

**Accommodating the East:
Sir Lawrence Dundas as Northern Nabob?
The Dundas Property Empire and Nabob Taste
By Helen Clifford**

Please note that this case study was first published on blogs.ucl.ac.uk/eicah in February 2013. For citation advice, visit: <http://blogs.ucl.ac.uk/eicah/usingthewebsite>.



Aske Hall, North Yorkshire, December 2012. Photography courtesy of Stuart Howat.



'Chinese' Screen, painted and gilded leather, early eighteenth century. Photography courtesy of Stuart Howat.

Aims

This case study began in 2010. On a visit to Aske Hall in North Yorkshire during the annual Open Heritage weekend, I noticed a range of 'India goods' in the house: lacquer screens, trunks studded with mother-of-pearl, and Chinese porcelain. They all appeared to date from the eighteenth-century but little seemed to be known about their provenance, and the owner encouraged research. This and the survival of a large family archive connected with Sir Lawrence Dundas (c.1710-81), who transformed Aske Hall into a grand country house in the 1760s and 1770s, prompted a series of questions. How did these goods get there, what did they mean to the owners of the house, and how did they relate to the more well known and researched interiors created at Aske in the 1760s? Did Sir

Lawrence, familiarly known as 'the Nabob of the North', have some connection with the East India Company which could be connected with these 'India' objects that have survived to the present?¹

This case study shows how ascriptions 'Nabob' taste by contemporaries could be applied to people, places and possessions that appeared, on the surface at least, to have had little connection with the East India Company. Sir Lawrence Dundas, unlike the owners of many of the other houses in this project was never an East India Company servant, nor did he visit India. However, by digging a little deeper,



'Chinese' black lacquer cabinet, early eighteenth century. Photography courtesy of Stuart Howat.

the tentacles of East India Company involvement can be seen to have impacted on Sir Lawrence's



social, political and domestic life.

Oval porcelain dish, Chinese, c.1750-1770. Photography courtesy of Stuart Howat.



Porcelain Cup & Saucer, Chinese, c.1730-50. Photography courtesy of Stuart Howat.

This study contributes to the debate about how far and in what ways Asian goods were incorporated into British life. Some historians have argued that these 'exotic commodities were only 'spotted where returning Anglo-Indians congregated, but not only were their numbers very small in the eighteenth century, but they were largely confined to London and a few towns, mainly in the home counties'.² Others have identified a much wider and greater spread of these objects across time and place. This case study provides additional evidence for the latter view, demonstrating the significance of the East India Company for British society and culture outside the ranks of the Company's families, and beyond the confines of London.

'Nabob': The Chronology of a Concept

According to the *Oxford English Dictionary* the word 'nabob' appeared in the English language around 1612, a corruption of the Persian term 'nawab' which referred to high-ranking officials in the Mughal court who acted as deputy governors of provinces or districts in the Mughal Empire. By the 1760s however the word was also applied, by critics of the East India Company, to individuals of great wealth, specifically those who had returned from India with large fortunes, and used that wealth to purchase seats in Parliament.

The last three decades of the eighteenth century were a key phase in the evolution of the 'nabob' as a concept and a descriptor. The collapse of the East India Company's finances in 1772, both in India and Britain, aroused public indignation towards the Company's activities and the behaviour of the



Portrait of Sir Lawrence Dundas by Thomas Hudson (1701-79). Oil on canvas, 127x101cm. Collection of the Marquess of Zetland, Aske, Yorkshire.

named after his grandfather and father's older brother .

Dundas's rapid rise to wealth reminds us that the East India Company was only one of many militaristic routes to fortune in eighteenth century Britain. Lawrence Dundas made his first fortune as a merchant contractor supplying goods (such as bread, forage, horses and waggons) to the British Army during their campaign against the Jacobites in 1745. These contracts made him a man of wealth. However his great opportunity came during the Seven

Years War (1756-1763), when he secured even greater contracts. James Boswell's claim that Dundas would 'bring home a couple of hundred thousand pounds' underestimated the scale of the profits, which others have put at between £600,000 to £800,000.⁷ The final sums were rumoured to involve nearly £2 million. Dundas engaged in contracting on his own, something that required confidence as well as resources, and his refusal to share profits earned him many enemies.⁸

Lawrence Dundas subsequently branched out into banking, property and was a major backer of the Forth and Clyde Canal which ran through his estate at Kerse near Falkirk. Associated with the Canal was the port at Grangemouth which Dundas founded in 1768. He was a Director of the Royal Bank of Scotland, had shares in the British Plate Glass Manufactory, invested money in private loans and shipping ventures, and owned two sugar estates in the West Indies, one in Dominica and the other in Grenada.⁹

the seventeenth century, when the family switched loyalties from the Stuarts to Charles I. Thomas married Bethia Baillie (fl.1686-1732) whose brother was abbot of St James's at Rattisbon in Bavaria. Lawrence was the second of two children born to Thomas and Bethia, in 1721. In 1738 Lawrence married Margaret (1715/16-1802) daughter of Alexander Bruce of Kennet, Clackmannanshire. They had only one child, a son Thomas (1741-1820),



Portrait of Lady Margaret Dundas, by Thomas Hudson (1701-79). Oil on canvas, 127x 101cm. Collection of the Marquess of Zetland, Aske, Yorkshire.

Serving as MP for Lanark Burghs from 1747-1748, and then as MP for Edinburgh in 1768, 1774 and in the year of his death in 1781, Lawrence Dundas established himself at the head of a small parliamentary group of relatives and friends whose support was useful for the prime minister, Lord North (1732-1792).¹⁰

Was Sir Lawrence a Nabob?

In 1762 Lord Shelburne (1737-1805) informed Henry Fox (1705-1777) that Lawrence ‘Dundas, the Nabob of the North, writes me to desire I’ll get him a baronetcy’.¹¹ Dundas, on presenting Shelburne with a large ‘loan’, received his title two months later. A baronetcy is the only hereditary honour which is not a peerage. Nobility was a status that the ambitious Sir Lawrence aspired to, but was not to achieve, although his son Thomas did rise to the peerage in 1793. Dundas had been swift to take advantage of his connection with Shelburne, whom he had met in Germany. Shelburne had served in the British army during the Seven Years War, was aide-de-camp to George III and, on the death of his father in 1761 inherited the title and was elevated to the the House of Lords.

An article in the *Morning Post* in 1775 written by ‘Varro’ provides a contemporary view of Dundas’s rise to prominence, and with it the key points of criticism of ‘new wealth’: political corruption, ostentatious display and infiltration into the aristocracy, Dundas’s only child Thomas had married Lady Charlotte Fitzwilliam, daughter of William Fitzwilliam, 3rd Earl Fitzwilliam in 1764 :

The fortune which this man made by contracts during the war in Germany ... has already filled the house of Commons with five of his name, and three or four more who owe their seats to his wealth or influence. It is amazing that country gentlemen of ancient and respectable families should stoop so low as to pay court to these upstarts.

He has made a great shew of his wealth, having purchased five or six capital estates in England, Scotland and Ireland, and matched his children into some of the greatest families – such sudden fortunes gained out of the public purse, are among the heaviest weight of war: they not only burden the fortunes, but gall the feelings of every individual of either honor, credit or affection for his country.¹²

So, although Lawrence Dundas was never an employee of the East India Company, the relatively sudden acquisition of wealth, the way that he chose to display it via his properties, and his political maneuverings, earned him the title of ‘Nabob’ with all the popular suspicions that went with it. You did not have to be an East India Company servant to be dubbed a ‘nabob’ in your manners, taste and ambitions in the later eighteenth century.

The historian G. E. Bannerman has argued that criticism of Dundas, has obscured his organisational capacity, logistical expertise and management skills.¹³ We will see that it is precisely these abilities which he trained on the acquisition and development of a network of houses from Arlington Street in London to Kerse in Falkirk.

East India Company Connections

Although Lawrence Dundas was never a ‘servant’ of the East India Company, he was closely involved in its affairs. He bought considerable shares of East India Company stock for himself and on behalf of others; he worked with a number of East India Company commanders and captains who appear to

Council. Under Henry Dundas’s co-ordination Lawrence Dundas now became a target of a pamphlet war that exposed his alleged corruption and vanity.

b) East India Company Ships, Commanders and Captains

Documents at North Yorkshire County Record Office reveal that between 1763 until his death Lawrence Dundas invested in at least seven East India Company ships: the *Prime* (1763,1765,1772,1776 & 1779), the *Lord Holland* (1763), the *Latham* (1763), the *Bute* (1773), the *Triton* (1775), the *Royal Henry* (1778 & 1781), and the *Northington* (1780).¹⁸ The most detailed records relate to his investments in the 864 ton ship the *Prime*. He invested in all five of its voyages, mostly to Madras and China. A surviving investment shows a wide range of goods which he purchased to sell, including ironmongery, glassware, cutlery for Madras and lead, glassbeads and clocks for China. The latter items were very popular in China, where as gifts they were an essential lubricant in gaining access to key officials, and were known as ‘sing-songs’. The millinery, shoes and stationery would have been bought by East India Company servants and their households, whose access to these goods from home was only via this trade.¹⁹

Investment for		Cost	Other
Ironmongery	China	650	
China	China	657	✓
China	China	157	
China	China	197	✓
China	China	72	200
China	China	150	
China	China	180	
China	China	150	
China	China	100	200
China	China	195	✓
China	China	200	
China	China	229	
China	China	150	✓
China	China	100	100
China	China	100	
China	China	50	
China	China	70	
China	China	150	✓
China	China	250	✓
China	China	126	✓
China	China	70	
China	China		40
China	China		657
China	China		200
China	China		100
China	China		100

North Yorkshire County Record Office
2403 1/10/02

As George McGilvary has shown, from 1725 onward, a patronage system existed in Britain enabling government ministries to use posts in the East India Company and its shipping to secure political majorities in Scotland and Westminster.²⁸ Lawrence Dundas received many such appeals for support drawing upon his East India Company contacts, which were closely implicated with his political ambitions. A series of letters to Sir Lawrence from his son Thomas, then MP for Stirling (1768-94), between August and November 1777, show him busy in Edinburgh ensuring that Dundas supporters were elected to the City Council, using East India Company appointments to secure their compliance. He wrote to his father: 'If you don't get young Spottiswoode and young Lennox sent out to India I can assure you our interest above will be much suspected here ... For God's sake see Lord North yourself and get the matter settled'.²⁹ The affairs of the East India Company were intimately connected with not only national, but also local Edinburgh politics.³⁰

The many letters which survive appealing for Sir Lawrence's preferment within the East India Company, indicate the widespread assumption of his powers of influence within it. In 1766 a David Anderson thanked Sir Lawrence for getting a post for his son in Bengal.³¹ Lieutenant Thomas Dundas in Calcutta hoped Sir Lawrence would assist his promotion to the 'Rank of Captain in less than Four or Five Years'.³² Jack Wordie's cousin, a mate on the East India Company ship the Vansittart trusted Dundas might be able to get him 'the Command of one of the East India Company packets'.³³ In 1775 Robert McFarlane in Bengal wrote to ask if Dundas would recommend him as 'superintendent of the Police for the town of Calcutta' explaining that:

I have been living three years in this country, principally employed in the tea service, but have not been able to acquire even a small fortune, although I cannot say I am poor. Indeed I have never been in a right line for making one neither have I been recommended to any of the Gentlemen in Government in this country to push me forward; which perhaps has been my own fault, for not applying to any friends for that purpose, who I dare say would have served me in that way; and I do not in the least doubt, that had I applied to you some years since for such recommendation that you would cheerfully have done what you could. Particularly as you had such an interest in East India affairs, and I likewise judge from the good name you bear both from English & Scotch, which has even reached to this remote part of the world and often given me much pleasure, consider I am your relation, ... although a distant one My sister Mary writes me that you have got her husband appointed Collector at Morley[?], which I hope they will be forever grateful to you for.³⁴

McFarlane's letter reveals the assumption that large fortunes could be gained in the service of the Company, but were contingent on patronage to gain preferment. It also shows the importance of claiming family ties to secure that support. Isabella Strange fulsomely thanked Dundas in August 1776: 'You never do things by halves you have made me most happy and sav'd Mr Strange a journey to London which we were both afraid would have been absolutely necessary to solicit getting our little Warrior to Madras'. In return for his position as a cadet she considered herself 'as a part of your Family bound by the strongest Ties'.³⁵ Dundas's influence with the Company was invoked right up until his death in 1781. Henrietta Moodie wrote to him that year, asking for help on behalf of her son Donald who had just sailed for the East Indies.³⁶

It is likely, but so far unprovable, that these acts of patronage were acknowledged with gifts of thanks, tokens of gratitude that cemented the bonds of perceived 'family' which extended well beyond the ties of blood and kinship.³⁷ We turn now to the material culture of these East India Company



connections, moving from the large - the houses which Lawrence Dundas purchased to illustrate his success, to the small - the search for East India Company traded goods within his homes.

The Dundas Property Portfolio: 'Conquests from North to South'

After receiving his baronetcy in 1762 (and the death of his father the same year) Lawrence Dundas began a ten year campaign of purchasing and transforming a series of magnificent houses to reflect his wealth, taste and power. He only built one major new property, Dundas House in Edinburgh, although he commissioned plans for several

(Above) Map of Dundas property empire

ambitious extensions to some of his other properties, none of which were carried through. In 1762 the Seven Years War was about to end, and Lawrence Dundas's profits as contractor must have encouraged him to invest some of his money in property.

First he acquired a cluster of modest houses on the North East coast of England at Redcar, Marske Hall and Upleatham Hall in 1762. Marske Hall had been built for Sir William Pennyman in 1625; Upleatham Hall, was described in Bulmer's *Directory* of 1890 as 'a handsome modern Mansion' (demolished 1892).³⁸ To these was added, in 1764, an estate at Loftus a little further down the coast. It is unclear why he invested in these properties. Perhaps their links to the prosperous local alum trade may have been an incentive? Alum was an important mordant for setting dyes in the cloth industry, one that Dundas would have been fully aware of as the son of a prosperous draper.

In 1763 he upped his stakes and entered into a phase of spectacular house purchasing. He bought Aske Hall in North Yorkshire for £45,000. On 3 May 1763 Lord Hardwicke wrote to Lord Royston 'Sir Lory Dundas, who extends his conquests from North to South, has purchased Moor Park [Hertfordshire] for £25,000. He has contracted in his own great way; takes everything as it stands.'³⁹ A few months later he bought Lord Granville's London house 19 Arlington Street in St James's, London for £15,000.

Detail of *View of Moor Park* by Richard Wilson. Oil on canvas, 147.3x182.8cm. Collection Marquess of Zetland. Photography courtesy of Stuart Howat.





Arlington Street Looking North, by J.C. Buckler, watercolour, 1831.
No.19 is the pedimented entrance on the left. City of Westminster Public Library

A third phase began in 1772 when he commenced building Dundas Mansion in Edinburgh, completed two years later. By the time Sir Lawrence died in 1781 he owned eight major properties.⁴⁰ Each of them conveyed messages of power, wealth and taste.



Dundas Mansion

Aske Hall, North Yorkshire was a strategic purchase, bought to secure a seat in Parliament as it came with the pocket borough of Richmond, and a suitable focus for a new dynasty. Dundas's son Thomas became MP for Richmond between 1763 and 1768. Aske Hall cost Lawrence Dundas £45,000. This can be compared with John Spencer's construction and decoration of Spencer House in 1755 which cost £35,000, with a further £14,000 for the site and objet's d'art. It was considered as one of the most splendid examples of conspicuous consumption in London of the time.⁴¹

After Dundas purchased Aske Hall from Lord Holderness he proceeded to enlarge and remodel it in the Palladian taste, employing the fashionable York architect John Carr. Dundas kept the two Gothic follies probably built for the previous occupant, Sir Conyers D'Arcy, and described in Robinson's *Guide to Richmond*, (1833) as a 'Temple, a tall building which towers above the woods behind the hall ... built on the exact model of a Hindoo Temple; and on Pinmore Hill (between Aske and Richmond) is a Tower, bearing the grotesque name of Olliver Ducat, which is said to be a perfect counterpart of a Hindoo Hill-Fort'. The architectural historian John Harris has suggested that the Temple might be later, perhaps the work of Capability Brown, who Dundas employed to landscape

his estate.⁴² One wonders if they in some way reminded Dundas of one of the major sources of his massive fortune? The origin of this attribution however remains unknown.



(Left) Temple, Aske



(Right) Olliver Ducat, Aske

Dundas was anxious to carry out extensive alterations as soon as possible and Carr was at Aske in November 1762, before the purchase was complete and plans were well advanced by March the following year. Work was concentrated on creating a suite of family rooms, together with offices, leaving thoughts of improving the state rooms for later. In 1767 Carr produced plans for a massive extension on the front of the house which would have turned Aske into a great classical mansion. The intended new work would have included a hexastyle portico, an apsed hall 60ft wide by 27ft wide, dining room, drawing room and a gallery 80ft by 27ft. Nothing however came of the grand scheme. Dundas was less interested in new building than refurbishing.⁴³ Together with the properties in County Cleveland, north of Aske, at Markse, Upleatham and Redcar Dundas held a major interest in property in northern England. Nearly midway between London and Edinburgh Aske was perhaps a useful half-way house between the two sites of his ambition.

Moor Park was nothing if not prestigious: it was a country house connected with exceptionally powerful men. The Manor of More had been home to Cardinal Wolsey's grand palace. It was later dismantled and replaced in 1670 with a mansion built by James, Duke of Monmouth, the illegitimate

son of Charles II, who married him off to Anne Scott the heiress to the Earl of Buccleuch's vast fortune. In 1732 Monmouth's widow sold Moor Park to Benjamin Styles, who had amassed a fortune from the fraudulent South Sea Investment Company. Styles in turn sold it to Admiral Lord Anson (1697-1762) who had overseen the Royal Navy during the Seven Years' War, which had provided Dundas with such fruitful business opportunities. In the park Sir Lawrence employed Adam to build a Tea Pavilion, complete with a painted Palm Room.⁴⁴

Dundas also needed a London base. He had previously rented houses, like Hill Street, Berkeley Square in Mayfair. In 1763 he bought 19 Arlington Street, St James's, in one of the most exclusive residential enclaves in London. It had been built in the 1730s for Lord Carteret. It was his third house purchase that year, and cost £15,000 the 'crowning fulfilment of his political and social ambitions'.⁴⁵

Meanwhile in Edinburgh Dundas's popularity had waned, and he was criticized for neglecting the city's affairs, and for his non-residence, which he rectified by building a mansion in St. Andrew's Square. In 1772, in a characteristically deft move Dundas outwitted the city fathers of Edinburgh and purchased a prime site in the city, which had originally been intended for a church. He employed Sir William Chambers the royal architect, fellow Scot and erstwhile employee of the Swedish East India Company, to build a fine Palladian villa as his private mansion.⁴⁶ It was modelled on Marble Hill, in Twickenham which had been built between 1724-9 for Henrietta Howard, Countess of Suffolk and mistress of George II.

Dundas was participating in the country house 'boom' of the 1760s. As Charles Saumarez Smith has explained:

The immense success of Britain at war, the expansion and consolidation of her overseas empire, the profits of trade, and the improvements which had been made in agriculture, had created a social elite ... which was self-confident, assured ... and wanting to be artistically commorated at home'.⁴⁷

Dundas and The Nabob Interior

If one of the attributes of a nabob was to live with pretention and ostentation, then the furnishing of the home would surely be a key indicator of this taste? Alphonse Daudet's description in his novel *The Nabob*, (although written in the 1898), conjures up the stereotypical interior associated with the Company's excessive and conspicuous consumption: 'The Nabob's dining-room [was] finished in carved oak, supplied ... from the establishment of some great house-furnisher, who furnished at the same time the four salons ... the hangings, the objects of art, the chandeliers, even the plate displayed on the sideboards, even the servants who served the breakfast. It was the perfect type of the establishment improvised, ... by a parvenu of colossal wealth, in great haste to enjoy himself'. The rest of this section will explore how far Sir Lawrence Dundas's domestic interiors conformed or not to this caricature.

The speed with which Sir Lawrence Dundas acquired properties in the early 1760s and his desire to show the very highest taste meant that he did employ some of the great house furnishers of his day: the Scottish architect Robert Adam (1728-1792), (who had set up a practice with his brother James in London in 1758, and whose descendants would include key East India Company officials) at Moor Park in Hertfordshire and at 19 Arlington Street, London, where between 1763-1766 he was 'to supervise internal decorations and furnishings of unprecedented opulence'.⁴⁸ John Carr of York (1723-1807) was employed at Aske, and

William Chambers (1723-1796), another Scot based in London, at Dundas House in Edinburgh.



Giltwood sofa designed by Robert Adam and made Thomas Chippendale, 1765.

The discovery in 1964 at Aske Hall of some of the original accounts for the furnishing of these properties (subsequently lodged at North Yorkshire County Record Office), reveal that Sir Lawrence patronised some of the leading cabinet makers of his day, including Thomas Chippendale. For example for 19 Arlington Street, Robert Adam designed a suite of two sofas and chairs for Aske described by Chippendale as ‘exceedingly Richly Carv’d in the Antick manner ... and cover’d with your own Damask’.⁴⁹ The designs and the surviving bills suggest they were the most expensive chairs he ever made. He invoiced the frames at £20 a time, exactly double the price he charged for the most expensive chairs in the State Rooms in Harewood House in 1773 for Sir Edwin Lascelles.⁵⁰ Sir Lawrence also employed lesser known furniture makers James Lawson, Vile and Cobb, Fell and Turner and France and Bradburn. Correspondence and bills associated with the purchase of furniture, paintings, and the commissioning of fine tapestries from the all the subject of a group of essays published in *Apollo* magazine in 1967.⁵¹ These essays are connoisseurial by nature, concentrating on attributing surviving decorative art to their authors.

The engagement of all these ‘professionals’ should not however obscure the very close control that Dundas exercised over the decoration of his homes or the role he delegated to his wife. Before his great house buying campaign began he wrote from Rotterdam in June 1760 to ‘Pegie’:

I hope you will give orders about everything concerning your house in Hill Street before you go to Scotland and about the Plate as I agreed upon before I left London, I would wish to have this ready before I come home, ... I gave Mrs Craufurd the Section of the room she is to write about the Tapestry and to order a Turkey carpet that will cover the whole room ... I would wish to have the dinning [sic] room lined with timber in place of paper for I think a room for eating should be wainscoted in place of paper ... adieu my Dear Life.⁵²

Clearly Dundas felt that the house was as much his wife’s as his own, he also relied heavily on his housekeeper Mrs Craufurd, and had his own ideas, independent of fashion about the furnishing of a dining room, in a period when wallpaper was becoming all the rage. Despite his rapidly accumulating wealth Dundas had an eye for economy too. In November the same year he wrote from Bremen in Germany to his wife: ‘When you write let me know what you have done with furnishing your house in Edinburgh, I would have you do it in a Plain Genteel Taste as neat as possible but not expensive’.⁵³

It is clear that Dundas, even though tied up with his complex contract work took immense interest in his properties, having a keen eye for detail, and relied heavily on his wife Pegie, not only to carry out his wishes, but also to make decisions about the furnishings. Concerning Moor Park Sir Lawrence wrote to her ‘I am so glad you go so well on ... if you get the Chairs for the Saloon made during our

absence, everything will be finished in the lower part but the great room, but do all these things as you like best'.⁵⁴ She remains a shadowy character, but her hand is evident in many of the letters and orders sent to the suppliers.⁵⁵ Sir Lawrence was clearly proud of his Clackmannan connections which he acquired via his wife, paying for a 'for finishing the Clackman [family] tree £30' in 1771.⁵⁶ The flurry of interior furnishing and house-formation that is usually associated with the setting up of the new marital home, occurred on a more regular and grander basis in the Dundas households.⁵⁷ Dundas as contractor seems to have relished the logistical challenges, albeit he became pettish when all was not going as smoothly as he liked. When he went to Aske in the spring of 1763 he 'found everything in confusion', and explained to Pegie 'tho' I must say Mrs Brown [another trusty housekeeper] has done all that any person can do and a most valuable servant she is too ... it is impossible to think the difference one finds in coming from Moor Park where you have everything in such order to a place where things are not'.⁵⁸



Sir Lawrence Dundas with his grandson, by Johan Zoffany, 1769. Aske Hall, Yorkshire.

It appears that Sir Lawrence envisaged Aske, Moor Park and 19 Arlington Street as much collectively as individually, their uniting feature being their lavish furnishings, designed and made by the same elite group of professionals. The only contemporary illustration of one of these interiors is the

Dressing Room at 19 Arlington Street, known via a painting of Sir Lawrence with his grandson, Thomas by Johan Zoffany in 1769 (which cost him £105 at the time, half James Boswell's annual allowance from his father to live in London). (Zoffany was later to make his fortune in India painting portraits of the British) With the '8 antique figures on the chimney' it looks the picture of classical taste, worthy of a member of the Society of Dilettanti which Dundas had joined in 1754, after which he sent his son on the Grand Tour. The display of these Grand Tour treasures is reminiscent of Samuel Foote's fictional nabob, Sir Matthew Mite, who 'brought from Italy antiques, some curious remains which are to be deposited in this country. The Antiquarian Society have, in consequence, chosen me one of their body'. In the Banqueting Room at Moor Park Adam designed a suite inspired by the antique couches used by the Romans for feasting, the source for their design is a chimney-piece of white marble, formerly in the Palazzo Borghese in Florence, and installed at Moor Park by Sir Lawrence

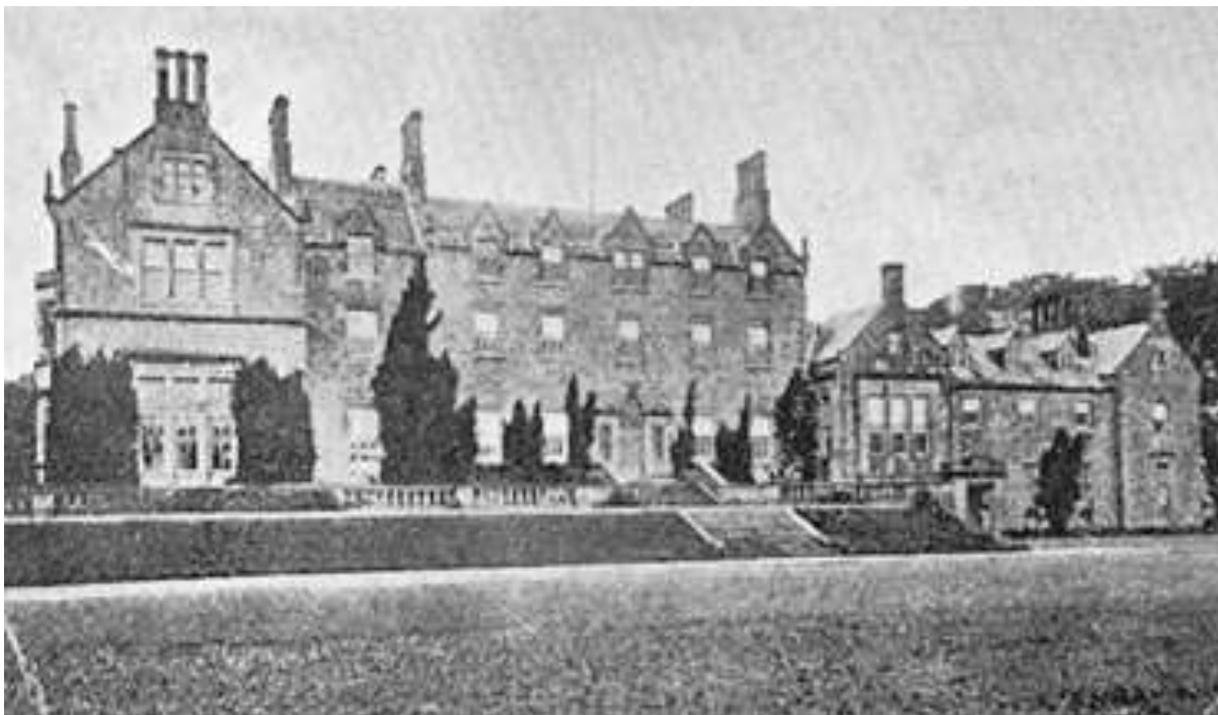
Sir Lawrence was clearly thinking of both Aske and Arlington Street together and hierarchically when he commissioned two magnificent 'very large Mahogany Bookcases' from Thomas Chippendale in 1764. Though identical in design the one intended for 19 Arlington Street was set with plate glass, (£80) while the one for Aske incorporated cheaper crown glass (£78).⁵⁹

Those things which could not be found in England, were purchased abroad. The rock crystal and ormolu 'lustres' for the Gallery at Moor Park were smuggled from Paris in the diplomatic train of the Prussian Ambassador in 1767, while the Neilson tapestries were shipped from the Gobelins manufactory in June 1769. The acquisitions of the 'chimneypiece of statuary and yellow of Siena marble' in Florence from the sculptor Francis Harwood, through the intervention of his son Thomas, which was dispatched to Aske in 1767, the chimneypiece reputedly from the Borghese Palace, which stood in the Tapestry Room at Moor Park, the 'Carlo Maratti' recommended to him by Greenwood, the Zoffoli bronzes and the mythological canvases by Cipriani which dominated the Hall at Arlington Street, placed him at the forefront of Italian taste. Sir Lawrence was also an early collector of Dutch painting including works by Teniers, Cuyps and van de Capelle.⁶⁰ Sourced from all over Europe, the contents of the Dundas households demonstrated not only wealth, but also an enviable network of suppliers, agents and dealers, culminating in interiors that were admired as being in the finest taste. Lady Shelburne in her diary for 1768 notes: 'I had vast pleasure in seeing the house [19 Arlington Street], which I had so admired, and improved as much as possible'.⁶¹ The wealth of this 'Nabob' enabled him to become 'a true dilettante and an enlightened patron of the liberal arts and architecture', without any censure of his taste.⁶²

India Goods & The Importance of Kerse

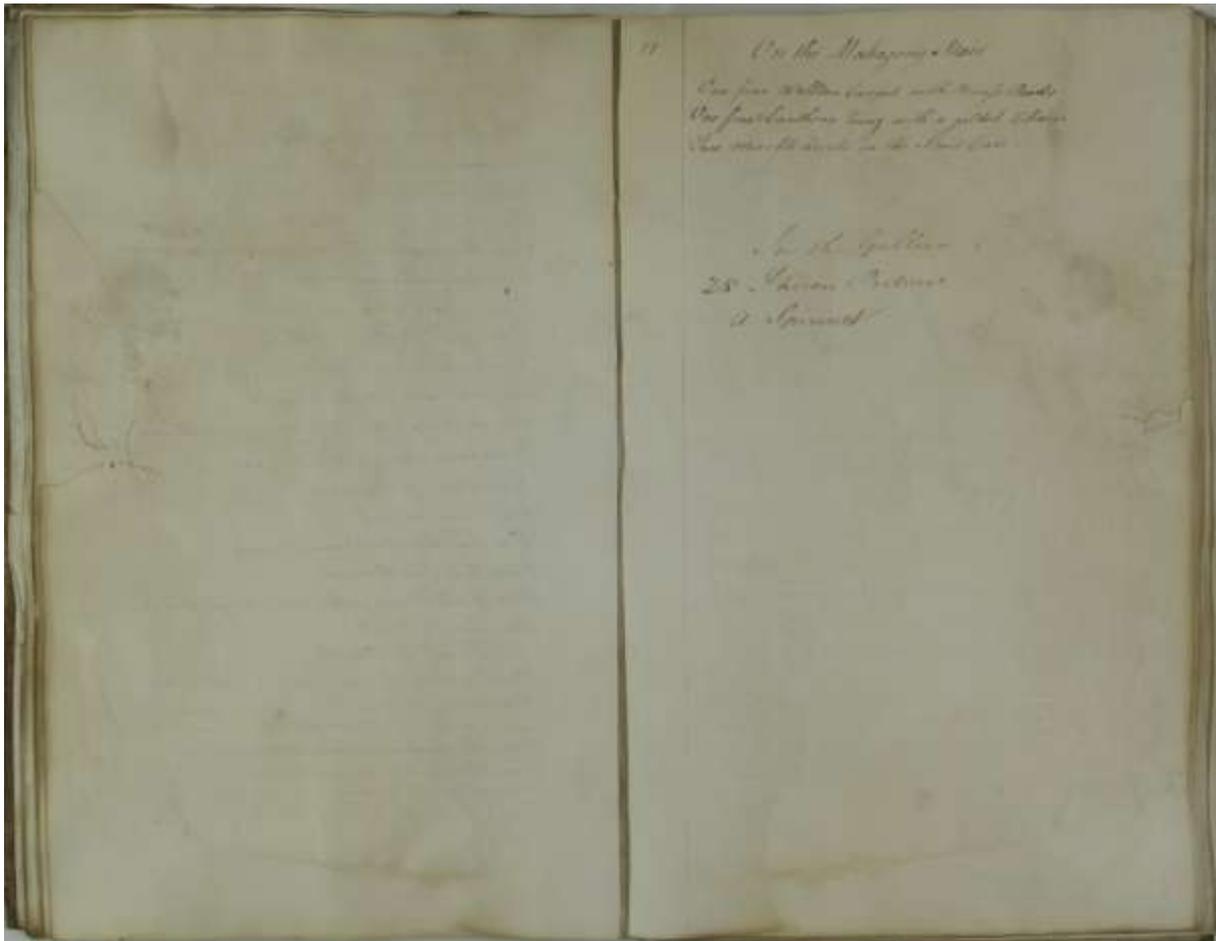
Yet where in this story of interior decoration are the exotic Asian goods that exist at Aske Hall today? None are mentioned in the connoisseurial articles published in *Apollo*. The paucity of inventory evidence surviving for the eighteenth-century relating to the Dundas properties, makes tracking their appearance and movement difficult. In the recently re-discovered 1768 inventory of Arlington Street the most exotic chattels listed are a 'stand for a Parroquet', 'Two Parroquets in a Cage'; and 'Cloathes Chest of Pigeons wood in a frame' in the Blue Bed Chamber. This exotic timber came from South America. Perhaps they may have entered the Dundas households in later centuries? Much of the career of Laurence John Lumley Dundas, 2nd Marquess of Zetland (1876 -1961) was centred on India. In 1912 he was appointed a member of the Royal Commission on the Public Services in India of 1912–1915, was Governor of Bengal between 1917 and 1922 and Secretary of State for India between 1937 and 1940.

At Moor Park, the only evidence in the inventory of Asian goods is in the list of chinaware, which included 'Mr Anson's India set of tea china finely painted with landscapes'.⁶³ According to Lord Hardwicke, Dundas took 'everything as it stands' at Moor Park when he purchased it on Anson's death in 1762. A porcelain soup plate from a complementary dinner set in the British Museum reveals that it may have been manufactured at Jingdezhen, Jiangxi province, China c. 1743-47.⁶⁴ What is left of the 208-piece armorial service is at the Mansion House in Shugborough. It was acquired during George Anson's months in Canton in 1743, which are recorded in his *Voyage Round the World* (1748). Stephen McDowall in his East India Company at Home case study of [Shugborough](#), examines in more detail the relationship of the Anson brothers, George and his older brother Thomas, with the Chinese and Chinese-style objects that were associated with the Chinese House erected on the Shugborough estate in 1747. Clearly Lawrence Dundas and his family would have had very different attitudes towards this very personal tea service, but found it sufficiently appropriate for their own use, 'second-hand'.



Kerse House before demolition.

It comes as a surprise then, to find an unusual concentration of 'India goods' in a rather overlooked Dundas property, Kerse in Stirling, purchased by Lawrence Dundas, c.1749. As John Harris has noted, although it was 'an unremarkable five-bay three-storey house' with little architectural merit, it was a very significant purchase for Dundas. In spite of Sir Lawrence's ancient Scottish lineage, he and his immediate forbears maintained no Scottish house of consequence before the acquisition of Kerse (It was demolished in 1958.) When Sir Lawrence was created a Baronet in 1762 it was as Baronet of Kerse in the County of Linlithgow. It was also a commercially astute purchase, being near Grangemouth which Sir Lawrence founded in 1768, during the construction of the Forth and Clyde Canal, which passed through the Kerse estate. Grangemouth was to become a bustling and successful port (today it is the largest container terminal in Scotland).



Kerse inventory, NYCRO ZNK XI.

All this seems a long way from any exotic connections. However, the discovery of an inventory dated 1763 of Kerse, in a green bound and rather water-damaged cover reveals a wealth of 'India goods'.⁶⁵ In the Gallery were '28 Indian Pictures';⁶⁶ in the Drawing Room 'one settee with blew Indian Sattin Work'd' with two elbow and eight plain chairs upholstered to match, 'Two Indian Cabinets' and 'an Indian Trunk' with 'Two fire Screens with Indian paper'. Lady Dundas's bed and dressing rooms contained a mixture of what appeared genuinely Asian goods with fashionable western imitations. In her bedroom she had a glass with a 'Chinese frame', probably carved in Britain, perhaps from Chippendale's *Gentleman and Cabinet-maker's Director: being a large collection of the most elegant and useful designs of household furniture in the Gothic, Chinese and modern taste* (1754). Her dressing room contained an 'Indian trunk' and an 'Indian dressing box with a pin cushion in the top'. Her dressing glass was set within a 'japann'd frame' (in imitation of Chinese lacquer). It is not clear what type of ceramics she had in the 'China press' which sat upon a mahogany chest of drawers. The 'Blue Guise Room' housed a 'four leafed Indian screen' with 'blew and white China water pots' and basins. A 'four posted Mahogany Bed stedd with Indian worked Sattin Furniture and counterpaine of the same', stood in the Blew Silk Room, the adjacent dressing room contained a 'dressing Glass with a Japan'd frame', with 'Six Chinese Chairs with Cushion cover'd with blew and white cotton'. These too are likely to have been derived from Chippendale's *Director*.

This concentration of East India Company goods is magnified when one takes into account the relatively small scale of Kerse compared to Dundas's other properties. For example there are thirty rooms listed in the Kerse inventory. Aske by comparison accommodated 38 bedrooms alone.⁶⁷

These goods clearly had a very specific meaning to the Dundas's, quite separate from the show and status of the more recently acquired Aske, Moor Park and Arlington Street homes, which contained none of these Asian sourced goods, or even European imitations of them. An inventory of the library at Aske in 1839 hints at more than a passing family interest in Asian affairs.⁶⁸ It includes Jean-Baptiste Du Halde's two volume *History of China*, published in 1736; the Scottish sea-captain, privateer and merchant Alexander Hamilton's *Account of the East Indies* (1727), and Bartholomew Plaisted's *Journal from Calcutta* (1750).

Kerse was the 'family' home, furthest north, deep in the dynastic hinterland of the Dundas clan. It was regularly occupied by Sir Lawrence and his family, as letters which are dated and signed with the place of writing prove. Sir Lawrence died in London, but chose to be buried near Kerse, in the family mausoleum in Falkirk Church. These exotic goods, which were created so far away, shipped across oceans, turn out to have been part of the modest, private, familial core of one of the most wealthy men of his day.

The Properties after the death of Sir Lawrence

On his death in 1781 'Lawrence Dundas of Arlington Street in the County of Westminster' left 'to my dear son Thomas Dundas all my real estate in England, Ireland and Scotland and in the West Indies', and made him sole executor of his will.⁶⁹ He also left debts which amounted to £1,000 in mortgages, £224,787 in bonds owing in Scotland, and annuities of £4,971. Thomas Dundas rapidly came to the conclusion that some of the properties would have to be sold. Moor Park was despatched first, in 1784. It fetched £25,000 at auction, and was stripped of its magnificent contents. The Moor Park paintings were auctioned in 1797. Dundas Mansion in Edinburgh was sold in 1825. Significantly Kerse remained in the family until 1958, when it was demolished. 19 Arlington Street was not sold until 1935 and Aske Hall became the 'family seat'. Inventories of the 1830s to 1860s show a consolidation of goods in process. An inventory and valuation of 1839, shows 'India screens', Indian trunks and an 'India Cabinet brass bound' have found their way to Aske, which was becoming the central family property.⁷⁰ 'Lord Anson's Model of a Ship in a glass case' which had been left at Moor Park when Sir Lawrence purchased after Anson's death in 1762, also found its way to Aske, as well as much of the 'Nankeen' 'India China Vases', and other chinaware.⁷¹ They went to a geographically peripheral, but genealogically central home in Scotland to an archetypal English country house.

Conclusion

This exercise in the exploration of nabob taste reveals the importance of thinking about a country house not in isolation, but within a network of properties that cross national boundaries. Each has a role within a family's personal, dynastic, political, social, cultural and economic situation, which changes over time. Sir Lawrence's skills gained whilst working as a merchant contractor gave him a logistical confidence that enabled him not only to deal with many new projects simultaneously, but also to draw objects from all over the world into his properties. His East India Company connections were crucial to the operation of these acquisitions, providing not only the finances, but also a network of associations through which he could acquire them. It is clear that he considered his 'India goods' in a distinct way. They are coralled in the house that was possibly the first Sir Lawrence bought, in the heart of Stirling, his dynastic homeland. He chose not to mix them with the furnishings of his show homes in London, Hertfordshire and North Yorkshire. While his patronage of Adam,

Chambers, Chippendale and Carr followed the pattern of so many other country house refurbishers, his very particular collection of Asian goods suggests a parallel story, that was also part of a meaningful and 'civilising process' centred on consumption.

They were kept after Sir Lawrence's death, although shortage of funds put pressure on to sell, and were shipped to an English country house that became in later generations the central family home. Perhaps it was here that Sir Lawrence Dundas's great great grandson, Laurence John Lumley Dundas, 2nd Marquess of Zetland (1876-1961) became fascinated with the East. He focussed his lengthy career on India, first as a member of the Royal Commission on Public Services in India (1912), then as Governor of Bengal (1912-1915) and finally as Secretary of State for India (1917-1922 and 1937-1940). In the search for 'India goods' we have found not only a network of commodities, but also of houses and of people; linking the British country house very firmly with the East, and crossing boundaries of place, culture and time.

This case study started out as an examination of one Dundas house, Aske Hall, in an attempt to understand from where and when the Asian goods currently in the house originated. In the process we have unearthed the scale and importance of his East India Company connections, and a very particular attitude to the Indian and Chinese goods that were the fruits of this Company's trade. The next step might be to compare Sir Lawrence's strategy with that of his neighbours in North Yorkshire and Hertfordshire. Only thirty miles from Aske Hall, Sir Edwin Lascelles (1713-95) was employing many of the same architects, designers and cabinet makers at Harewood House which he was building and furnishing between 1759-1771, with money made by his father in the West Indian sugar trade. Lascelles chose to have his Chippendale furniture set against Chinese wallpaper, possibly acquired via his brother Henry's position in the East India Company. Entries in the Day Work Book written by the steward Samuel Popplewell evidence the fact that Chippendale's men were hanging Chinese papers in many rooms in the House including putting up India paper (the contemporary name for Chinese wallpaper) in the Chintz Bedroom between the 1760s and 1790s. Here is a very different strategy of accommodating the East within the British country house.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Lord Ronaldshay for supporting and encouraging this research, Keith Sweetmore and his team from the North Yorkshire County Record Office, and Stuart Howat for his photography.

CHRONOLOGY

c.1710 Lawrence Dundas born

1738 Married Margaret Bruce, 'Peggie'

1741 Only child, Thomas born

1745 Jacobite Rebellion, contracts for supplying the army of Cumberland

1747-48 MP for Linlithgow Burghs, unseated

The East India Company at Home, 1757-1857 – UCL History

- 1749 Buys Kerse, Falkirk in Stirlingshire
- 1750 Elected to the Society of the Diletantti
- 1754 Unsuccessfully contests Linlithgow Burghs
- 1756 Purchased house and lands of Castlecary, Stirlingshire
- 1756 Seven Years War begins, receives contracts for supplying troupes in Germany
- 1759-62 Buys an estate in Sligo and Roscommon, Ireland for £63,696 and Ballinbreich, Fife for £31,000

- 1762 Death of Lawrence's father Thomas Dundas
- 1762 MP Newcastle under Lyme
- 1762 Buys Redcar, Marske Hall & Upleatham Hall in County Cleveland
- 1762 Purchases Clackmannan estate in Scotland for £22,000
- 1762 Receives baronetcy, Baron Kerse
- 1763 End of Seven Years War
- 1763 Buys Moor Park, Hertfordshire for £25,000
- 1763 Buys 19 Arlington Street, London for £15,000
- 1763 Buys Aske Hall, Richmond, N.Yorks for £45,000
- 1764 Buys Loftus Estate, East Cleveland
- 1764-77 Governor Royal Bank of Scotland
- 1764 Son Thomas marries Lady Charlotte Fitzwilliam, daughter of the 3rd Earl Fitzwilliam.
- 1766 Purchases earldom estate Orkney & Lordship of Shetland for £63,000
- 1768 Purchase Burray and associated lands on other Orkney islands for £16,500.
- 1768-80 MP for Edinburgh
- 1768 Buys Burray and associated lands on other Orkney islands for £16,500
- 1768 Begins development of the port of Grangemouth
- 1772 Building of Dundas Mansion, Edinburgh begins (architect William Chambers)
- 1773 Bought Letham from his brother, Thomas

The East India Company at Home, 1757-1857 – UCL History

- 1774 Dundas Mansion in Edinburgh completed
- 1780-81 MP for Richmond, North Yorkshire
- 1781 MP for Edinburgh
- 1781 Sir Lawrence Dundas dies
- 1784 Moor Park sold without its contents for £25,000
- 1794 Sale of Moor Park paintings
- 1794 Lawrence's son Thomas raised to peerage as Baron Dundas of Aske
- 1809 Irish estates sold for £177,490
- 1820 Thomas Dundas dies at Aske
- 1825 Dundas Mansion sold for £10,000
- 1892 Upleatham Hall demolished
- 1935 19 Arlington Street, London sold
- 1958 Kerse demolished

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¹ There is some confusion about the date of Lawrence Dundas's birth, some sources giving c.1710, others 1712 or 1721.

² Book review of Tillman Nechtman, *Nabobs: Empire and India in Eighteenth-Century Britain*, Cambridge University Press, 2010, by Mitch Williamson, 27 November 2011 <http://warandgame.com/2011/11/17/book-review-nabobs-empire-and-identity-in-eighteenth-century-britain/>

³ Samuel Foote, *The Nabob; a comedy, in three acts. As it is performed at the Theatre-Royal in the Haymarket, London*, printed by T. Sherlock, for T. Cadell [etc.], 1778.

⁴ Marion Moverley one of the East India at Home project associates discovered in the *Journeys of a German in England, a walking tour of England in 1782 by Carl Philip Moritz*: 'Last week I went twice to an English Theatre [Haymarket Theatre]. On the first occasion The Nabob by the late Samuel Foote, was played A Mr Palmer played The Nabob - a silly fool with a fondness of slander, suddenly become immensley rich and much sought after by cranks, natural scientists, quakers and who knows else, all seeking his membership, well he is admitted to the Society of Natural Scientists'.

⁵ Tillman Nechtman, *Nabobs: Empire and India in Eighteenth--Century Britain*, Cambridge University Press, 2010, p.238

⁶ Using GoogleNgram,search term 'nabob'.

⁷ 11 December 1762 in F.A. Pottle (ed.), *Boswell's London Journal*, 1950, p.75.

⁸ Edith Lady Haden-Guest,'Dundas, Sir Lawrence 1st Bt. (c.1710-81) of Kerse, Stirling and Aske, nr Richmond,Yorks', History of Parliament Online, volume 1754-1790, p.358. One of these enemies was Sir James Cockburn (1729-1804) who in 1764 filed bills against him. Dundas in turn blocked Cockburn's attempts to become a Director of the East India Company in 1765, although Cockburn succeeded in securing a Directorship between 1767-9 and 1770-73.

⁹ History of Parliament Online, volume 1754-90.p.358.

¹⁰ History of Parliament Online, volume 1754-90, p.358.

¹¹ History of Parliament Online, volume 1754-90, p.358.

¹² See: <http://www.christies.com/lotfinder/furniture-lighting/a-george-iii-giltwood-sofa-designed-by-5092522-details.aspx>

¹³ G.E. Bannerman, 'The "Nabob" of the North': Sir Lawrence Dundas as government contractor', *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research*, January 2008, volume 83, issue 219, pp.102-123 and *Merchants and the Military in Eighteenth-Century Britain. British Army Contractors and Domestic Supply 1739-1763*, Pickering and Chandos, 2008.

¹⁴ Huw Bowen *The Business of Empré*, 2006.

¹⁵ History of Parliament online, volume 1754-1790, footnote 38: Whately to Grenville, 2 and 15 June 1769, Grenville mss (JM); L. S. Sutherland, E. I. Co. in 18th Cent. Politics, 183; Lady Mary Coke, Jnl. iii. 134.

¹⁶ P.Bruce Behan, 'The East India Company 1749-1800: The Evolution of Territorial Strategy', *Business and Economic History*, vol.23, no.1. Fall 1994, pp.56. Share splitting was used by Clive in 1763 in an attempt to influence the election of Directors sympathetic to his cause.

¹⁷ NYCRO, ZNK X1-11-41. Thanks to Bob Woodings for sending information relating to the continued Thomas Dundas's investments with the East India Company after his father's death: ZNK purchased 2012, uncatalogued: Bundle 1 (letter from Henry Hale, dated 15 Nov 1794, apologising to Thomas Dundas that he will not be able to meet Dundas' orders for items from India. There is a long specific list.Bundle 8: A letter dated 21 June 1789 to Thomas Dundas, in reply to a request for information, from his supplier Shadwell explaining how the latter is trying to find out whether cheaper rates can be found for East India ships.

¹⁸ NYCRO ZNK X1/13/1-23 Ship Investments

¹⁹ Jean Sutton, *Lords of the East The East India Company and its Ships*, Conway Maritime Press Ltd, London 1981, p.77.

²⁰ NYCRO, ZNK X1/13/23. I am grateful to Georgina Hale for alerting me to Anthony Farrington *A Catalogue of East India Company Ships' Journals and Logs 1660-1834* (British Library 1999) and Anthony Farrington *A Biographical Index of East India Company Maritime Service Officers 1600-1834* (London, 1999) for the careers of everyone with the surname Dundas.

²¹ NYCRO, ZNK X1/13/7 Respondentia Bond in £2000 by James Dundas, commander of the *Prime* 490 tons, and Sir Lawrence Dundas, to Harry Thompson on voyage to Bencoolen and China for payment of £1210 to Harry Thompson, 11 December 1772.

²² Sutton, 1981, p.70

²³ NYCRO, ZNK X1/13/9 George Dundas, was a captain in the East India Company's service, and commander of the *Winterton* East Indiaman, which was wrecked off the coast of Madagascar in 1792.

²⁴ With thanks to Marion Moverley for pointing out via www.thepeerage.com that a George Dundas died before 1364, whose son was named James.

²⁵ NYCRO, ZNK X1/13/15 Account of investment for Capt. Ralph Dundas shipped on the Royal Henry for Bombay, 14 March 1778.

²⁶ Thanks to Margot Finn for pointing out the connection in British Library online Family History, advanced search 1740-1800.

²⁷ <http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/history/ghcc/research/eicah/houses/valentinesmansion/>

²⁸ George K. McGilvary, *East India Company Patronage and the British State. The Scottish Elite and Politics in the Eighteenth Century*, I.B. Tauris, 2008

²⁹ NYCRO ZNK X1/2/300, 4 November 1777

³⁰ Dundas also had to counter the opposition of James Cockburn who had joined an East India Company group of MPs led by Laurence Sullivan. Cockburn lavished money on his burghs to counter the Dundas interest.

³¹ NYCRO ZNK X/1/2/62, 5 May 1766.

³² NYCRO ZNK X/1/2/52, 11 January 1766.

³³ NYCRO ZNK X/1/2/217, 18 March 1775.

³⁴ NYCRO, ZNK X/1/2/224, 10 December 1775.

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⁴⁸ Wilmot-Sitwell, 2009, p.75.

⁴⁹ Christie's Sale 7676, Lot 5, <http://www.christies.com/lotfinder/furniture-lighting/a-george-iii-giltwood-sofa-designed-by-5092522-details.aspx>

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⁵⁵ For example NYCRO ZNK X/1/7/24 account of designs for Arlington Street and Moor Park are in Lady Dundas's hand.

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