

## **East India Company Bibliography**

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## Part One

### Annotated Guide to a Selection of East India Company Histories

**Lucy Sutherland, *The East India Company in Eighteenth-Century Politics* (Oxford, 1952),**

One of the earliest historical works on the East India Company is Lucy Sutherland's *The East India Company in 18<sup>th</sup> Century Politics*. Following the approach of Lewis Namier, Sutherland traces the 'the way in which a large financial, trading and territorial corporation, itself undergoing great administrative and political strain, could be affected by, and itself affect, the intricate workings of politics at Westminster, and the unending struggle of the governments of the day to maintain the "connexion" on which their survival depended.'<sup>1</sup> This parliament-centric view of history is useful in highlighting both the economic centrality to the British state of the EIC and its role in deciding the fate of political parties and the success of individuals. Here, Robert Clive's failure to wrestle control of the EIC from Laurence Sullivan in 1763 also resulted in the simultaneous failure of parliamentary opposition to be elected in the City of London. Thus, Sutherland closely links the development of the EIC to those political changes simultaneously being enacted in Westminster. But more than this, she writes, 'neither the history of the development of British power in India nor the career of these great men is comprehensible without the study of their intricate and often unedifying background.'<sup>2</sup> This is to perceive the machinations of state and imperialism as impacted by the characteristics or jealousies of these men, a viewpoint which offers the ability to read politics from the level of the personal. However, the limits of this approach are not only in the concern with solely 'great men' as historical actors but also the spatial confinement to the walls of Westminster.

**P.J. Marshall, *East Indian Fortunes: The British in Bengal in the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford, 1976),**

P.J. Marshall, a student of Sutherland, focuses instead on India in his study *East Indian Fortunes* and seeks to trace the ways by which EIC servants created and amassed a fortune. He demonstrates how the lack of regulation outside of the main cities during the mid-eighteenth century opened up the opportunities for EIC servants to make fortunes through bribes and private contracts for goods. Here his concern is focussed on how politics and trade interact within the community of Bengal, leading Marshall to argue for the

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<sup>1</sup> Lucy Sutherland, *The East India Company in Eighteenth-Century Politics* (Oxford, 1952), p. v.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 50-51.

development of the EIC from trading Company to a military-backed territorial one during the course of the eighteenth century. This shift was accompanied by an attempt to eradicate corruption within the ranks of EIC servants with the extravagant gift giving and fortunes made from trading giving way by the latter decades of the eighteenth century to large salaries and decreasing emphasis on patronage. Marshall's final chapter engages with the return of those who chose an EIC career and also those who failed to return, demonstrating that the numbers of civil servants who perished in the Bengal EIC was at a 57 per cent average between 1707 and 1775.<sup>3</sup> These brutal statistics suggests not only the multifarious groups who sought an India career but also through incorporating those who failed the narratives of 'great men' who succeeded are put in perspective as, for the most part, exceptional figures. However, as Marshall concludes 'a detailed study of the uses to which Bengal fortunes were put once they had arrived in Britain is outside the scope of this book' and to explore this facet of an EIC career would be to explore both the economic repercussions but also the social ones in terms of negotiating (re)integration into British society.<sup>4</sup>

**H.V. Bowen, *The Business of Empire: The East India Company and Imperial Britain, 1756-1833* (Cambridge, 2006)**

In more recent years, Huw Bowen has focussed on the workings of the Company from London. Bowen has studied the intricate workings of the EIC in London from 1756 to 1833, prefacing his work with the warning that this is a 'somewhat old- fashioned study of institutional change.'<sup>5</sup> However, it looks not to 'great men' such as Clive who made fortunes in India but rather the 'ordinary' scribes and clerks who worked in India House. Here, Charles Lamb, who worked for the EIC at the beginning of the nineteenth century, complained of the long-hours and hard work required, comparing his eventual retirement to being freed from slavery.<sup>6</sup> This is not only to trace the development of the beginnings of an increasingly regulated and controlled civil service but also to highlight how banal the EIC employees' connection to the global often was. Bowen also seeks to expand the actors who interacted with the EIC beyond simply those that sought a career and to the wider numbers who bought stocks in the Company, a mixed group which

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<sup>3</sup> P.J. Marshall, *East Indian Fortunes: The British in Bengal in the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford, 1976), p. 218.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 256.

<sup>5</sup> H.V. Bowen, *The Business of Empire: The East India Company and Imperial Britain, 1756-1833* (Cambridge, 2006), p. x.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 149.

included British women and foreigners alongside more traditional male actors. His final chapter deals with the return of Company servants from India and their impact on the economic and social aspect of Britain.

**George McGilvary, *East India Patronage and the British State* (London, 2008)**

George McGilvary's work offers the ability to gain a picture of the EIC from a non-Anglo centric point of view. Tracing the influence and numbers of Scots in Indian service post-Union, McGilvary highlights the fact that these changes began far earlier than previously thought during the 1720s under the leadership of Robert Walpole and Scot John Drummond in order to ensure that the fragile Union of 1707 was maintained.<sup>7</sup> This led to the dominance of Scots in the EIC with, for example, one quarter of all Indian patronage between 1760 and 1830 going to Scots, where the population proportion suggest it should have been far closer to an eighth or a ninth. These figures allow him to assess the role of Scots not only in dominating the EIC service but also the impact their economic success had on Scotland itself after their return. Here agriculture and the building of estates was one of the central reasons behind the massive economic and social shifts seen in Scotland during the eighteenth century. This places colonialism at the heart of an integrated British nation and allows McGilvary to question, in terms similar to Tom Nairn, how Britain will be sustained as a single entity with the end of the patronage of to the EIC, demonstrated by his parting comment that 'with the British Empire all but extinguished, and the cohesion it engendered gone, a reversion to the constituent parts of the United Kingdom might indeed become a reality.'<sup>8</sup> This is to see the 'English' EIC as not simply subsuming Scots into its ranks but to recognise that this influx of Scots also helped create a 'British' empire in India.

**Jeremy Osborn, 'India and the East India Company in the Public Sphere of Eighteenth Century Britain', in H.V. Bowen, Margarette Lincoln and Nigel Rigby (eds), *The Worlds of the East India Company* (Woodbridge, 2002)**

These wider considerations of how an India career was regarded and how they were played out in the press is examined in an article by Jeremy Osborn who has taken newspapers and also more unusual sources such

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<sup>7</sup> For a previous work which highlights the role of Henry Dundas from the 1770s onwards in managing EIC patronage see Michael Fry, *The Dundas Despotism* (Edinburgh, 2004).

<sup>8</sup> George McGilvary, *East India Patronage and the British State* (London, 2008), p. 208. See Tom Nairn's chapter 'The English Enigma' in *The Break-Up of Britain: Crisis and Neo-Nationalism* (Edinburgh, 2003), pp. 279-294.

as the betting book of eighteenth-century Oxford colleges. Through doing so, he argues that ‘expansion had a domestic as well as an Eastern frontier’ and traces newspapers role in shifting public opinion as the EIC changed from being regarded as a corrupting influence and the need to avoid a territorial empire to a view that was far more encouraging of imperial expansion.<sup>9</sup> To do so is to engage with a multitude of shifting meanings and perceptions of the EIC and also increase the political understandings of the EIC beyond the narrow confines of Westminster. However, it remains a history sited in the ‘public sphere’ of newspapers and reading rooms and to look instead to the means by which these ideas permeated and complicates the notion of the ‘private’ or ‘domestic’ sphere is to not only to thicken further the conception of politics but also engage a wider cast of actors beyond those males who had access to Oxford reading rooms.

**Emma Rothschild, *The Inner Life of Empires: An Eighteenth-Century History* (Princeton, 2011)**

Emma Rothschild’s *Inner Life* is a micro-history of the Johnstone siblings and their interactions with empire covering their collective lives from 1723-1813. Using a ‘fragmented’ collection of sources most prominently letters, wills and official parliamentary and company sources alongside the technological techniques more commonly utilised by family historians, Rothschild traces the history of the family and their wider network of friends, relatives and slaves. The geographical span of the book from Scotland to the West Indies, India and the Americas is dictated by the careers of the male members of the family: two brothers apiece served in the British Army, the Royal Navy and the East India Company. To trace these disparate imperial careers highlights the networks that bound the family together, not just of familial intimacy but also information, money and the exchange of (often exotic) goods. Rothschild’s innovative use of the ‘inner life’ as a focus also allows the female members links with Empire to emerge and opens up this interaction as personal and domestic rather than on the official and institutional accounts that have traditionally dominated studies of imperial interaction. But Rothschild does not seek to contain this within a ‘private sphere.’ Rather she grants agency to the sisters who remain in Scotland who she describes as the ‘at the center of this family history of empire’ due to them being the main receiver of letters and circulator of news.<sup>10</sup> To do so is to cast the Johnstone sisters as global and imperial actors despite their own relative lack of travel through the circulation of goods and letters within which they were enmeshed. This

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<sup>9</sup> Jeremy Osborn, ‘India and the East India Company in the Public Sphere of Eighteenth Century Britain’, in H.V. Bowen, Margarette Lincoln and Nigel Rigby (eds), *The Worlds of the East India Company* (Woodbridge, 2002), p. 218.

<sup>10</sup> Emma Rothschild, *The Inner Life of Empires: An Eighteenth-Century History* (Princeton, 2011), p. 192.

innovative means of complicating the boundaries public and private contributes to the reclamation of imperial agency of the Johnstone sisters.

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