

**Blair Southerden (with Helen Clifford)**

**Ships, Steam & Innovation: An East India Company Family Story c.1700-1877**

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Figure 1. Blair Southerden sitting in the kitchen of the Swaledale Museum (run by Helen Clifford) with a copy of his book *A Gentle Lion and other ancestors* (2013). Image courtesy of Helen Clifford.

This contribution to the East India Company at Home project originates from a meeting with Blair Southerden who came up to North Yorkshire to give a talk to the Upper Dales Family History Group in July 2013. Having heard about the project he brought with him a copy of his privately printed book *A Gentle Lion and other ancestors* (2013). In a section in this publication he reveals the story of the discovery of his Parsi origins, the family's close connections with the East India Company, and how through his association with the Company civil engineer Ardaseer Cursetjee (1808-1877), Blair's great great grandfather came not only to visit Britain several times, but also to set up home here in 1859. The

opportunity of presenting a case study from an Indian perspective seemed irresistible. Ardaseer Cursetjee's story reverses the usual tale of a white male East India Company servant travelling out to India, and coming home to England, and in so doing casts a different light on what 'The East India Company at Home' means. The story of Ardaseer Cursetjee and his English and Indian families adds a further dimension to the idea of the emotionally divided children of empire, presented by Elizabeth Buettner in her *Empire Families Britons and Late Imperial India* (2004).

The following adapted text is taken from Blair Southerden's *Gentle Lion*, of which only 32 copies exist. It is re-ordered, reduced and expanded in certain areas to explore themes central to the *East India Company at Home* project - that is issues surrounding the construction of home and identity. Blair explains that he was told as a boy that he had a great grandfather who was a Parsi from India. Yet in the dedication of the book to his mother he hints that there was a lost story. As Blair phrases it, she knew so much more about her family than she was allowed to tell. It was not until 2004, when he spent some time searching the internet for his ancestors' name, Ardaseer, and found references to a civil engineer from the Indian shipbuilding family of Wadia that he pursued this part of his ancestry further. He notes that it was a simple matter to locate the marriage record for Gustasp Ardaseer and Florence Neal, his mother's maternal grandparents, which revealed Gustasp's father as 'Ardaseer Cursetjee, civil engineer'. Their marriage took place at St Mathias Church, in the parish of Richmond, Surrey in 1879. Discovering the origin of Gustasp's name immediately took Blair back to the information he had found on Ardaseer Cursetjee, which led to the Wadia family and ultimately to his finding a further fourteen generations of ancestors, hitherto unknown to him, in India. While Ardaseer Cursetjee achieved fame within his lifetime, as a naval engineer, and pioneer of steam in India, Blair's discoveries about his life in Britain cast a completely new light on him, explaining perhaps why his story has not been widely recognised in India. The resulting case study we hope shows how historians with different perspectives can work together, to shed a revisionist light on the life of a forgotten innovator and his relationship with Britain.

### **A Short Note on Names**

The Parsis have long used a patronymic style of naming and individuals were known by a combination of their own given name and that of their father, so Ardaseer Cursetjee was Ardaseer, son of Cursetjee. It later became the practice to adopt as a surname the name of an illustrious ancestor or traditional vocation of the family. In the preface to Ardaseer Cursetjee's published *Diary* he states that he is of the Lougee family.<sup>1</sup> The family originally referred to themselves as being of the family of Lowjee and probably adopted the vocational name of Wadia only around the 1870s.<sup>2</sup> In the nineteenth century the present surname Wadia was adopted in India. It is a corrupt derivation of the word *vadia* meaning carpenter or shipbuilder.

**An Indian shipbuilding dynasty**



Figure 2. Portrait of *Jamsetjee Bomanjee* oil on canvas, c.1830. Attributed to J. Dorman, based on an earlier engraving after an original miniature by Edward Nash. It was probably painted after the death of Jamsetjee Bomanjee to commemorate the shipbuilding accomplishments of both father and son. Image courtesy of The Royal Asiatic Society.

This family story begins with Lowjee Nusserwanjee (c.1700-1774) the great (x2) grandfather of Ardaseer Cursetjee. He was born at Sigapur near Surat in about 1700. Many Parsis lived in this area, as in the late seventh century many fled from Persia in the wake of persecution, and were offered residence by the ruling Hindus of India, mainly in the area of Surat. Lowjee Nusserwanjee trained as a shipwright and was employed in the East India Company's dockyard at Surat, which prior to 1735 was the principal dock, not only on that side of the peninsula, but also of all India. How Lowjee Nusserwanjee found himself in Bombay is explained at length in a report of 1810, written by the Superintendent of Marine, Mr T. Money for the Government of Bombay:

In that year [1735] Mr Dudley, the master-attendant, was sent by the Government of this Presidency to Surat to agree with the builder there, Dhanjibhai, to build a ship for the Honourable [East India] Company's service to be called the *Queen*. In the construction of this vessel Mr Dudley was so much pleased with the skill and exertions of the foreman, Lowjee Nussarwanjee, that after the launch he endeavoured to persuade him to proceed with some officers to Bombay, where the Government were desirous of establishing a building yard.<sup>3</sup>

Lowjee Nusserwanjee refused to leave without his master's consent, and when finally given he moved to Bombay in 1736 with a small team of shipbuilding artisans, including his brother. In August 1740, on the death of Mr Dudley, Lowjee Nusserwanjee replaced him and was given the title Master Shipbuilder. On Lowjee's death in 1774 he was succeeded as Master Builder by two of his sons Maneckjee Lowjee (1720-1792) and Bomanjee Lowjee (1722-1790) who jointly held the post. Maneckjee Lowjee married Rutanbai Shappurjee Khursedjee and had six children Framjee (1749-1804), Nusserwanjee (1754-1817), Heerjibhoy (1764-1804), Rustomjee (1766-1812); and two daughters Jerbai and Awahbai. When Maneckjee Lowjee died in 1792 his son Framjee Maneckjee (1749-1804) and his brother Bomanjee Lowjee's son Jamsetjee Bomanjee (1756-1821) succeeded as third Master Shipbuilders. The period between 1812 and 1817 saw the family attain its greatest

prestige as shipbuilders when sixteen men-of-war were designed and built, and 40 more large ships. Jamsetjee Bomanjee's portrait shows him seated, wearing a shawl, the customary gift from representatives of the East India Company, at the launching of a new ship (see figures 2 and 3). In the portrait Jamsetjee Bomanjee holds a plan of the *Minden* launched in 1810, the first man-of-war to be built for the Royal Navy out of England. The Royal Navy recognised that ships could be built more cheaply in Bombay and teak, the local timber, was more durable than English oak. Apart from some earlier Bombay-built ships that had subsequently transferred to the Royal Navy Service between 1800 and 1821 another eighteen ships were commissioned, including the *Minden*, the *Cornwallis* and the *Wellesley*, all third rates with 74 guns.



Figure 3. Double portrait of *Jamsetjee Bomanjee (right) and his son, Nourojee Jamsetjee (left)*, oil on canvas, (H 603 mmW 873 mm) c.1830. Image courtesy of The Royal Asiatic Society.

It was in this period that Rustomjee (1766-1812), the writer's great (x4) grandfather, was employed in the dockyard. He married firstly Meherbai Maneckjee Cowasjee Sorabjee and they had one child, Cursetjee born in 1788, the writer's (x3) grandfather. Meherbai died in July 1794 and Rustomjee married secondly Awahbai alias Javanai Horm, who bore him two

further children, Dinbai (?-1828) and Dhunjeebhoy (1799-1854). From 1801 Rustomjee was placed in charge of the Mazagaon Dock. On his brother Framjee's death he succeeded to the joint position of Master Builder, under Jamsetjee as Head Builder, until his death in 1812.

Jamsetjee continued as Master Builder until 1817, when he was succeeded in that post by his son Nowrojee Jamsetjee Wadia (1774-1860). The fifth Master Builder was Nowrojee's nephew, Cursetjee Rustomjee Wadia (1788-1863), the writer's great (x3) grandfather. He had joined the dockyard in 1799 at the age of eleven and, on the death in 1821 of his great uncle Jamsetjee Bomanjee, became the Second Builder. He married Jerbai Cowasjee Bomanjee Kabrajee and one of their four children was Ardaseer Cursetjee.

The sixth and seventh Master Builders were Jehangir Nowrojee (1821-1866) and Jamsetjee Dhunjibhoy (1829-1893). Jehangir succeeded in 1857-1866. He is notable here, as a cousin to Ardaseer Cursetjee, who had preceded him to England in order to study ship construction. In 1863 Jehangir, as Master Builder, had been required to reduce staff and had persuaded family members Hirjeebhoy Merwanjee the First Assistant Builder, and Rustomjee Ardaseer Second Assistant Builder to join family companies that were benefitting from increasing trade with both England and the United States. On Jehangir's death in 1866 there was only one other member of the Wadia family employed in the dockyard, Jamsetjee Dhunjibhoy, the Third Assistant Builder. He had joined the dockyard aged 15 in 1844. His retirement in January 1885 brought to an end 150 years of Wadia connection as Master Builders.

**Ardaseer Cursetjee Wadia (1808-1877): Steam and Innovation**



Figure 4. Ardaseer Cursetjee FRS, Chief Inspector of Machinery for the Honourable East India Company. (Wadia, The Bombay Dockyard). Image courtesy of Blair Southerden.

Ardaseer Cursetjee was brought up and educated in the service of the East India Company and followed in the family tradition of working at the Bombay Dockyard from the age of fourteen in 1822. In that year his uncle, Nowrojee Jamsetjee was the Master Builder, and Ardaseer Cursetjee's father was employed as an Assistant Builder. By 1828 aged twenty Ardaseer Cursetjee had been placed in charge of the shipyard at Mazagaon, where he designed and supervised the construction of several fine vessels.

As R. K. Kochhar explains Ardaseer Cursetjee was, however, 'more interested in steam machinery than ship-building'.<sup>4</sup> In 1820 he had built a small 1 HP engine and installed it at his premises for pumping water from a well. Fortunately his interest coincided with that of

the Company. They readily agreed to his request about the year 1831 to transfer him to the charge of Capt. F. McGillvray, the Mint engineer, 'for the purpose of devoting myself to the study of steam machinery and the foundry business'. By 1830 commercial circles in Bombay were lobbying for the development of what was called the 'overland route' to Europe and Great Britain, via Suez. This route would reduce the sea journey by 1,000 miles and would be good for business in Bombay. Increasingly steamships were visiting India and requiring repairs, for which Bombay had neither adequate facilities nor the engineers to supervise them.

After transferring to the Mint, Ardaseer acquired a 10 HP steam engine from England which he installed in a boat of his own building, launched in 1833 and named the *Indus*, and was reported in the *Bombay Courier* as having been 'built by a very promising young Parsi shipbuilder'. The *Indus* was the first private steamer built at Bombay, (and was preceded only by the *Hugh Lindsay*, built in 1829 for the East India Company by Nowrojee Jamsetjee, the Fourth Master Builder, and later purchased by the Bombay government). This was 'principally intended as a means of conveying instruction' and its builder regularly invited people to study it in action. The *Bombay Courier* reported that he 'demonstrated to his countrymen the great advantage which might be derived from the introduction of steam as a means of irrigating garden land and improving agricultural resources of the country'.<sup>5</sup> In print Ardaseer Cursetjee acknowledged his debt to Captain F. MacGillvray who supervised him, and 'his worthy assistant' Captain Turner, 'as those gentlemen gave me my first lesson upon steam'.<sup>6</sup>

His achievements did not go unnoticed and in 1833 he was made Assistant Builder at Mazagaon, 'the office being expressly established for him on the recommendation of the Superintendent of Marine, Captain John Crawford'. By 1837 the Indian Navy (until 1830 the East India Company's Bombay Marine) had made the policy decision to create an all-steam fleet. But even before the new technical direction of the dockyard was apparent, Ardaseer

Cursetjee had taken the initiative to improve his knowledge and experience of steam power.

Ardaseer Cursetjee's fascination with innovation was not confined to steam and its application to ships. He is also credited with introducing photography and sewing machines to Bombay. In 1834, aged twenty-six, he introduced gas as a fuel for domestic lighting into Bombay, 'by lighting up my own house and garden, at my expense, and I exhibited the same gratuitously to the public, who came many hundreds of miles on purpose to witness this'. In particular:

The Governor of Bombay, the Earl of Clare, came with his retinue to witness the demonstration. A huge crowd thronged outside Ardaseer Wadia's residence at Mazagaon, Bombay, and the Governor [of Bombay] could approach his demonstration only with difficulty. On concluding his appreciative inspection, the Governor awarded "an honorary dress" to symbolise his admiration of the young Parsi's ingenuity. As the Governor was on his way out, a flick of his fingers by Ardaseer Wadia signalled an instantaneous switching off the lights. A minute later the blazing glory was again switched on, and the throng outside responded with added amazement.<sup>7</sup>

As the historian John Crowley has remarked 'until the use of coal gas in the early nineteenth century [in Britain], the basic technology of lighting had remained the same from thousands of years before classical antiquity'.<sup>8</sup> Within twenty years of gas lights being first demonstrated in Pall Mall, London in 1807 they had displaced oil lamps in most central districts.<sup>9</sup> Thanks to Ardaseer, Bombay was soon to benefit from this new light source.

## Visiting England 1839

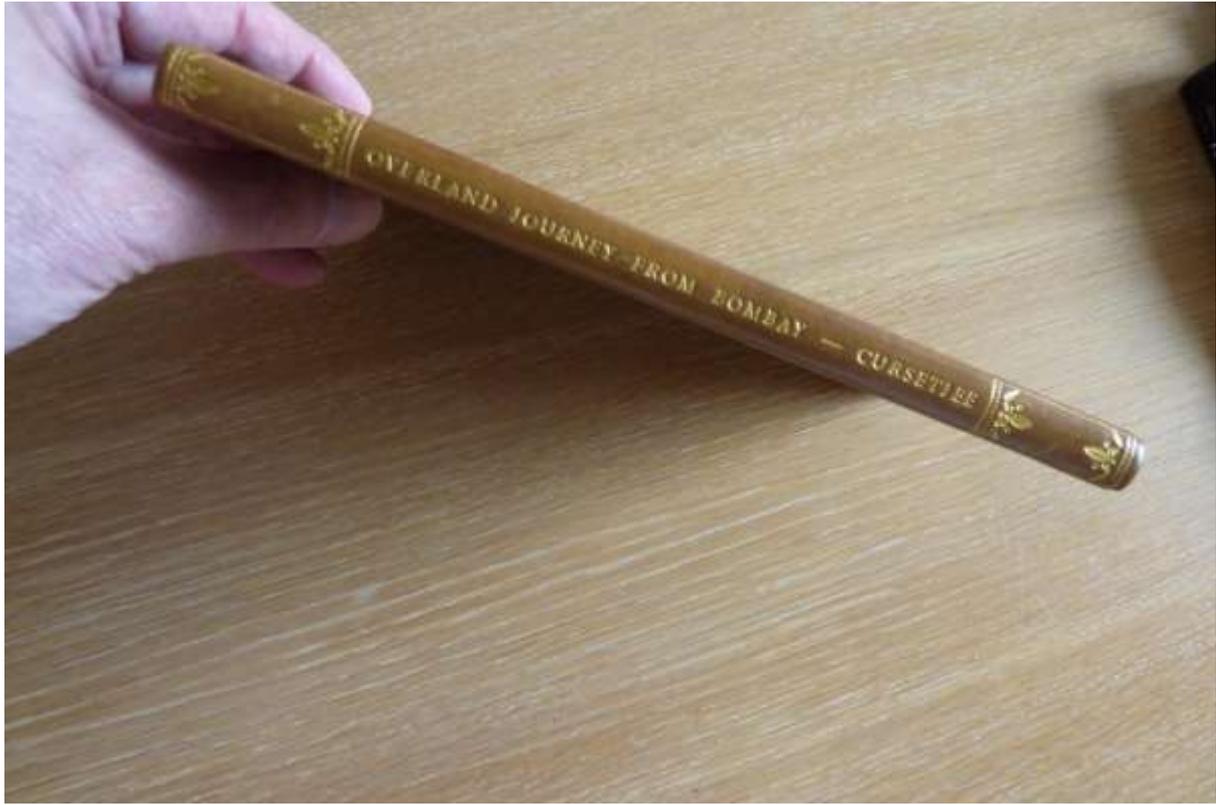


Figure 5. Spine of Ardaseer Cursetjee's *Diary of an overland journey from Bombay to England*.  
Image courtesy of Blair Southerden.

It was perhaps the Governor's delighted response to Ardaseer's domestic invention, as much as his achievements in steam machinery that gave Ardaseer the courage in 1835 to apply to for permission to accompany the Governor to England. In his *Diary* he explained: 'Having already spent several years in scientific pursuits of public utility, it was my great ambition to visit England for a short time, to make myself better acquainted with the resources of that powerful country'. The Governor, the Earl of Clare did not however approve this application and recommended that he wait awhile. Following his departure severe illness compelled Ardaseer to leave the island of Bombay. It is unclear why he chose to take a trip to China, and no record exists of his time there, although he was elected a non-resident member of the Royal Asiatic Society in 1837. Ill health was to beset him again in 1838, when his renewed request to visit England was granted. He finally made it to England in 1839, sailing on the steam ship the *Berenice*, leaving behind his wife (and distant

cousin), Awahbai Nowrojee Nusserwanji, his two sons Rustomjee (1828-1893) and Nusserwanjee (1833-1891) and daughter Ruttonbai (1830-1899). His second daughter Soonabai was born that year. His request for financial support from the East India Company, made on his arrival in England, was rewarded with an allowance of £1 a day for subsistence. His salary of 79 rupees a month (equivalent to £95 per annum) barely covered his sea passage, and he calculated that his expenses in getting to England had cost him the equivalent of three year's salary.

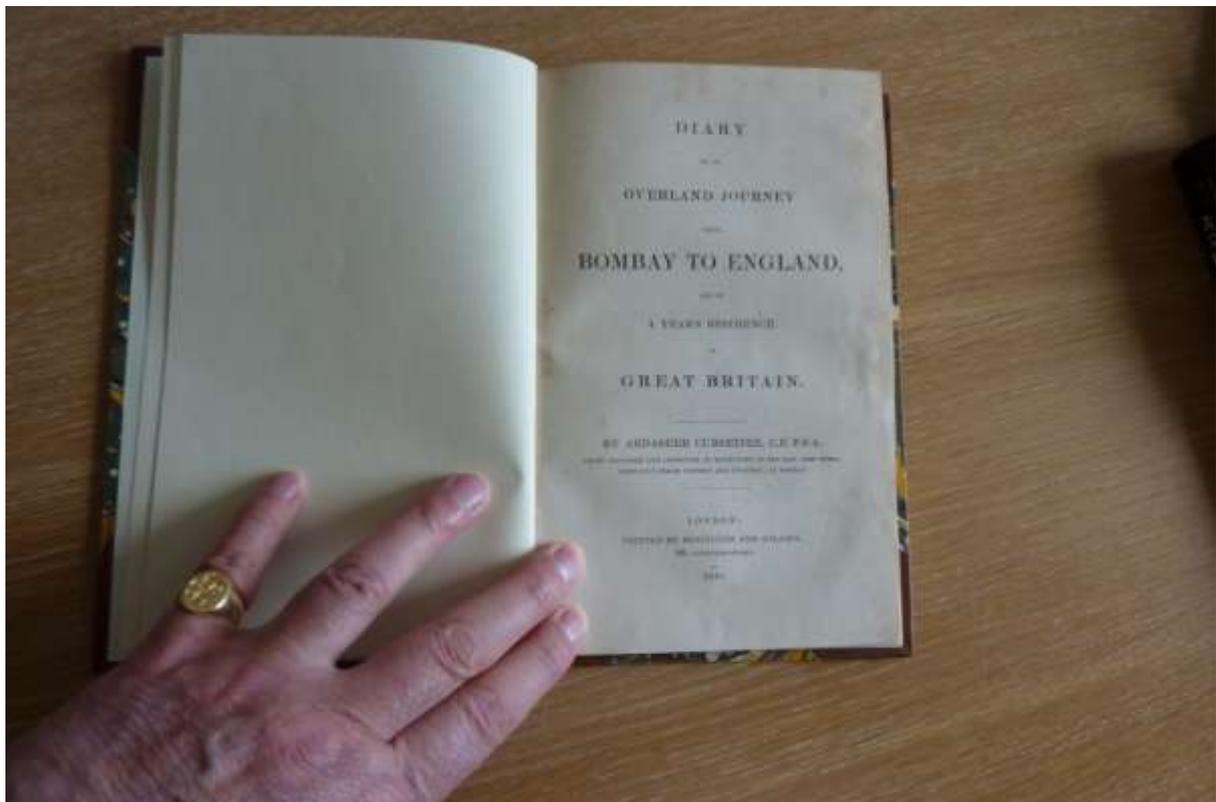


Figure 6. Image of frontispiece to Ardaseer Cursetjee's *Diary of an overland journey from Bombay to England*. Image courtesy of Blair Southerden

Ardaseer Cursetjee's *Diary* provides a fascinating, if somewhat brief account of this year and a half away from Bombay. For a Zoroastrian to travel overseas was to go against the religious teaching of his community, and especially for one whose family was the Head of the Parsi Panchayet [Synod] in India. It was also against his religious teachings to eat food prepared by someone not of his religion, but Ardaseer was a devout Parsi and he travelled with servants who prepared his meals. During his stay in England he declined many

invitations to dinner because the food would not have been prepared by someone of his own faith. His references to this in the diary may be one of the many reasons he chose to publish it, as well as proving worthy of the opportunities given him by the East India Company. According to his *Diary* his time in England can be divided into three parts. First and most extensive was his social life, which was driven by his thirst for engineering knowledge and contacts, what we would now call 'networking'. This certainly paid off, as his admission to several august British bodies testify, including his election as a Fellow of the Royal Society, the first Indian to be thus honoured and to the Society of Arts and Science, and the mechanical section of the British Association for the Advancement of Science. He also, according to Kochhar, became a Freemason in 1843.<sup>10</sup>

The second element in his stay was his presence at important occasions, such as his attendance at the illuminations in the City and Whitehall celebrating the wedding of Queen Victoria in February 1840 and his presentation to her in July that year. He also gave evidence to a Committee of the House of Commons on the subject of the opium trade with China, in which Bombay merchants were prominent, which may explain why he went to China in 1835. The Committee's investigations had been precipitated six months before Ardaseer Cursetjee's departure for England when local officials at Canton had seized over 20,000 bales of opium from British merchants on the instructions of the Chinese government. He was questioned in his capacity as a Parsi recently come from Bombay who was knowledgeable about trading activities. He described the harm that the seizure had caused Parsi merchants in Bombay as a consequence of being unable to settle debts. The reports from this Committee were a precursor to the action taken later by Lord Palmerston, which started the first Opium War with China.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly to Ardaseer, there was the time he spent drawing plans of marine steam engines at Seawards of Limehouse, one of the most progressive marine engineering companies, established in 1824. John Seaward (1786-1858) founder of the company took Ardaseer to the Institute of Civil Engineers where he was elected an

Associate. He professes in his *Diary* that his chief aim in London was to work in a Thames shipbuilding yard where steamboats and marine engines were constructed, so that on his return to India he would be able 'to impart to my countrymen the benefit of my researches in a branch of science, which has greater influence upon the interests of mankind than all the discoveries of them many centuries past; for such must be considered the various adaptations of steam power to the wants, the conveniences and luxuries of civilized life'. In a time of unprecedented expansion in London, the docks and shipyards were one of the most active areas in the metropolis. Between 1800 and 1806 the West India Docks had been laid out, at Wapping the London Docks, and at Blackwall the East India Docks. St Katherine's Dock followed in 1829. Canals and iron railways linked them up, and the importance of the engineer had never been greater. Ardaseer Cursetjee's addresses in London at this time, indicate proximity to this action. In 1840 he wrote from an address in Poplar whose population had reached 17,000 by 1831 reflecting the inrush of shipbuilding employment provided by the new docks. It was an area that even from the seventeenth century had been closely connected with the East India Company, who had built offices and a dockyard there in 1612-14.<sup>11</sup> Ardaseer Cursetjee also made time to visit relatives, including his two cousins Jehangir Nowrojee and Hirjeebhoy Merwanjee, the son and nephew of the Master Builder in Bombay, who had preceded him to England and remained for two and a half years training as naval architects at Chatham Naval Dockyard. They gave an account of their stay in a *Journal* published in 1841.<sup>12</sup> We can draw upon Nowrojee and Merwanjee's *Account* of their visit, and Cursetjee's *Diary* to discover what their impressions were of Britain. A review of both publications in the *Mechanics Gazette* of 1841 credits their works as being written in a 'very good style, and are characterised by manly spirit and sound sense'.<sup>13</sup>

The authors of the *Account* made it clear that the purpose of the publication was to provide a 'bird's eye view, as it were of what we have seen from 29 March 1838 the day we left Bombay, until April 1841' as a guide for other Indians who might want to visit Britain. They were struck by the number of omnibuses in London. They comment in detail on 'the great

length of time that is everyday occupied at meals by the English people', listing half an hour for breakfast, two hours for dinner, half an hour for an afternoon meal and a further half an hour for supper. 'Now this consumes nearly a quarter of their time and does appear to us, to be a very great waste of that valuable commodity'. They drew a 'quiet picture of everyday life of a family', being particularly impressed by female education that enhanced such life, and hoped that this might 'induce mothers in India ... to establish some such system to education their children'. What struck them most was the comfort of English domestic life.

While Ardaseer Cursetjee has been dubbed 'the poster boy' of Empire, a good example of how western education could uplift a 'natives', his comments on what he found in Britain were not uniformly positive.<sup>14</sup> He castigated London's 'dirty roads', comparing them unfavourably with those of Bombay. He considered cab drivers to be 'an imposing and insolent set of men' and was dismayed by the shopkeepers and tradesmen who had he found 'a generally ... unfair practice of speaking against one another in the same line of business which is the cause of great embarrassment to foreigners as they cannot have any confidence in dealing with them'.

### **Return to India**

While travelling along the south coast inspecting shipyards, Ardaseer Cursetjee noticed an advertisement in *The Times* soliciting applications for the position of Chief Engineer and Inspector of Machinery at the steam factory and foundry in Bombay. He immediately returned to London and wrote from 21 Penny Fields in Poplar to the Secretary to the Honourable Court of Directors of East India Company offering himself as a candidate, submitting testimonials from Samuel Seaward with whom he had been studying and from the Institute of Civil Engineers, as well as from employers from the HM Dockyards at Woolwich, Chatham and Portsmouth. A month later the Court of Directors unanimously chose him for the job which he swiftly accepted. He was advised to return at the earliest

possible practicable period. While he waited for the sailing of the *Buckinghamshire* in December, he made a brief sightseeing trip of Paris. Meanwhile the Court of Directors appointed the foremen for the factory, over whom he was to have control, the first Indian to be employed by the EIC as a manager of Europeans. On return to Bombay in April 1841 he promptly took up his new position in charge of the steam branch of the Indian Navy, aided by one chief assistant, four European foremen and staff of about one hundred European engineers and boiler makers, and about two hundred native artificers. The post carried a salary of Rs600 per month, more than seven times his then salary as Assistant Builder. Not everyone however approved of his appointment. The *Bombay Times*, doubted 'the competency of a native, however able or educated, to take charge of such an establishment as the Bombay Steam Factory with a body of Englishmen to be directed, superintended and controlled'.

Ardaseer Cursetjee held this post for sixteen years. In 1843 the steam factory opened for repairs and his workload increased as the Navy grew in size, in numbers both of staff and ships. In 1850 he was elected vice-President of the Bombay Mechanics Institute. In February 1851 he launched the steamship *Lowjee Family* built by his son Rustomjee Ardaseer at Mazagaon Dock, fitted with machinery fabricated at the foundry at his house. After these exertions it is not surprising that Ardaseer Cursetjee suffered what was probably a stroke. However three months later he was permitted to make a second visit to England this time via the United States, where he was the first Parsi to visit that country. Although his travels are not well recorded a rare report exists of his visit to the home of Mr and Mrs Howard in Salem, Massachusetts, recorded by their daughter in her memoirs. She 'was somewhat startled one evening by a friend's bringing a real live Parsee, with a tall calico headdress to take tea with us'. She continued:

It was a revelation to me that a fire worshipper could take tea like ordinary mortals. But he was a harmless lion, and roared very gently, and drank his tea and ate his

bread and butter quite like other folks, and told us many interesting things of his life in Bombay.

I remember that we all screamed at him and spoke very distinctly, as if we were talking to a child, and that he answered us in a very low cultivated refined voice, using much better English than we did.<sup>15</sup>

When he returned to Bombay in February 1853 he brought back with him some wood-cutting machinery from the United States, and probably other novel items, since he is credited with the introduction of photography and electroplating to Bombay. His own photograph was taken by Dr Hugh Welch Diamond (the son of an East India Company surgeon), and exhibited at the London Photographic Society's show in Dundee in 1854 the same year the first photographic society was formed in India, of which Ardaseer Cursetjee was one of the founding members.

### **Personal Connections: Setting up Home in London**

It is still unclear what prompted the retirement in 1857 of this pioneer at the age of 50. Had his job as Chief Inspector of Machinery taken its toll on his health? Had he foreseen the waning influence of the East India Company long before what is traditionally called the Indian Mutiny (also known as the Sepoy Revolt or the Indian War of Independence)? Or had the 1850s wrought such changes within the Parsi community that he opted to return to England? Or did a lady called Marian Barber hold the key to his last trip to England in c.1858? In December 1853 Ardaseer's name appears as the father of Lowjee Annie, born to a Marian Barber (1817-1899) in Bombay. Her second child by him, a son named Gustasp Ardaseer, was also registered in Bombay, in 1856.

Marian's parents both originated in Suffolk, but by the time of her birth they had moved to London.<sup>16</sup> The 1841 census shows the family as living in the Hamlet of Mile End Old Town,

Tower Hamlets, (where they lived for over three decades), her father William 'employed by the Customs'. Here were newly built stuccoed houses, within easy access of Stepney Green which even in the mid nineteenth century must have been, according to Pevsner, 'pretty and peaceful'. By the 1851 census one of Marian's brothers William is revealed as 'Formerly a check clerk in London Docks' (was it through him that Ardaseer met Marian?). For much of Ardaseer Cursetjee's stay in England in 1839-40 he lodged in Limehouse, no more than a mile from the Barber family in Mile End, and connected from 1810 by the Commercial Road which linked Shadwell, Limehouse and Poplar with the City. Furthermore a 'Mrs Barber and servant' appears in the passenger list of the *Achilles*, leaving Bombay for England in 1851, near to that of Ardaseer Cursetjee.<sup>17</sup> Had they met in Bombay before the sailing? Or had they met 11 years before, in London? If so had she gone out to India to work for him? Was she now his nurse or travelling companion? Or had Marian been acting as governess for his children in Bombay? Marian was clearly back in Bombay by March 1853 to conceive their daughter Lowjee Annie. She was still in Bombay in November 1856, but had returned to London by June 1859. We know this from her children's place and date of birth: Lowjee Annie born 25 December 1853 Bombay; Gustasp born November 1856 - Bombay; and Florence Victoria born 22 June 1859 - 34 Essex Street, parish of St Clement Danes, Middlesex.

Ardaseer Cursetjee did not marry Marian. In his will he refers to her by her maiden name, but he identifies her as the mother of his children. Ardaseer remained married to his wife in Bombay, and marriage to Marian would have been prohibited by English law. Furthermore at this time there was a much documented legal case in progress that while not specifically relating to him, must have raised some disquiet. The case of *Perozeboye v Ardaseer Cursetjee of Bombay* was filed in November 1853 requesting that the defendant 'do take back his lawful wife and treat her with conjugal kindness and to provide for her alimony in the event of the said Ardaseer Cursetjee refusing her back'.<sup>18</sup> Furthermore the later Parsi Marriage and Divorce Act of 1865 (in India) explicitly ruled out bigamous

marriages, which had begun to occur with the weakening influence of the Parsi Panchayat [Synod].

Although Ardaseer took up the appointment as Chief Engineer of the Indus Flotilla Company in Karachi in 1861, taking charge of the Company's steam branch and workshops at Kotree in Sind, it seems likely that he worked from London. No records have been found for his activities in Karachi, nor of his travel to and from this post, from which he resigned in 1863. The Company, established in London, operated steamships which sailed on the River Indus between Hyderabad and Moolton whence a railway took passengers and goods onwards to Lahore. The unreliable river link was replaced by rail in 1865. The census record for 1861 shows Ardaseer Cursetjee living at 6 Montagu Place, Hammersmith, the other residents are Lowjee Annie his daughter aged seven, Gustasp his son aged four; his second daughter Florence Victoria aged one and Emily Rosina Willshere, 'Governess to little child', together with a cook and a general servant, but with no trace of Marian. The following year all the family was living at Upper Mall, Hammersmith, an address recorded in Lowjee and Gustasp's baptismal records. The houses at that time were mostly eighteenth century, the end fizzling out into the Water Works of which the Engine House had been built in 1811-12. It was however even in the 1850s rural, with plenty of open country between the main roads, although the population had grown from 13,000 in 1841 to 25,000 in 1861.



Figure 7. Lowjee House, this property in Richmond (seen looking south across Sheen Road) was occupied by Ardaseer Cursetjee and his family until his death in 1877, photograph taken 2011. Image courtesy of Blair Southerden.

From 1863 the family lived in Richmond. The 1871 Census shows Ardaseer and Marian Cursetjee aged 62 and 54 respectively with their children Lowjee Annie 17, and Gustasp 14, and Ardaseer's grandson Cursetjee Rustomjee, 16 living at Lowjee House, Richmond, Surrey (see figure 5). The household was completed by a coachman, cook and housemaid (both widowed), the latter's daughter and two female visitors from London. Florence was not far away, boarding at Madeley House School near Richmond. Lowjee House still stands, a grade 2 listed building, described as part of a Georgian terrace. From the exterior architecture it

looks as if it had recently been remodelled, possibly in the 1810s-1820s. It stands proud of the flat brick facades of the attached houses with its striking four-section cylinder tower frontage. In 1998 the accommodation was described as including a reception hall, cloakroom, drawing room and sitting room, with five bedrooms. The *Richmond Directory* for 1876 describes the other occupants of premises on the south side of Marsh Gate Road (changed in 1892 to Sheen Road), where Lowjee House was situated as James Bonella of the *Red Cow* [public house], W. Pyke greengrocer and fishmonger, and Richard Mole beer retailer, then Ardaseer Cursetjee at Lowjee House, probably at number 41. While the first part of the street housed shopkeepers, the next houses: Matson Red Lodge, Matson Lodge and Matson Villas were home to gentlemen who did not identify themselves by occupation, and at the end of the street Robert Harmer MD lived at Court Lodge. In 1876 Ardaseer Cursetjee was to write his carefully worded will from Lowjee House, where he died the following year.

### **The Will of Ardaseer Cursetjee: houses & bequests**

Ardaseer Cursetjee's will gives us some insight into his attitudes to his religion, his home and his personal goods and their meaning to the families he left behind, both in India and England. He remained a devoted Zoroastrian throughout, desiring that he should 'be buried in the Parsee Cemetery at Woking ... according to the rites of the Parsee Religion and leave the whole management of my burial entirely to the said Dorabbjee Pestonjee Cama [also named as one of his executors] or in his absence to such other Parsee as Marian Barber otherwise Marian Ardaseer or any of my children by her may appoint'.<sup>19</sup>

He bequeathed to his wife Awahbai, left behind in India, 'for her own use and benefit all the real and personal estate and effects derived from her late Father or Mother or any of her other relations and all accumulations thereof respectively'. To his family in England he detailed more personal effects, to his daughter Lowjee Annie he left his diamond ring 'and my portrait of myself painted in oil and all my plate and plated articles which shall at the

time of my death be in or about or belonging to my said dwelling house called Lowjee House' To his son Gustasp he bequeathed 'his watch and chain and mechanical piano fork'. To his grandson 'Cursetjee Rustomjee of Her Majesty's Indian Civil Service' he left 'my gold signet ring' whilst to Marian he left 'all jewels and the articles and things usually worn or used by her and which from time to time or at any time given or presented to her by me' as well as £100 legacy and an annuity of £50.

He further directed that 'Lowjee House where I now reside in ... be vacated by my family as soon as conveniently can be after my death and that thereupon such portions of the furniture and articles of domestic use or ornament which shall be in Lowjee House at the time of my death (except what are hereinfore specifically bequeathed) as shall be jointly selected by the said Marian Barber and Lowjee Ardaseer shall be removed at the expense of my estate to furnish the said No.5 Woolmer Cottages, The Grove, Hammersmith upon trust during the life of the said Marian Barber to permit her and such of my said three children as being unmarried shall be desirous of residing with the said Marian Barber to have the use occupation and enjoyment of the same premises and furniture. ... And I direct that an Inventory of the said furniture and articles shall before or upon being removed ... be made out and signed by the said Marian Barber and that such an inventory be kept in the custody of the said Executors and Trustees', although she was not to be 'in any way liable for or concerned to see the custody or preservation of the said furniture and articles on any portion thereof'. Unfortunately the inventory has not come to light, so we cannot reconstruct how it was furnished and how Indian and English conventions might have been combined.

Succeeding generations of Ardaseer Cursetjee's family were to shuttle back and forth between India and England, creating complex and intimate ties. For example Cursetjee Rustomjee (1855-1941) stayed with his grandfather in Richmond, connecting through his presence both Indian and English families. He had been sent to England after leaving school to study for the Indian Civil Service entrance examination. He matriculated at London

University in 1874 and enrolled as a student at Middle Temple in the same year. He was successful in the India Civil Service examination in 1876 and returned to India that year. He was posted to Allahabad as an assistant magistrate, but returned to England on leave in 1880 marrying Lowjee Annie (1853-1894), his aunt (his grandfather's daughter), that year, causing an uproar within the Parsi community. Their three children were all born in India, where their father pursued his civil service career in the United Provinces, as Assistant Judge in Allahabad (1902), Judicial Commissioner at Lucknow (1904) and Acting Judge at Allahabad High Court from 1906 until his retirement in 1911. He returned to England soon after and died in Matlock, Derbyshire in 1941.

## Conclusion

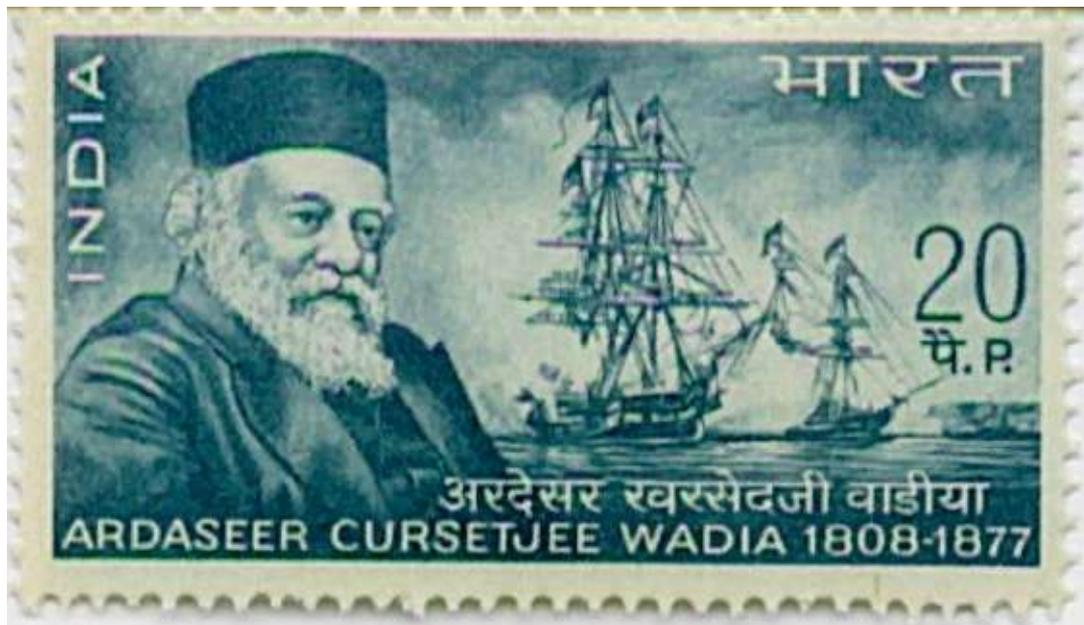


Figure 8. A stamp in a series issued by the Indian Post Office in 1969 commemorating Indian scientists. Image courtesy of Blair Southerden.

In May 1969 the *Indian Post* issued a commemorative stamp celebrating Ardaseer Cursetjee, 'in memory of this great son of India, pioneer and innovator'. His portrait to the fore with the sailing ships with which he was associated in the background. However as R. Kochhar has commented although the British 'were happy to patronize Cursetjee for trying to improve his country and countrymen ... his own country was not impressed and ignored

him completely'.<sup>20</sup> Even a two volume history of his own community, published in 1884 while devoting seventeen pages to his family, and noting his two cousins who visited England, fails to mention him. Kochhar suggests that it was because he 'was at that time leading a retired life in far-off England'. This was one of the penalties of Ardaseer's decision to create an English rather than Indian home, made possible by his association with the East India Company. We know that many British East India Company servants formed liaisons with Indian women, particularly in the eighteenth century. Some took the bold step of marrying, and bringing their family back to Britain. Ardaseer Cursetjee's story shows how one Indian reversed the pattern. Movement back and forth between India and England helped shape family identities, and Cursetjee and Marian's life, and the relationship between Cursetjee Rustomjee and Lowjee Annie, begs important questions about the dynamics and boundaries of these identities.

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<sup>1</sup> Ardasser Cursetjee Wadia, *Diary of an Overland Journey from Bombay to England and of a Year's Residence in Great Britain* (Bombay and London: Henington and Galbin, 1841).

<sup>2</sup> The Indian ancestry of the Wadia family has been comprehensively documented by Ruttonjee Ardeshir Wadia, who continued his father's research and published two books *The Bombay Dockyard and the Wadia Master Builders* (Bombay, 1955) and *The Scions of Lowjee Wadia* (Bombay, 1964). He also printed a family tree tracing his ancestry back to the first Master Shipbuilder of the Honourable East India Company, appointed in 1734, and listing his male ancestry back a further seven generations

<sup>3</sup> Dosabhai Framji Karaka, *History of the Parsis, including their Manners Customs and Present Position*, 2 vols (London, Macmillan, 1884), vol.1, chapter 13.

<sup>4</sup> R. K. Kochhar, 'Ardaseer Cursetjee (1808-1877): The first Fellow of the Royal Society', *Notes & Records of the Royal Society*, 47:1 (1993), pp. 33-47; R.W. Home, 'The Royal Society and the Empire', *Notes and Records of the Royal Society*, 56:3 and 57:1 (2002-3).

<sup>5</sup> Ruttonjee Ardeshir Wadia, *The Bombay Dockyard and the Wadia Master Builders*, Bombay, 1955, p.331

<sup>6</sup> Wadia, *Diary of an Overland Journey from Bombay to England*.

<sup>7</sup> S. D. Mehta, *The Cotton Mills of India 1854-1954* (Bombay: Textile Association, 1954), chapter 2.

<sup>8</sup> John E. Crowley, *The Invention of Comfort: Sensibilities and Design in Early Modern Britain* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2001), p. 69.

<sup>9</sup> Celina Fox (ed.), *London -World City 1800-1840* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992), p. 292.

<sup>10</sup> Kochhar, 'Ardasseer Cursetjee', p. 36.

<sup>11</sup> Alex Wernher, 'Scaling London's early XIXth century docks, bridges and manufacturies: Charles Dupin's writings and technological change', *Documents pour l'histoire des techniques*, 19/2 semester 201: les techniques et la technologie entre la France et la Grande-Bretagne XVII-XIX sicle, p.14.

<sup>12</sup> Jehangeer Nowrojee and Hirjeebhoy Merwanjee, *Journal of a Residence of Two Years and a Half in Great Britain* (London: Wm Allen and Co., 1841).

<sup>13</sup> *The Mechanics' Magazine, Museum, Register, Journal, and Gazette*, 33 (1841), p. 285.

<sup>14</sup> Quoted in Arvind Gupta, *Bright Sparks, Inspiring Indian Scientists from the Past* (New Delhi, 2009), p. 65.

<sup>15</sup> Caroline Howard King, *When I Lived in Salem 1822-1866* (Vermont: Stephen Day Press, 1937), p. 59.

<sup>16</sup> Westleton Parish Register FFC63/D1/6 fiche 9 of 18

<sup>17</sup> *Bombay Calendar* 1854, transcribed by Families in British India Society ([www.fibis.org](http://www.fibis.org)).

<sup>18</sup> *Reports of cases heard and determined by the Judicial Committee*, 6:8, p.376. This case came before the Privy Council in 1856 on appeal from the Supreme Court. The findings that it was impossible to apply the law of the Diocese of London, a Christian law to persons professing the Zoroastrian religion were to be much quoted in future cases.

<sup>19</sup> Obituary of Ardaseer Cursetjee, *Proceedings of the Society of Civil Engineers*, 51 (1878), p. 271.

<sup>20</sup> Kochhar, 'Ardaseer Cursetjee', p. 46.