ Upon his death in 1812, his estate totalled over £175,000, making him the eleventh richest man in the country to die that year.⁷⁶ He appointed his Bosanquet cousins as executors, thereby reiterating how important tight-knit family networks were to the transmission of wealth.

Compared to many other merchant and nabob estate owners in Herts, the Gaussens and the Bosanquets at Broxbournebury were unusual in that they kept their estates within the family for more than three generations.⁷⁷ As each generation became more established within the local landowning elite, so they shifted how they presented the basis of family wealth. Upon Samuel Robert Sr's death, the estate passed to his eldest surviving son Samuel Robert Jr (1788–1818) who married his cousin Cecilia Franks (1789–1868). His early death in 1818 meant that the estate descended to his infant son, Robert William Gaussen (1814–80). Educated at Eton and Cambridge, Robert served briefly with the British legation at Stockholm, before returning to assume the life of a country

gentleman in 1838. He expanded the estate significantly to over 2,000 acres by purchasing both Gobions and Moffats, and despite maintaining a broad stock portfolio and sitting on the board of the Globe Insurance Company displayed none of his grandfather's enthusiasm for commercial life.⁷⁸ Instead, he increasingly styled himself a landed gentleman with an interest in stocks, rather than a merchant prince with a country estate to match.

Even as Robert William's horizons narrowed, his marriage to Elizabeth Christian Casamajor (1821–64) of Potterells created yet another filament in an already complicated web. Potterells came into the possession of Elizabeth's cousin Justinian Casamajor (1746–1820) when he inherited it from his friend Charles Delaet in 1792.⁷⁹ Before moving to Potterells Justinian lived nearby at High Canons, Shenley and owned land in Northaw. Originally from Spain, the Casamajors settled in Bristol in the 1690s, where they were involved in the Iberian wine trade. By the time Justinian inherited Potterells, the family had spread across Britain's expanding empire as Company officials in India and plantation owners and merchants in the Caribbean.⁸⁰ It was to the latter that Justinian owed his wealth, first as a London West India merchant and subsequently through his marriage to Mary, the daughter of Antigua planter Duncan Grant (d.1770), which brought Casamajor property in the Caribbean. Having spent heavily on redeveloping the estate he fell into financial difficulty when profits from his Antiguan investments declined. This left him able to leave only small legacies in his will (although he did stress that his daughters had been amply provided for by his wife's brother). He placed his Caribbean property in trust to be sold. Nonetheless, the terms of Delaet's will ensured Potterells remained in the family, decreeing it should pass to his godson, Justinian's third son, William Charles Casamajor (1779–1847).⁸¹

Where Justinian Casamajor's activities focused on the Caribbean, the wider family network spread east. His uncle, Noah Casamajor (1700–46), established himself as a merchant at Madras in the mid-1700s, and his son, James Henry Casamajor (1745–1815), joined the EIC as a writer in Madras, rising to the council in 1791. Although his son James Archibald (1787–1864) joined the EIC in turn, it was the marriages of his daughters that really catapulted the Casamajors into the highest echelons of the EIC elite; Jane Amelia (1789–1808) to Henry Russell (1783–1852) son of Sir Henry Russell (1751–1836), Chief Justice of Bengal; Amelia (1791–1872) to the third son of the Governor General Lord Minto (1751–1813); Louisa (c.1801–78) to Charles Farquharson RN (1795–1862), son of William

Farquharson (1758–1813), EIC Bengal; and Elizabeth Rebecca (1788–1866) married John Studholme Brownrigg (1786–1853), MP and partner in the East India merchant firm of Charles Cockerell & Co.⁸² This network of patronage and contact helped smooth entry for Justinian's two youngest sons to Company service as writers in Madras, as well as leading to the arrival at Potterells of James Archibald and his daughters following his retirement from the EIC in Madras in 1837. He had also married the daughter of an Antiguan planter, who probably had business links to Justinian, but in the aftermath of emancipation this brought little financial benefit. Unlike the previous generation of officials, James Archibald did not return from India possessed of great wealth and spent a peripatetic retirement moving around the homes of relatives and friends. At his death, his effects were valued as being under £600. Nonetheless, his arrival in North Mymms precipitated the marriage of his daughter Elizabeth to Robert Gaussen in 1841, thus joining two families of global reach in the heart of the home counties.

Like their EIC counterparts across Hertfordshire, those living in North Mymms enthusiastically embraced the opportunity to thrust themselves into parish, county and parliamentary politics. Hunter (1780), Michie (1782), Samuel Robert Gaussen (1790), Justinian Casamajor (1800), Thomas Nash Kemble (1825) and Robert William Gaussen (1841) all won election to county high sheriff, a role the Stones identified as being crucial to the integration of new arrivals into county society and one often assiduously avoided by established families who loathed the inconvenience and expense.⁸³ Several used their wealth to gain election to Parliament. John Hunter reputedly paid up to £3,000 to gain the seat for Leominster in 1784 but did little once elected.⁸⁴ As MP for Warwick (1796–1802), Samuel Robert Gaussen proved similarly inactive in the Commons, although he did work to further the interests of the City for which his brother-in-law Jacob Bosanquet was principal spokesman.⁸⁵ Prominence in public life extended to serving on the boards of various philanthropic and charitable institutions. John Michie, for instance, was a steward for the New Lying-in Hospital off Tottenham Court Road and Peter Gaussen a governor of the Foundling Hospital. All assumed similar prominence in parish life. As the surviving memorials in St Mary's church testify, most were closely involved with the parish church where successive generations worshipped, married, baptized their children and were buried (see Figure 12.4). Both Samuel Robert Gaussen and Justinian Casamajor served as church warden at St Mary's, a role that gave them responsibility for allocating pews and handing out charity to the poor.

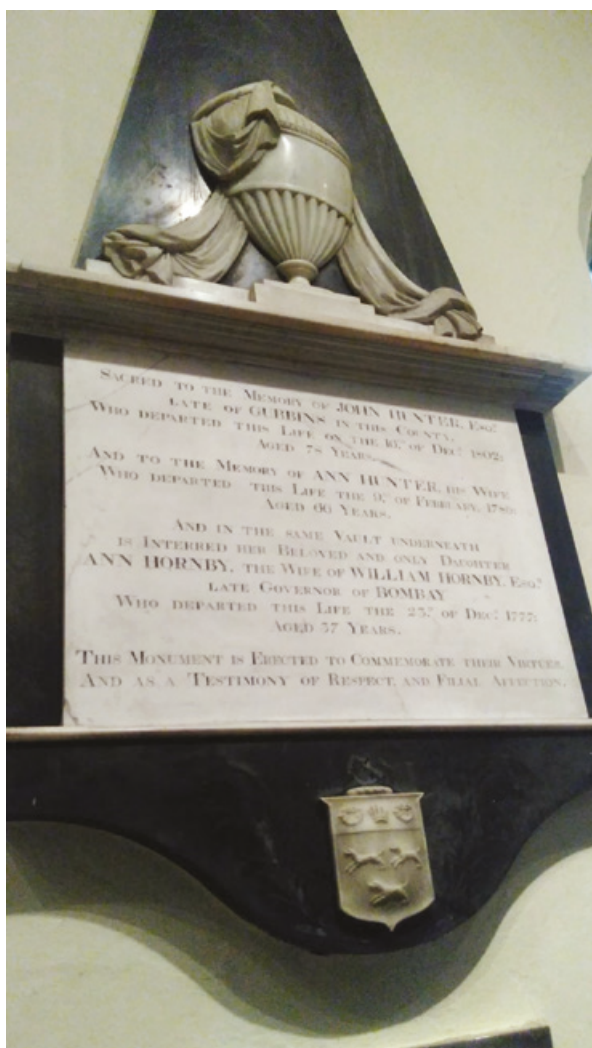


Figure 12.4 Memorial to John and Ann Hunter, and her daughter Ann Hornby, St Mary's Church, North Mymms. Photograph courtesy of Chris Jeppesen.

Gaussen was also a trustee for the Great North Road turnpike, which ran near his estate, and colonel in the county militia.

Although women were barred from holding public office, they were more visible in the parish, revealing their central role in embedding circuits of empire in communities across Britain.⁸⁶ A small part of Ann Hunter's wealth from Bombay was left to feed the poor of the parish,

whilst her granddaughter, Hannah Holmes-Hunter bequeathed £100 to the church for the benefit of the poor. Justinian Casamajor's daughter Caroline Lydia (1788–1853), at the time of her death leasing Moffats from Robert Gaussen, left £3,000 to endow a school for the children of the parish.⁸⁷

The arrival of wealth from empire initiated profound aesthetic and economic changes to the local landscape as owners redeveloped houses and grounds. Most notable were the changes made by Jeremy Sambrooke to Gobions, where he employed Charles Bridgeman (1690–1738) and James Gibbs (1682–1754). Bridgeman had already worked on several East India Company gardens in Hertfordshire, but it was his efforts at Gobions that elicited a visit from Queen Caroline and her daughters in 1732, as well as drawing rich acclaim from Daniel Defoe a decade later and Horace Walpole in his 1770 essay *On Modern Gardening*. Ornamental gardens, a canal and lake, bowling green and tree lined avenues transformed the park to provide a fitting panorama for the redesigned neo-classical house. To this he added a large mock-Tudor entrance arch, classical statues and hothouse.⁸⁸ John Hunter proved less preoccupied with Gobions house, concentrating instead on purchasing local farms and enclosing common land under an act of Parliament in 1778.⁸⁹ In 1802 he was awarded a gold medal by the Society of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce in recognition of the 40,000 oaks he had planted.⁹⁰ Like Sambrooke, Justinian Casamajor renovated the existing house at Potterells, turning the sixteenth century half H-plan into a neoclassical manor with colonnaded portico. Even so, the house is described by historian John Brushe as resembling 'a beautiful stage set': Casamajor substituted marble and stone for plaster and wood in several places, including in the painted wooden columns sat atop stone bases at the entrance.⁹¹ He also developed the estate, constructing a model farm and experimenting with modern agricultural methods.

In the physical absence of the three houses little detail remains on the objects they contained. Beyond a general impression that these houses were filled with the trappings of genteel life, it remains ambiguous how far empire permeated their interior spaces. For instance, Gobions' advertisement of sale in 1814 gave few particularities other than describing a grand house with spacious cellars, marble chimney pieces and mahogany doors.⁹² Nonetheless, hints linger that habits and tastes picked up in India entered quotidian routines. John Hunter wrote to his friend John Tasker asking him to procure him a regular supply of coffee, while in another letter Tasker informed him that he was trying to arrange shipment of the mango tree he had requested.⁹³ More intriguingly, the

wills of John and Ann Hunter reveal that it was not only commodities that returned from India but sometimes people as well. Both left small annuities to Mary Ann Baker ‘a black woman’ who acted as Ann Hunter’s lady’s servant and Henry Dick, described by Ann Hunter as ‘a gentleman now residing at Gubbins [sic]’ and, fifteen years later, by her husband as ‘a black man labouring under an imbecility of mind and under the care and custody of Mrs Holmes of Islington’.⁹⁴ It is unlikely to be a coincidence that Henry Dick shared his surname with Ann Hunter’s first husband. Hunter’s obituary in *The Monthly Magazine* asserted that he had remarried to a ‘mulatto lady’, although no further evidence exists, as well as observing his mindfulness in providing for Baker and Dick who otherwise would have been left destitute. Frustratingly, the archival trace left by these individuals quickly vanishes, giving little sense as to how they experienced life in rural Hertfordshire or interacted with those born locally and working on the estate. Nevertheless, their very presence in the domestic space of Gobions and parish more broadly is important both in terms of how empire was made visible at a local level and also how this shaped the ways nabobs were presented in print.⁹⁵

Conclusion

From the early eighteenth century onwards, wealth from empire flowed into Hertfordshire as returning EIC officials, Caribbean planters and London based merchants purchased land and property across the county. North Mymms illustrates in microcosm how global processes of conquest, trade, enrichment and exploitation that energized Britain’s expanding empire became infused with local significance. Growing up, I had no awareness that this layered history lurked within an ever-so familiar horizon. And yet, material markers of the estates endured, incorporated into the fabric of village life that formed the backdrop to my youth: Brookmans’ stable block has become the golf course club house; Gobions’ ornamental lake and garden forms part of the park in which I walked my dog; Folly Arch, the estate’s once imposing entrance gate, now stands forlornly askew on the road entering the village; the gatehouse at Potterells re-appropriated as the village doctors’ surgery; Moffats House divided into residential homes that I passed on my way home from school.

In a recent collection of essays, Antoinette Burton and Dane Kennedy asked various historians of empire to reflect upon ‘how empire had shaped them’. For Burton and Kennedy, the accounts that

emerge offer clues as to how the global and imperial intersect with the national and local in ways that 'reveal the imprint of local space and place on the making of historical sensibilities'.⁹⁶ While I cannot claim to have been particularly aware as a child that Britain once had an empire, let alone that it impinged on the world around me, discovering now the significance of empire in the history of Brookmans Park has encouraged me to consider the place I grew up in new ways. David Lowenthal has argued that our sense of proximity to the past is rooted in the familiar surrounds of the present. But in seeking to orient this relationship through surviving material markers, we risk sacrificing complexity in favour of nostalgic, reaffirming narratives.⁹⁷ In acknowledging that our local histories may be less rooted than we instinctively assume or that the empire perhaps came closer to home than we ordinarily apprehend, we can start to destabilize narratives that have for so long sustained an insular version of British history. Behind those familiar vestiges that permeate our local landscapes may stand histories of wider entanglements. Rediscovering these not only enriches our understanding of the past but should also challenge how we think about ourselves in the present.

