

**“A jaghire without a crime”**

**East India Company and the Indian Ocean Material World at Osterley 1700-1800”**

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Figure 1: View of Osterley House and Park, Print made between 1750-1806, V&A Museum E.206B-1892.

On Friday we went to see – oh! the palaces of palaces! and yet a palace sans crown, sans coronet – but such expense! such taste! such profusion! and yet half an acre produces all the rents that furnish such magnificence. It is a jaghire got without a crime. In short, a shop is the estate, and Osterley Park is the spot. The old house I have often seen, which was built by Thomas Gresham; but it so improved and enriched, that all the Percies and Seymours must die of envy...

Horace Walpole to Lady Ossory, 21 June 1773.<sup>1</sup>

When Horace Walpole visited Osterley Park in 1773 he was struck by the transformation of the House effected by the renowned architect Robert Adam in the 1760s, a major redevelopment that had changed the character of this “botched Elizabethan pile”<sup>2</sup> into a fashionable neo-classical country mansion whose interiors were “...worthy of Eve before the Fall.”<sup>3</sup> Not only this, Walpole was impressed by the collection of ‘oriental’ objects at Osterley and the collection of birds brought in from various parts of the world through East India Company trade, which were displayed alongside European master paintings: “Mrs Child’s dressing room is full of pictures, gold filigree, china and japan. So is all the house – the chairs are taken from antique lyres, and make charming harmony – there are Salvators, Gaspar Poussins, and to a beautiful staircase, a ceiling by Rubens.<sup>4</sup> Not to mention a kitchen garden that costs £1400 a year, a menagerie full of birds that comes from a thousand islands which Mr. Banks has not yet discovered...”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Horace Walpole to Lady Ossory, 21 June 1773 in W.S. Lewis ed. *Yale Edition of Horace Walpole’s Correspondence* (New Haven; Yale University Press, 1937), 125.

<sup>2</sup> Eileen Harris, “The genius of Robert Adam: His interiors”—as cited by Lissa Chapman, “Sans Coronet”, 43. Undated Manuscript, Osterley House, National Trust.

<sup>3</sup> Walpole To Lady Ossory 21 June, 1773. (Lewis, ed. *Walpole’s Correspondence*, 1937), 126.

<sup>4</sup> It has been suggested that this painting was bought by Sir Fancis Child in Amsterdam in 1697 and was housed in his house in Lincoln Inn Fields before it was removed to Osterley House. See below.

<sup>5</sup> Walpole To Lady Ossory 21 June, 1773. (Lewis, 1937), 127. Lewis has suggested that Mr. Banks refers to a person in Walpole’s earlier writings (Tale V of the *Hieroglyphic tales*) who ‘was going all over the world in search of he did not know what.’ See note 30. It is quite evident that Mr. Banks is Joseph Banks (1743-1820), the renowned naturalist and botanist.



Figure 2: Secretary Bird in the Osterley Menagerie.

Source: William Hayes, Anne Hayes, Emily Hayes, Matilda Hayes, et al. *Rare and Curious Birds Accurately Drawn and Colored from Their Specimens in the Menagerie at Osterly [sic] Park* (William Bulmer and Co., London, 1794-1799). Robert and Sarah Child commissioned William Hayes to write and illustrate this work, which documents the collection of birds at Osterley Park. Their correspondence is archived in the London Metropolitan Archives (London ACC/3752/12/155-164).

Walpole's characterization of Osterley as a "jaghire got without crime" is a telling reference to the decorative magnificence of the estate, which was the result of its patronage by three generations of Child family men who were prominent governing figures of the East India Company. The second half of the eighteenth century had seen East India Company's expansion into politics as well as trade in South Asia with major Company figures such as Robert Clive (1725-1774) securing trading concessions and administrative rights in the region, facilitating the influx of increased wealth into Britain. As the Company's political ambitions in South Asia grew, so did the personal wealth of Company patrons who returned after making their fortunes in the subcontinent.<sup>6</sup> While their "shop", the family-run bank Child & Co., was the principal resource funding the grand restoration of Osterley Park in the 1760s, many of its remarkable examples of

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<sup>6</sup> Walpole's reference to a "jaghire without a crime" is very much a reference to his impression of Clive as "this every way great criminal". *Last Journals* i, 197-203, 231-5, pp. 231. As cited by Lewis (1937) in note 11 accompanying the transcribed letter. The term "jagir" (var. Jagheer, Jaghire) was defined as "A hereditary assignment of land and of its rent as annuity." Henry Yule, *Hobson-Jobson, A glossary of colloquial Anglo-Indian words and phrases and of kindred terms, etymological, historical, geographical and discursive*. New ed. edited by William Crooke, B.A. London: J. Murray, 1903.

decorative art were brought together as a result of the Child family's multi-generational link with East India Company trade and shipping networks in the Indian Ocean.

Acquired by Thomas Gresham (1519-79) in 1562, the Osterley estate was a simple farmhouse before it was converted into a grand mansion.<sup>7</sup> The high profile status of Osterley Park in this period was cemented through Gresham's own reputation as a financial adviser to Queen Elizabeth I. It is known that the Queen paid ten visits to Thomas Gresham's manor at Osterley, one of them c. 1570s coinciding with the performance of entertainments devised by playwright Thomas Churchill described as the 'devices of war and a play'.<sup>8</sup> Nearly two centuries later, Osterley Park's architectural and interior redesign as a classical home by Adam brought it into line with current fashion once again. Although Osterley's Adam interior has received much attention, little has been written about Osterley Park's rich and multifaceted history from the perspective of its intimate connection with the East India Company and the Company's role in shaping its decorative programme.

This case study seeks to highlight Osterley Park's East India Company (EIC) heritage and the role of EIC trade in the Indian Ocean in shaping the house and its interiors. Rather than focusing on the period of Adam's interventions in Osterley House (and their European orientation), we focus on the arrival of furnishings and objects from the 'Orient' prior to the 1760s. The first section of this case study focuses on the hitherto unknown connections between the Child family and the East India Company. In presenting a biographical account of Francis Child the elder (1642-1713) and his financial dealings we present a more complex, if not complete, picture of the role of moneyed individuals such as Francis Child the elder in shaping the course of maritime mercantile trade conducted by the EIC in its transitional years from being a medium-sized charter Company to being a global trading and administrative force in Asia. As this study demonstrates, three generations of the Child family were in the strong position of making decisions for the Company as Directors and Chairmen. While they were certainly astute businessmen, this study aims to highlight their personal and emotional investments in acquiring objects to furnish their home at Osterley Park. From that perspective, the analysis of Francis Child's travel journal documenting his visit to the Netherlands in 1697 allows a fuller insight into his own impression of what constitutes the ideal home – a view that brings together his preference for Asian export art and European grand master paintings. His son Robert Child's (1674-1721) active involvement in one of the foremost artistic forums of the period, the St. Luke's or Van Dyke's Club, is an important context for considering his role as the primary creative force for refurbishing Osterley Park after it was acquired by his father. His role as Director of the EIC for over a decade further substantiates our hypothesis that he had the means and the ability to acquire the choicest of decorative pieces and textiles from Asia for Osterley Park.

As this study shows, material objects were not only part of commodity trade between Britain and Asia, but they were also carriers of personal aspirations and memories of East

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<sup>7</sup> John Hardy and Maurice Tomlin, *Osterley Park House*, (Victoria and Albert Museum, 1985).

<sup>8</sup> Martin Wiggins with Catherine Richardson, *British Drama 1533-1642: A Catalogue: Volume II: 1567-1589*, (Oxford University Press, 2012) "Play at Osterley", No. 590, p. 146.

India Company servants who had spent time in Asia. Thus, they were constitutive of the wider emotional economy of maritime trade. A section of this study, therefore, focuses on the Childs' own maritime investments in shipping. It is through the acquisition of these objects – Chinese armorial porcelain, lacquerware and silks, Indian textiles, and furniture—that the Childs created a distinctive visual identity and enduring status for their family in London society. Moreover, as we see, these objects (especially armorial ware) were often the result of personal choice; they were commissioned selectively and acquired through private trade by Company merchants and representatives in Asia, the objects themselves harboring the complex interactions of European and Asian artistic exchange.

## FAMILY COMMERCE



Figure 3: The Money brothers: William (1769-1834), James (1772-1833) and Robert Taylor (1775-1803) 1788-92, by John Francis Rigaud, National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London, BHC2866.

A group portrait of three sons of William Money (1738-1796), a Director of the East India Company and an Elder Brother of Trinity House, commissioned by Sir Robert Wigram Bt (1769-1830), Money's lifelong friend and business partner. William Taylor (middle) was a director of the Company in 1811, an elder brother of Trinity House and an MP. He was also knighted and died as Consul General at Venice in 1834. His right arm rests on the shoulder of his brother Robert, who stands to the left and is shown half-length, to right, wearing a red coat. He is in profile looking at his eldest brother and pointing with his right hand to a map of China at the place marked Canton. James, the right hand figure, holds the other end of the map with his right forefinger placed on Calcutta. Through a window behind him the Indiaman 'Rose' is shown at anchor. James and Robert both spent their lives in the civil branch of the Company's service, with Robert serving in China. (Source: NMM's online image catalogue).

Three generations of the Child family at Osterley, much like the Taylor brothers who are illustrated above, were intimately involved in the East India Company. Unlike many other properties covered by case studies, the EIC Connection with Osterley is almost entirely London based. As far as we know none of the Child family who owned the property in the seventeenth and eighteenth century ever travelled to Asia, or served as employees of the EIC. However, the family was concerned with the governance of the Company at an important stage of its development, accumulating wealth through trading and substantial EIC stockholdings. They were undoubtedly influenced by the tastes and

styles of the countries it traded with, and the substantial contribution to their wealth from the stocks they held in the Company gave them the money to furnish their home in that (and the neo-classical) style.

For over 30 years one of the immediate family was a Director,<sup>9</sup> two owned ships leased to the EIC,<sup>10</sup> and all had substantial EIC stockholdings. Two served as Lord Mayor of London,<sup>11</sup> three were knighted and at least one member of the family was sitting as an MP for all but one of the years from 1722-1782. They thus sat, and had influence, at the centre of the political, financial and commercial world at a time when the Company was in its formative phase of growth. And the people they were close to were an integral part of this Company nexus. One partner in the Child & Co Bank, Robert Dent, was a co-owner of at least one of the ships used by the Company;<sup>12</sup> another Thomas Devon, was a critical backer of Sullivan in his fight against Robert Clive for the control of the Company in the 1760s. Sarah Jodrell's marriage into the family in 1763 reinforced the connection. Two of her family, Daniel Sheldon and Richard Craddock, had served as Company men in India at the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, and both later became Directors.

### **The First Director, Francis Child the Elder (1642-1713)**

Francis Child the elder acquired Osterley House in 1713, shortly before his death. The son of a cloth merchant, Francis Child moved to London in 1656 to be apprenticed to William Hall, a goldsmith and eventually became a Freeman of the Company of Goldsmiths in 1665.<sup>13</sup> Around this time, it is known that he went to work for Blanchard and Wheeler, one of the pioneering banker/goldsmiths who had premises in the Strand. When in 1671 he married the daughter of Martha and William Wheeler, who was also a stepdaughter of Robert Blanchard, he inherited their combined fortunes catapulting Francis Child's status in London society. Blanchard and Wheeler, and its successor business, Child & Co. survived the many pitfalls that befell other banker/goldsmiths at this time and when he died in 1713 Sir Francis Child was a very wealthy man, with assets of £250,000 – assessed by Philip Beresford to be equivalent to £3.8bn today.<sup>14</sup> His jewellery business was one of the largest in London<sup>15</sup> and clients for the banking side of the business included not only the landed gentry such as the Earl of Dorset, a friend and patron but such notables as Nell Gwyn and Isaac Newton.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Numerous references in Court Minutes of the EIC, B51-3, B56-62, British Library.

<sup>10</sup> The National Archives HCA 26/8/107 & HCA 26/4/86.

<sup>11</sup> “Lord mayors of the city of London from 1189” City of London Records, [<http://www.cityoflondon.gov.uk/about-the-city/who-we-are/key-members/the-lord-mayor-of-the-city-of-london/Documents/list-of-lord-mayors-nov-2012.pdf> accessed July, 2013.]

<sup>12</sup> British Library IOR/ B/96, p. 327.

<sup>13</sup> Chapman, “Sans Coronet,” pp. 7-8.

<sup>14</sup> Philip Beresford and William D. Rubinstein *The Richest of the Rich Wealthiest 250 people since 1066* (Harriman House Publishing, 2007).

<sup>15</sup> Edgar R. Samuel, “Sir Francis Child's Jewellery Business,” *The Three Banks Review*, (March 1977): 43-54.

<sup>16</sup> Philip Winterbottom, ‘Child, Sir Francis, the elder (1641/2–1713)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, May 2006 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/5286>, accessed 22 July 2013].





Figure 4: Francis Child the elder (1641/2-1713) in his robes as Lord Mayor of London  
Attributed to Sir Godfrey Kneller (1646 -1723).

Image Courtesy: Osterley House, National Trust. Reproduced by kind permission of Christ's Hospital Foundation

In 1683 the *London Gazette* announced that Francis Child was to hold a lottery to dispose of the jewellery of Prince Rupert (grandson of King James 1) at Whitehall. *A History of London Goldsmiths* describes King Charles II ‘counting the tickets among all the lords and ladies who flocked to take part in the adventure.’<sup>17</sup> Further, Child & Co. archives show that he also regularly advanced large sums of money to the Treasury and later became “jeweller in ordinary” to King William III.<sup>18</sup> It is known that he lent pieces for

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<sup>17</sup> William Chaffers Reeves and Turner, *Gilda aurifabrorum* (1899), p. 74. Reprint published by BiblioBazaar, 2008. E-copy of original available from General Books LLC, 2012.

<sup>18</sup> Winterbottom, ‘Child, Sir Francis, the elder (1641/2–1713)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, (2004); online edn, May 2006 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/5286>, accessed 22 July 2013].



the coronation of King William and Queen Mary in April 1689, and sold many pieces for their personal use or to give as gifts.<sup>19</sup> In that same year he was made an Alderman, and was knighted by William III.<sup>20</sup>

Edgar Samuel's research published in the *Three Banks Review* draws on the bank's archives to show just how important the jewellery side of the business was to Francis; delegated by Blanchard to another jeweller John East, Francis bought it back under his control in 1681. It may have been this that first ignited his interest in the East India Company, as a source of precious stones. Certainly Sir Dudley North, 1st Lord Guildford is recorded as buying 2000 pieces of eight from Sir Francis Child at 5s 4 and a half p for export to Aleppo.<sup>21</sup> A 1675 stock valuation in his own hand shows a number of designs and his stock of jewellery expanded steadily. In 1690 he valued his stock of loose diamonds at over £5000. In that year he was made Sherriff of London and the following year Prime Warden of the Goldsmiths Company.<sup>22</sup>

As well as using polished stones and recycled gems from second hand pieces he regularly bought large numbers of unpolished diamonds. Diamonds bought from EIC men, such as Captain Chamblett, would be polished and remounted for sale. His partner, John East, had bought rough diamonds from John Joliffe (an EIC Director), Isaac Alvares and Antonio Rodrigues Marques. In 1683/4 Francis bought over £7,000 of diamonds at EIC auctions. In 1686, Francis started to trade as a diamond importer. Adopting the low risk strategy that had served him well as a banker, he initially invested £200 with Streynsham Master, an EIC Company man.<sup>23</sup> The papers of Elihu Yale, Governor of Madras from 1686-1692 show that Francis together with Sir Henry Johnson had sent 5000 pagodas (£2375) to Yale intending to buy diamonds, but which instead was invested in a voyage to Bengal. He continued to invest, often using Abraham Pluymmer, a Dutch diamond cutter to do the buying, but later also using a Daniel Chardin in Madras.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> LMA, CLC/521/MS16864.

<sup>20</sup> *The history of England: during the reigns of King William and Queen Mary ...By Mr. Oldmixon (John)* Printed for T. Cox, 1735.

<sup>21</sup> Grasby, Richard, *The English Gentleman in Trade: The Life and Work of Sir Dudley North 1641-1691* (Clarendon Press 1994), p. 68.

<sup>22</sup> John S Forbes, *Hallmark: a history of the London Assay Office* (1999), p. 349.

<sup>23</sup> Quinn has observed that during the political crisis of 1688 resulting in the leaving of James II of England, Child lent money to a number of well-connected people. He goes on to mention that "In a rare entry, Child even lent three thousand pounds directly to the East India Company in February of 1688". Stephen Quinn, "Tallies or Reserves? Sir Francis Child's Balance Between Capital Reserves and Extending Credit to the Crown, 1685-1695," *Business and Economic History*, 23 No. 1, (Fall 1994), pp. 39-51, 43. For a discussion of the nature of credit and its ethical and moral underpinnings, see Margot C. Finn. *The Character of Credit: Personal Debt in English Culture, 1740-1914*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.

<sup>24</sup> Edgar R. Samuel, "Sir Francis Child's Jewellery Business," *The Three Banks Review*, (March 1977): 43-54. Also see, Raphaele Schwarzberg, "Becoming a London Goldsmith in the Seventeenth Century: Social Capital and Mobility of Apprentices and Masters of the Guild" Working Papers No. 141/10, Department of Economic History, London School of Economics, June 2010. For a larger discussion of the role of precious metals in supporting EIC trade see, Bruce P. Lenman, "The East India Company and the trade in non-metallic precious materials

The banking side of Child & Co was a rival to the Bank of England, which was set up in 1694. The brainchild of Scottish financier William Paterson, the Bank of England functioned as a source of cash supply for the Government initially advancing it £1.2 million. However, it was in direct competition with Francis Child's bank, which was making large loans to the Crown and for financing the governing of Ireland and the war with France.<sup>25</sup> His eventual resentment of the Bank of England resulted in an attempt to set up a rival institution called the Land Bank in 1696 and in 1708 Child was accused of attempting to force a run on the Bank of England.<sup>26</sup> Furthermore Child's involvement with the Old East India Company came into conflict with the interests of the Government, which created a rift between Child and the Whigs. James Vernon, a government Minister is said to have stated 'the Bank and the New East India Company have spoiled Sir Francis for a good Whig' when considering his candidacy for Lord Mayor, which was regarded with much ambivalence.<sup>27</sup> Nevertheless in 1698 Francis Child was Lord Mayor of London and was elected to the EIC Court of Directors later in the same year.<sup>28</sup>

### **Francis Child the Elder and the East India Company**

Francis Child had been a substantial stockholder in the Old East India Company with the Company account in Child & Co. bank. He was appointed to the committee set up to finalize negotiations for a merger with the New Company 'The United Company of Merchants of England trading to the East Indies "provided that it can be done on safe, just and reasonable grounds"<sup>29</sup> and a parliamentary list of early 1700 classed him in the 'interest' of the Old East India Company.<sup>30</sup> In 1709 the Old and the new EIC merger became a reality and the United Company was to be run by a Court of 24 annually elected Directors, each of who was a major stockholder in the Company.<sup>31</sup>

Francis Child also sat on the important Committees of Shipping, Private Trade, Books and Accounts and "Writing of Letters". During this time the Court Minutes of the EIC show that these Committees were responsible for placing orders with Captains and the principal owners of ships for imports and exports, for regulating standards and quality of goods, and of seamanship and safety. Child remained a Director until 1701 and served again briefly in 1711.<sup>32</sup> During his Mayoralty Sir Francis left the buying to his diamond

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from Sir Thomas Roe to Diamon Pitt" Huw Bowen, M. Lincoln, N. Rigby eds. *The Worlds of the East India Company* (Boydell Press, 2002), 97-110.

<sup>25</sup> Royal Bank of Scotland Archive, quoted in Philip Winterbottom, "Child, Sir Francis the Elder" in *The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. As cited by Lissa Chapman, "Sans Coronet", 17.

<sup>26</sup> Lissa Chapman, "Sans Coronet", 17.

<sup>27</sup> *Letters illustrative of the reign of William III from 1696 to 1708 addressed to the Duke of Shrewsbury* by James Vernon, ed. GPR James (1841), vol. 2, 186; Chapman, 17.

<sup>28</sup> Court Minutes of the EIC April 1699- April 1702 B 43.

<sup>29</sup> Court Minutes of the EIC April 1699- April 1702, BL/IOR B 43, 5 July 1699.

<sup>30</sup> David Hayton, E. Cruickshanks, S. Handley, Eds. *The House of Commons, 1690-1715* (History of Parliament Trust, 2002).

<sup>31</sup> Court Minutes of the EIC, Volume B50a, 1706-8.

<sup>32</sup> Court Minutes of the EIC 1712-13 B 52, 4 May 1711.

polisher, Joseph Cope, who cut and polished £60,000 worth of rough diamonds between 1698 and 1704 for Francis and his associates.

### **Picturing Home: Francis Child the elder's travel to the Netherlands in 1697**

The period leading up to Francis Child the elder's connection with the Old East India Company (and later The East India Company) played an important part in shaping his sensibility for acquiring objects and furnishings for the interiors of his home in London.

Hardly anything is known about Francis Child's legacy for setting the standards of taste in the family but much can be gleaned from his personal journal, *A short account by way of Journal of 10th I observed most remarkable in my travels thro' some part of the Low Country, Flanders, & some part of Germany whis is on the Rhine* recording a momentous visit to the Netherlands in 1697.<sup>33</sup> The journal survives in the collection of the London Metropolitan Archives in two copies in bound notebooks. Sir Francis appears to have been a part of an official delegation to the talks culminating in the Treaty of Reswick that ended the Nine Years War with France and Spain. He accompanied the Earl of Pembroke on this trip and made a pointed note of gratitude in his journal referring to him as '...our first Plenipotentiary at this treaty from whom I received beyond what I could have expected.'<sup>34</sup>

Sir Francis made copious notes of his travel, describing the various towns, their mercantile connections and advantages, their urban landscape, churches, sculptures, country houses and gardens. The interiors of the grand mansions he visited made a deep impression on him and his detailed descriptions convey his delight upon beholding the remarkable fruits of mercantile trade between Europe and Asia.

Francis the elder's description begins with the town of Middleburgh '... a rich, populous and beautifull town, has many merchants which trade to all parts of the world, has a share in the East India Company and have during this war sent out many capers whereof some have carried 30 guns...' <sup>35</sup> He goes on to detail the topographical qualities of Rotterdam that affected sea trade between England and the Netherlands:

The great trade it has is owing to the commodious sense of its harbour, for ships of great burthen, can by these canalls not only come into the town and unlode at the Merchant's door, but in 2 tides return to sea, whereas ships bound to Amsterdam from England, must unlode at the Texell and ships bound outward from Amst must sayle round the islands of the Texell before they get to sea and may by cross winds be kept 10 or 12 in that gulf called the South Sea so a ship may make 3 returns from Rotterdam to Eng before one may gett clear of the texell, for which reasons our Eng Merchants finding it more to their advantage, send their effects consigned to men at Roter who send them up their canals to Amsterdam.

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<sup>33</sup> London Metropolitan Archives, ACC/1128/177 and 178.

<sup>34</sup> ACC/1128/177, p. 13.

<sup>35</sup> On June 2, 1697. ACC/1128/177, p. 3.

Child's description is especially partial to the maritime environment of Dutch towns and his interest extended beyond urban geography to the wider architectural and material culture of the sites. At many points, the journal describes the construction of Dutch boats and ferries, their design and their holding capacity.<sup>36</sup> Another one of Child's specific interests is in monuments and sculptures and their accompanying inscriptions in Latin as well as the design of various coats of arms. For example, in his description of the '...mausolee erected to perpetuate the memory of Willm Henry Prince of Orange the father of this powerfull and flourishing Republik', he not only details the design of the monument, its iconography, the materials (marble, iron, brass) but also the arms of the families of the house of Nassau.<sup>37</sup>

Francis the elder's keen eye for antiquities and scientific curiosities complemented his penchant for detail. He made a special visit to a Monsieur La Faille (a notable in the court of Henry VIII) to view his "curious collection of Modern medals" and wrote about a Mons D' Hequett's chamber of rarities, which was 'worth any one's asking the favour to see them.'<sup>38</sup> Francis Child's most important visit was to the microbiologist and lensmaker Antonie van Leeuwenhoek (1632-1723) '...so much esteemed amongst the virtuosi and a fellow of our Royal Society lives here and willing to show any strangers recommended to him as curious those microscopes he first invented and has since brought to perfection ...make it appear they magnify 1000000 times.' Francis was evidently excited to get a first hand experience of using one of Leeuwenhoek's microscopes. He wrote that Leeuwenhoek '... show'd us by them, the testicles, & eggs of lice, the eggs of oysters & several other dissections of the most minute insects, which any one may be better informed of who reads his *Areana Naturo Detecta*.'<sup>39</sup>

Francis Child's impressions provide a vivid account of the décor and furnishings of grand mansions in the region and of the display of 'exotic' objects from the Americas and Asia. In Delft, Child made a special mention of the quality of porcelain manufactured in the town:

...They brew very good beer, but are peticularly famous for their Porcellane or earthen ware, which they paint better then the Chinese, make more large, and as beautifull everyway, could they but make their small ware transparent in which the Chinese have the advantage of them.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> 'From Rotterdam there goes every hour of the day a trechtschuit to Delfe...' He then proceeds to describe the passage boat in detail. He describes the construction of the boat, its 10 ft high mast, capacity to hold 60 passengers, and its horse drawn mechanism. ACC/1128/177, p. 5.

<sup>37</sup> ACC/1128/177, p. 6.

<sup>38</sup> ACC/1128/177, p. 7.

<sup>39</sup> ACC/1128/177, p. 7.

<sup>40</sup> ACC/1128/177, p. 6.



Figure 5: Delft Ceramic Jug in the style of Chinese blue and white porcelain.  
1691-1700 (made) V&A Museum, C.2360-1910

Made at the factory "De Metaale Pot", Delft, under the ownership of Lambertus Van Eenhoorn. LVE  
mark for 1691-1724

Francis Child's observation about the unique transparency of Chinese porcelain compared to Delft earthenware was a very astute one. Tin-glazed pottery had been produced in Holland since the first quarter of the sixteenth century and Delft had emerged as one of the main centers for its production in the seventeenth century. With the rise in import of Chinese porcelain by the Dutch East India Company (VOC) after 1602, the fashion for blue and white porcelain put traditional Delft ceramic wares into competition with their exotic counterparts. As a result, from the first quarter of the seventeenth century, Delft potters had begun to imitate the transparent finish of Chinese blue and white porcelain ware by using Chinese style decorations in cobalt blue over a white-tin glazed background (**Figure 5**).<sup>41</sup>

In his journal, Child's fascination with Asian decorative art continues as he lingers on the description of grand interiors of palaces and mansions. His longest description is of King's house in the Bosch:

The left side of the room is one great picture of this King's grandfather, drawn in a triumphall chariot by white horses, attend by many figures. This piece is all of Rubens, and the rest of the room is painted by him and other Masters...several of the other rooms are well furnisht and have pieces of Van Dyke in them. Here is a curious closet made of the best sort of Indian Screens, the floor inlaid, the ceiling

<sup>41</sup> This information is summarized from C. H. de Jonge *Delft ceramics* Trans. Marie-Christine Hellin, (New York, Praeger, 1970).

of Lookinglasse with Gold cyphers on it. This closet is very full of fine China, which because place'd by late Queen, the King has ordered shall not be removed. Belonging to this house, is a large garden with terrass walk, and a labirinth pretty to behold, but very different to get out of.<sup>42</sup>

Child seems to be particularly interested in the interior decorations within palatial homes and in the display of artistic virtuosity, whether in European master paintings or Asian decorative art. In Honselersdijk, south of Hague, Francis Child went on to describe the interiors of the palace apartments:

...the apartments are well furnished and have in them good pictures of several great Masters...Here are closetts of choice pieces, especially one very large of Japan [lacquer], the ceiling of lookinglasse with flowers painted on it and over the chimney was fine China nearly placed by the late Queen.<sup>43</sup>

Francis Child the elder's journal conveys how his travel to the Netherlands played a significant part in shaping his aesthetic sensibilities, at a time when he was about to begin his significant engagement with the East India Company. His many visits to country mansions and palaces highlight his specialist interest in Asian objects and furnishings – painted screens, porcelain, and lacquerware to name only a few exotic commodities associated with the EIC. Child is keenly aware of decorative art from Asia, its status as a rarefied privilege, and the all-important channels of maritime trade that brought decorative objects from Asia into Europe.

Though not much is known about decorative objects acquired by Child in the Netherlands, his visit resulted in the purchase of over sixty paintings by great masters, which he brought along with him to London. At the time of the visit to the Netherlands, Francis Child resided in his London home Hollybush House, overlooking Parson's Green in Fulham, Middlesex, which he had inherited from Robert Blanchard's wife in 1686.<sup>44</sup> His son, Robert purchased 42 Lincoln's Inn Fields (now the Royal College of Surgeons) in 1702 and Francis the elder lived there from 1704 thus this entry was made into the journal a few years later.<sup>45</sup>

The journal carries a list of these paintings by great Masters under the heading *A catalogue of my pictures in my house in Lincoln Inn's Fields taken March 9, 1706 and of my drawings in frames with glass*. There are sixty-one paintings in all (with six unnumbered additions) and also a price list specifying the amount paid for them. The total summarized at the end of the list is £4850, a sum in the millions today.

The presence of another hand list of pictures, which are sorted by their physical placement in 42, Lincoln's Inn Fields provides a deeper insight into the Child family's status in London's metropolitan polite society. This second list details the spaces

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<sup>42</sup> ACC/1128/177, p. 14.

<sup>43</sup> ACC/1128/178.

<sup>44</sup> Winterbottom, "Child, Sir Francis the Elder" in *The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (2004), online edn, 2006. Also, C. J. Feret, *Fulham old and new being an exhaustive history of the ancient parish of Fulham*, Vol. 2 (London, 1900).

<sup>45</sup> Winterbottom, "Child, Sir Francis the Elder" (2004), online edn, 2006.

occupied by the paintings in the house. For example, a ceiling piece by Reubens and a painting of King Charles on Horseback by Van Dyck is listed under the heading 'Staircase.' Paintings by Salvator Rosa, Claude Lorraine, Guido and Caracci among others are listed as on display in the Dining room.

### **From Father to Son: Robert Child (1674-1721) and St Luke's Club**

While there is every possibility Francis the elder wrote this second list, the presence in it of a portrait of his son Robert raises the alternative possibility that the list was written by Robert Child. A clue is provided by the paintings listed as belonging to the 'First Parlour' - listing a portrait of 'Sr Robert Child' by the Swedish painter Michael Dahl (1656/1659–1743). The association between the two individuals forms an important context for thinking about Robert's own interest in the artistic culture of the period. Michael Dahl, the portrait painter, was part of a group about twelve members forming the Society of the Virtuosi of St Luke (*active c.1689–1743*), also known as St Luke's Club or Vandyke's Club, which comprised of artists and gentlemen who met frequently to engage in conversations and debate on matters of taste.<sup>46</sup> The club's name related to the annual celebration of the festival of St Luke, the patron saint of painters and it was one the prominent forerunners to specialist academies such as the Royal Academy of Art, which was formed only in 1760. The Society's records show that in the first decade of its revival in 1689, Robert Child was one of an exclusive group of twenty members of St Luke's Club along with Christopher Wren the younger (1632-1723), the surgeon and anatomist William Cowper (1666-1709), and the painter Hugh Howard (1675-1737).<sup>47</sup> Furthermore, the title of Dahl's portrait of Robert Child in the Lincoln's Inn Fields House suggests that it was painted after Robert was knighted in 1714 - in the year after Francis the elder's death. This is a significant but often overlooked fact, since it raises the possibility that Robert Child added this second list of paintings in his father's journal. Moreover, it is possible that the list functioned as an inventory of the paintings in Lincoln's Inn Fields and was entered into the journal around the time of the Child family's relocation to Osterley Park after 1713. From this period onwards Robert took on the full responsibility of refurbishing Osterley as the new Child family home.

### **Sir Robert Child (1674-1721)**

Francis's eldest son Robert became and Member of Parliament in 1710. He was elected as a Director of the EIC in 1710 and was repeatedly elected in this post with hardly a break until 1720. He was a hard working Director, attending nearly all the weekly meetings of the Court. Like his father he served on the more important EIC committees: Accompts (Accounts) & Warehouses Treasury and Bullion in 1712 and later Correspondence and

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<sup>46</sup> Martin Myrone, 'Society of the Virtuosi of St Luke (*act. c.1689–1743*)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, Jan 2013.

[<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/theme/96316>, accessed 23 July 2013]

<sup>47</sup> Martin Myrone, 'Society of the Virtuosi of St Luke (*act. c.1689–1743*)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 2013. Also, Bignamini, 'George Vertue, art historian, and art institutions in London, 1689–1768', *Walpole Society*, 54 (1988), 1–148.



Treasury in 1720.<sup>48</sup> In the course of the first session he was identified by Abel Boyer as one of the ‘High Church’ candidates standing at the elections for the East India Company.

Three years after his appointment to the Court of EIC (1713) Robert took over the Child & Co. bank and became an Alderman of the City of London.<sup>49</sup> He was not a Director of EIC during this year but led a shareholder petition, successfully arguing for better governance of the company:

Mr Alderman Child with several of the Adventurers attending the court delivered a request which was read, subscribed by many of the Adventurers, wherein the Court was desired to use their endeavours to obtain an alteration of the Company’s charter, so as to have a Governor and Deputy Governor, and to increase the Qualifications of all future Directors. And he did in the name of himself and several others of the Adventurers as well present as absent, desire the Court would take the same into consideration and then withdrew.<sup>50</sup>

A special meeting of the General Court was called. Result *nemine contradicente* (no-one dissented) and it was referred back to the Court of Directors for action.<sup>51</sup>



Figure 6: East India Company Sale Room at Leadenhall Street, 1808 Rowlandson, Thomas et. al. aquatint, coloured, 266 mm x 315 mm, National Maritime Museum, PAD1361.

<sup>48</sup> Court Minutes of the EIC, BL/IOR B 51-53, 1710-12; B56, 1720-22, p. 8.

<sup>49</sup> The Aldermen of the City of London, Henry III- 190, <http://www.britishhistory.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=67248> Feb 2013.

<sup>50</sup> Court Minutes of the EIC, BL/IOR B52, 9 December 1713.

<sup>51</sup> Court Minutes of the EIC BL/IOR B 51 -53, 1710 – 1712.

### **Sir Robert Child: From Director to Chairman**

In April 1714 Robert was elected Director and deputy Chairman. In the same year he was also knighted by King George I. By the following April, apparently after a struggle with the Bank of England interest headed by (Sir ) Gilbert Heathcote, he was elected Chairman.<sup>52</sup> Lord Treasurer Oxford (Robert Harley) ‘took particular notice’ of Child when a delegation from the company attended the minister as can be seen from the Court Minutes

“Sir Robert Child acquainted the Court that several of the Directors with himself went up to the Treasury with the Companyes memorial, touching the deficiencies on the Fund. The Chairman attended the Rt Hon Lords Commissioners of His Majesties Treasury who promised to [take] most utmost care of the Funds.....Several of the Directors acquainting the Court that the Chairman had addressed himself to their lordships in a very particular and obliging manner, and the Court being informed of the substance of what was spoken they unanimously returned the Chairman their hearty thanks for the same.”<sup>53</sup>

His status is underlined in Daniel Defoe’s anonymously authored pamphlet published the same year, the *Secret History of the White Staff* (1714), which includes a reference to ‘Sir R. Ch.’ as one of the ‘jobbers and monied men’ who had grown rich at the nation’s expense.<sup>54</sup> The following April he was elected Director of EIC and Deputy Chairman, and went on to be Elected Director and Chairman for the year April 1715-1716. His influence with the Treasury is apparent:

On 10 Oct 1715

The Chairman attended the Rt Hon Lords Commissioners of His Majesties Treasury to congratulate their Lordships that the Directors were received in a very obliging manner by their Lordships who promised to [take] most utmost care of the Funds. And that as the Company should have free access to them at all times, so their Lordships would give them what assistance was in their power in any difficulty relating to the Companyes affairs.<sup>55</sup>

He continued to play a part in the day to day trading of the company,

On 7 Jan 1715

The Court being informed that the Rt Hon The Lord Commissioners of his Majesties Treasury have earnestly recommended to the Company to take off a quantity of Tin. That it be referred to Sir Robert Child, Sir Robert Nightingale,

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<sup>52</sup> BL/IOR B 51 -53, 1710 – 1712.

<sup>53</sup> Court Minutes of the EIC BL/IOR B53, 1714-1716, p. 458.

<sup>54</sup> *Secret History of White Staff*, pt. 3, p. 38; Beaven, 123; PCC 177 Buckingham (cited by www. History of Parliament online- <http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1690-1715/member/child-robert-1674-1721>).

<sup>55</sup> Court Minutes of the EIC BL/IOR B53, 1714-1716, p. 458.

and Mr Gould, or any two of them to consider what quantity of Tin, and at what price it is proper to send to the East Indies.<sup>56</sup>

During his time as Director EIC's trade with China had increased to the point that in 1722 the Company set up its Council of China; the Spitalfields riots led to a ban on imported cotton textiles; the Treaty of Utrecht was signed and the Company had to help the government pick up the financial pieces following the demise of the South Sea Company. After an unsuccessful bid to the Government to obtain a better deal for this the following January the Directors agreed that 'Being deeply sensible of the Nation's present unhappy circumstances are very willing to contribute their utmost towards retrieving then and repairing and supporting the National Credit over their own particular detriment'.<sup>57</sup>

### **Francis Child II (1684-1740)**

Sir Robert died in 1721 and his place in Child & Co. was taken by his younger brother Francis Child II. The business continued to thrive, and in 1739 Child greatly expanded its premises in Fleet St. The banking business had moved on and at this time there were very few loans of the traditional gold-smith type, on the security of silver or gold plate and precious stones. There were important advances made to City dealers secured, upon parcels of stock and heavy investments in East India securities.<sup>58</sup> A partner in the Bank, John Morse, left £10,000 each to Francis and Samuel Child in his will of 1736.<sup>59</sup>

The younger Francis retained his involvement with the Goldsmith Company, serving as its prime warden in 1723-4. Like his father Francis Child was elected an Alderman (in 1721), and held the position until his death in 1740, serving as Sheriff of London (1722-3), as Lord Mayor (1731-2) and as an MP from 1722 -1740. For the first five years he was MP for the City of London, and, like his father, served as president of Christ's Hospital. He rented out most of his large property portfolio but seems to have been the first member of the family to carry out major alterations at Osterley, probably including laying out the formal gardens.<sup>60</sup>

Francis Child II was elected to the EIC Court as Director in April 1721 and, like his father and brother before him, was appointed to the major Committees, those covering Accounts, Warehouses, and Private Trade. He served as Director with until 1732, apart from an obligatory gap every 4<sup>th</sup> year.<sup>61</sup> He also attended EIC Court meetings regularly and was one of the Directors who agreed to attend the Company auctions every week.

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<sup>56</sup> Court Minutes of the EIC BL/IOR B53, 1714-1716, p. 247.

<sup>57</sup> Court Minutes of the EIC BL/IOR B56, 1720-22, 4 Jan 1720. Court Minutes date the year April to April so in reality this was Jan 1721.

<sup>58</sup> D. M. Joslin, "London Private Bankers, 1720-1785" *The Economic History Review*, New Series, 7, No. 2 (1954): 167-186.

<sup>59</sup> FG Hilton Price, *The Marygold by Temple Bar* (London: privately published by Bernard Quaritch, 1902), p. 31.

<sup>60</sup> Child & Co. archives, Royal Bank of Scotland, Mss, unpublished handout.

<sup>61</sup> Court Minutes of the EIC BL/IOR/B 59, 1726-28; B60-B62.

1722 saw the establishment of the Company's Council of China, in recognition of the growth of trade with that country. Another extract from the Court minutes also demonstrates that in January of that year, Francis Child had a particular role to play

Mr Dubois acquainted the Court that a parcel of Diamonds had been seized by an officer of the Customs upon one of the Mates late belonging to the Chandos and upon enquiry into the fact by the Commissioners of Customs then relinquish the seizure and then directed the Diamonds to be sent to this house in order to ascertain the duty thereon but no Bill of lading appearing desired that the Court Direction before the delivery. [The Court] ordered that the said Diamonds be delivered to Alderman Child he paying the usual duty and giving receipts for same.<sup>62</sup>

He was knighted on 28 September 1732.

### **Samuel Child (1693-1752)**

After Francis the younger, there does not seem to be any member of the Child family serving as a Director of EIC—although, as we will see, this did not sever the family's deep links with the Company. The youngest son of Sir Francis the Elder, Samuel Child, took on responsibility as head of the family banking firm. He held a large number of EIC stocks and in his will left his wife £45,000 of EIC stock and £3000 to his son Francis.<sup>63</sup> Apart from these stocks his only interest in the company seems to have been as co-owner of the EIC chartered ship the *Northampton*, which was unfortunately lost in a violent storm in 1744 on its way back from a voyage to China and India.

Samuel was the only son of Sir Francis Child the elder to have children, and so his two sons Francis III and Robert inherited the Child family fortune, which had been accumulated since Sir Francis was apprenticed in 1664. Both were educated at Oxford, were partners in Child and Co and were responsible for transforming Osterley into the house it is today.

On 31 December 1760 Samuel's son Francis held nearly £33,000 worth of East India stock (according to ledgers A-G), and left his fiancée £50,000 when he died in 1763, days before his impending marriage, the bulk of his estate going to his brother Robert.

### **Robert and Sarah Child**

Robert married Sarah Jodrell (1741-93) of Ankerwyke in Buckinghamshire in 1763. Robert and Sarah are credited with working with Robert Adam to change Osterley House into the Neo-classical house it is still today. Although Robert does not seem to have been involved with EIC, other than as a shareholder, the Jodrell family had longstanding links to the Company. Sarah's grandparents were 1st cousins and both their families had an EIC related heritage. One of Sarah's great-grandfathers Richard Craddock had been an

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<sup>62</sup> Court Minutes of the EIC BL/IOR B57, 9 January 1722.

<sup>63</sup> *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research*, Vol. 23-24 (1950), p.180

EIC factor in India and Persia in the seventeenth century. Another great grandfather was Daniel Sheldon, who was a factor for the East India Company in India. In 1659 he wrote to another factor for the company at Bandel (outside Calcutta in Bengal) urgently requesting a sample of tea to send home to his uncle Dr Gilbert Sheldon, Archbishop of Canterbury. He wrote:

I must desire you to procure the chaw, if possible. I care not what it cost. 'Tis for a good uncle of mine, Dr Sheldon, whome somebody hath perswaded to study the divinity of that herbe, leafe, or what else it is, and I am soe obliged to satisfy his curiosity that I could willingly undertake a viage to Japan or China to doe it.

Later he wrote, 'for God's sake, good or badd, buy the chaw if it is to be sold. Pray favour me likewise with advise what 'tis good for, and how it is to be used...' <sup>64</sup>

Over the course of his career in the EIC, Daniel Sheldon's personal gifts to his relatives and friends also included objects that were rooted in the material history of Indian court culture. The *Gentleman's Magazine* of Oct 1768 describes a chess set that Daniel Sheldon, an Indian Merchant, gave to Dr Hyde, Librarian of the Bodleian Library and a Professor of Hebrew and Arabic in 1694. It was made of solid ivory, varnished and interspersed with gold; the pieces for one side are white, for the other green. Dr Hyde described the set as

The most precious and at the same time the most adorned and ancient of this sort of board is one which I possess, brought from India, the gift of my magnificent and ever-to-be-honoured friend, Daniel Sheldon, Esquire, a merchant trading to the East Indies. <sup>65</sup>

Robert Child died 28 July 1782, aged 43. The *Gentleman's Magazine's* obituary of him stated: 'He has died worth £15,000 per annum in landed property, exclusive of his seat at Osterley Park, which is deemed the most superb and elegant thing of its kind in England. His share of the profits in the banking business has never been estimated at less, for some years, than £30,000 per annum.' He was in addition a considerable holder of Government stock. <sup>66</sup>

But it seems that the Child's interest in the EIC, which had always been commercial, passed to those partners who had an active role in running the bank. Thomas Devon, a partner in 1752 was a significant supporter and backer of Lawrence Sullivan in the highly charged fight between him and Robert Clive over control of the Company. <sup>67</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> William Harrison Ukers, *All About Tea* (The Tea and Coffee trade journal company, 1935), p. 40.

<sup>65</sup> Robert Blair Swinton *Chess for Beginners and the Beginnings of Chess* by (T. Fisher Unwin, 1891), p.175.

<sup>66</sup> *The Gentleman's Magazine* (1782), p. 406; As cited in Sir Lewis Bernstein Namier, ed. *House of Commons 1754-1790* (Boydell & Brewer, 1985), p. 212.

<sup>67</sup> "Mr Walsh in a letter to Lord Clive of 14th of Feb 1765 after telling him of Mr Sulivan's having split a number of votes and of Mr Divon (Thomas Devon, a partner of Child's house)

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having split 30,000l.” Major General Sir John Malcolm, *The life of Robert, Lord Clive: collected from the family papers communicated by the Earl of Powis* Vol. 2 (London, 1836), p. 212.

## WINDS OF TRADE



Figure 7: This chart, covering from 50 degrees north to 50 degrees south of the Equator, centers on the Pacific Ocean, 'The Great South Sea'. Wind directions are indicated by arrows and fine engraved lines. Magnetic variation is shown by isogonic lines at 5 degree intervals. Moll, Herman, G201:1/38, circa 1715, 18.5 x 53cm, National Maritime Museum.

The Child family's interest in East India Company sea trade was carried forward through their investment in shipping. Company ships were instrumental in the network of trade and commodity exchange in the Indian Ocean. The Company ran many ships, called East Indiamen, which were hired through tenders supplied for EIC voyages.<sup>68</sup> The EIC Directors were in the strong position of placing orders with captains and supercargoes of East Indiamen ships and this period saw an increased influx of Asian goods into Britain. Supercargoes or supra-cargoes were an essential part of commodity trade – they were responsible not only for negotiations for buying cargo but also had to ensure the safe arrival of goods back into Britain. These ships on the other hand were built to specifications by groups of managing owners who had an arrangement with the Company lasting for about four voyages. The owners could also build successor ships if needed.<sup>69</sup> In the second half of the eighteenth century, there were three ships called *Osterley* and each of them bore a connection with the Child family. Francis Child III was a principal owner of the first *Osterley* ship.

<sup>68</sup> Chapman, 33.

<sup>69</sup> Summarized from Anthony Farrington, *A catalogue of East India Ships Journals and Logs 160-1834* (British Library, 1999).



## Private Trade and *Osterley* East Indiaman



Figure 8: A triple portrait of the East India Company ship 'Royal Charlotte', National Maritime Museum, BHC3599.

The logs of the *Osterley* ships are representative of the larger networks of Company trade in Asia in the second half of the eighteenth century. Even as the East India Company Committees placed bulk orders for official goods with the ships' captains and supercargoes there was a flourishing network of private trade that supported the regular inflow of luxury commodities into Europe. This form of 'regulated corruption' was sanctioned through indulgences in Company policy and ship captains could earn up to ten times their actual salary.



Though tea, cotton, silks, and spices remained a top priority for the East India Company porcelain, lacquerware, and finished textiles came a close second. The most popular privately traded commodities from India and China were porcelain, lacquerware, silk and cotton textiles, and ivory. The following section looks at a sample journey of the *Osterley* in detail to offer a sense of the commodities traded on it during Francis Child III's tenure as its co-owner.

Figure 10: An East India Company Captain, circa 1690, 1270 mm x 1015 mm National Maritime Museum, BHC3126.

## **Osterley I**<sup>70</sup>

Owner: Francis Child III

Launched 1758

Principal Managing Owner: Charles Raymond

Voyages:

- 1) 1757/8 China
- 2) 1760/1 Benkulen, Madras and Bengal
- 3) 1765/6 Bombay and China
- 4) 1768/9 Madras and China

Like his father Samuel, Francis Child III invested in an EIC ship, the *Osterley*, in 1757/8 whose managing owner was [Charles Raymond](#).<sup>71</sup> This ship, *Osterley I*, sailed four voyages around to Sumatra, around the Indian coast, St Helena and China between 1758-1770.

Its Captain received permission to seize pirates and attack the French in 1757 and the ship seems to have taken on board a French prisoner of war whose death was reported a few years later. In 1761 under Captain Frederick Vincent the ship was commissioned by the Navy to assist a beleaguered Fort in Indonesia.<sup>72</sup> He seems to have stayed on to govern the Company Fort at Benkulen on the Sumatran coast for a while before returning to Gravesend in the following February where the Court Minutes record payment of £2000, £9000, and £3000 to the owners of the *Osterley* between April and December 1760 for freight and demurrage. After its first voyage before returning to Gravesend in February 1760 it was ‘...met by many boats, such as the Providence which were loaded with the Hon Company’s goods, tea, Chinaware, Iron and some Chinawares.’<sup>73</sup> After this voyage in that December it was ordered that the Committee of Treasury be desired to ship 5 chests of foreign silver for China to the ship *Osterley* (and other similar ships) for Bencoolan (Benkulen).<sup>74</sup> At Benkulen the *Osterley*, like other Company ships, was engaged in buying large quantities of pepper.<sup>75</sup>

*Osterley I*’s final voyage from Madras to China provides a good example of the East India Company’s dealings in Asia. Harbour logs from the Captain Francis Fortescue’s journal for *Osterley I* indicate that like most East Indiamen, it sailed along with other companion ships (*Pigott*, *Thames*, *Ankerwick*, *Lincoln*, *Triton*, *Nottingham*, *Havannah*,

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<sup>70</sup> This information is summarized from British Library, LMAR 400 series A through E.

<sup>71</sup> According to a Letter of Marque traced by Georgina Green, the owners of *Osterley I* in 1757/58 were Sir Richard Lyttleton, Francis Child, Jonathan Ewer and Charles Raymond. For further information on Charles Raymond, see the [Valentine Mansion Case Study](#).

<sup>72</sup> National Archives DD/N/223c/26 & 27 6 Sept. 1762 & 12 Oct. 1762.

<sup>73</sup> BL IOR L/Mar/B400A-E

<sup>74</sup> Court Minutes of the EIC 1760-61 B 76.

<sup>75</sup> BL IOR L/MAR/B/400B-C, Journal 23 Nov 1760-2. The Journal entry for 30 May 1762 records 595 bags of pepper; on 31 May and 1 June, 719 bags of pepper and 612 bags of pepper from the ship *Deligence* on account of the EIC.

*Hector*, *Ashburnham*) as well as country vessels. *Osterley I* sailed for Madras on 31 January 1769. (See **Figure 9: Fort St. George on the Coromandel Coast**) In June while on its journey from the Goan port of Cabo de Rama (Cape Rama) in northwest India to Cape Comorin in the southernmost tip of India, the ship picked up an important consignment of elephant bone (ivory). On 12 July 1769 while docked close to Madras, the ship received redwood and cotton on behalf of the East India Company. These goods were usually brought to the main ship on smaller country ships, which did the rounds from ports and factories. The ship then sailed towards Bengal and stowed additional loads of five hundred bales of cotton and thirty tons of redwood. It was only in October that the ship reached Whampoa, through the Malacca Straits.

Once near Canton, much of the cotton and redwood as well as the ship's cargo of lead was unloaded and the ship '...received on board 90 chests of china of the hon'ble comps [Honorable Company's], and 62 Private trade.' It is remarkable that the number of chests containing porcelain was nearly two-thirds of those bought on behalf of the Company. This also suggests that Fortescue was acting on behalf of several private clients one of whom may have been Samuel Child's son Robert Child (since Francis III had died in 1763) under whom many restorations and refurbishments occurred at Osterley Park. Between November and December *Osterley I* stacked up hundreds of chests of different varieties of tea such as bohea, souchong, congo and nanheen. *Osterley's* journey back in January 1770 was its last as in its next incarnation, the ship changed owners.



Figure 9: Fort St George on the Coromandel Coast. Belonging to the East India Company of England 1754, Ryne, Jan Van, Sayer, 255 x 398 mm. Robert, National Maritime Museum, PAD1845.

## **Osterley II**

Principal Managing Owner: William Dent, Brother of Robert Dent a partner at Childs' bank.

Launched 1771

Voyages

- 1) 1771/2 Benkulen and China
- 2) 1774/5 St Helena and Benkulen
- 3) 1777/8 Madras and Bengal

## **Osterley III**

Launched 1780

Principal Managing Owners: William Dent, Robert Dent and (later) John Atkins

Voyages

- 1) 1780/81 Bombay and China
- 2) 1784/5 Madras and China
- 3) 1786/7 Madras and China
- 4) 1789/90 Bombay and China
- 5) 1792/3 China
- 6) 1794/5 China
- 7) 1797/8 Madras and Bengal

The EIC ships *Osterley II* & *III* retained a connection with the Child family through indirect means. Robert Dent, a partner in Child & Co. from 1763, was a member of the charterparty on a number of his brother William Dent's ships including *Osterley II* and *III*. Both ships made regular voyages to India and China. But these ships, like others, also played an important part supporting the expansionist ambitions of the Company through serving it in battles. Towards the end of its third voyage, *Osterley II* was captured by the French following an attack by two frigates *Purvoyeuse* and *Elizabeth* in February 1779.<sup>76</sup> It is also known that this incident led to the displacement and eventual deaths of four of five children bound for England, who drowned as their connecting ship was wrecked.<sup>77</sup> A similar fate befell *Osterley III*, which had one of the longest runs out of the three ships. After many successful voyages to India and China, *Osterley III* was embroiled in the rising Anglo-French rivalry at the end of the eighteenth century. While towards the end of its seventh run, *Osterley III* was captured by the French ship *La Forte* on 13 February 1799 but later rescued.<sup>78</sup> At the time, it had been carrying a detachment of 107 men of the 28th regiment of light dragoons from Madras on board.<sup>79</sup> The rescue of *Osterley III* by

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<sup>76</sup>The event caused much controversy in EIC circles especially as it was revealed that a British subject resident at Fort St. George owned *Elizabeth*. BL IOR L/MAR/B/400G, 22 February 1779. Letter from the ship *Duke of Kingston* to the EIC, 16 June 1779, London. IOR/R/E/4-868, p. 465.

<sup>77</sup> BL IOR/E/1/65 54-57.

<sup>78</sup> BL IOR L/MAR/B/400-O, Journal entry, 13 -24 February, 1799.

<sup>79</sup> 'Narrative of Transactions on Board the Honourable Company's Extra Ship *Osterleii*, from tile 6th February, to the 2d March, including the Particulars of her Capture by *La Forte*.' *Asiatic*

EIC ship *La Sybille* in March, 1799, and its eventual return to England constitutes the final chapter in the story of the Child family's maritime connections with the commercial and material worlds of the Indian Ocean. *La Sybille's* victory over the *La Forte* went down into history as one of the famous naval battles of its time. The ship's dead captain Edward Cook, is commemorated in a bas-relief monument in Westminster Abbey with the following inscription:

Erected by the Honourable East India Company as a grateful testimony to the valour and the eminent services of Captain Edward Cook, commander of His Majesty's ship Sybille, who on the 1st March, 1799, after a long and well-contested engagement, captured La Forte, a French frigate of very superior force, in the Bay of Bengal, an event not more splendid in its achievement than important in its results to the British trade in India. He died in consequence of the severe wounds he received in this memorable action, on the 23rd May, 1799, aged 27 years.

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*Annual Register or view of the History of Hindustan... for the year 1799* (London, 1801), pp. 89-90.

## MATERIAL GOODS

### PORCELAIN AND THE EAST INDIA COMPANY



Figure 11: Detail of Ceramic Parade Jar, a. 1700-1730  
Osterley House  
Photo Courtesy: Stuart Howat

I find that the ship will floor forty half chests more of China ware than expected therefore request that you will order that quantity which make the whole of the Company's amount to 110 chests and half chests.

John Payne, Ship Captain, *Ponsborne*. Canton 20 April 1769.<sup>80</sup>

Porcelain or “chinaware” was included as cargo on most East India Company ships that crossed the Indian Ocean in the eighteenth century. The rapid expansion of the English market for porcelain from about 1720 to 1770 saw perhaps 25-30 million pieces of porcelain enter the country making it one of the largest importers in Europe. Fired to perfection in the kilns of Jingdezhen, in south China, porcelain objects traveled nearly 500 miles south to the port town of Guangzhou (Canton) where East India Company merchants and supercargoes (officials in charge of the cargo) were based. The trading season was usually a few months in the autumn and was limited by monsoons. Supercargoes often paid for their orders in advance, collecting the porcelain on their return trips. At Guangzhou, porcelain was sold in shops and warehouses managed by

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<sup>80</sup> British Library, IOR/R/10/7, 1769.

Chinese merchants who, as members of a guild, or co-hong, regulated the terms of their trade.<sup>81</sup>

The liaisons between supercargoes and merchants were in many instances crucial to the success of the trade. Certain Cantonese merchants were well known to the EIC:

Suqua for many years past hath been reputed the most considerable merchant in Canton and can dispatch any number of ships in good time, for he is in great circumstances, and generally allowed to be an able and skillfull merchant, but he will always endeavour to make a hard bargain.<sup>82</sup>

At times, changes within the Chinese chain of command resulted in the breakdown of privy agreements between traders and officials. For example, the factory records for the year 1740 point to the confusion during one such instance when an incoming Foyen (governor) reversed the rights of traders to stay in Canton after their ships had sailed. Faced with such a situation, the supercargo on the ship *Duke of Dorset* wrote:

The Merchants Texia, Leonqua, Tinqu[ingqua], and Teunqua came this evening and acquainted us with much seeming concern that the Lamhoyen who had been at Soukien for these two months past with the Chuntuck [Viceroy] being now returned to his city had sent to give notice to the Europeans to leave Canton. It being contrary to the ancient custom for them to stay here after the ships had sailed. We told them they knew the reasons for our stay ...– they replied that the Foyen [governor] who had dispensed with the ancient custom being now out of office and called up to Court. The inferior Mandareens were apprehensive of the new Foyens displeasure if he found any thing contrary to the Laws when he arrived and it was the Lamphoyen's office to see that they were observed, as it not appear by any record that the Foyen had given leave for us to stay. They therefore desired we would prepare to go to Macao fearing some displeasure might fall on them likewise. We seemed to make light of it. But the Merchants went from us to the French, Dutch and Danes and gave them the same notice. The new Foyen is expected in about six weeks.<sup>83</sup>

Thus actual trade on the ground was conducted in an atmosphere where supercargoes had to learn to adapt to the customary laws of trading with local merchants. At times certain restrictions imposed by Chinese officials to regulate trade of commodities imposed conditions on trade of bulk commodities such as tea. In 1755, supercargoes reported an arrangement by which trade in chinaware and silks was sanctioned on the basis of the

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<sup>81</sup> For an overview of the China trade system see H B. Morse, "The Chronicles of the East India Company Trading to China 1635-1834" in Patrick Tuck, *Britain and the China Trade 1635-1842* Volume I (Reprint, Routledge, 2000).

<sup>82</sup> Diary and Consultations of the Council for China for 1730, G/12/30, 21 Nov 1729-8 Jan 1731. At Canton Jul 1730-Jan 1731.

<sup>83</sup> China Factory Records (II) Diaries and Consultations IOR/R/10/3, Dec 1741-Oct 1755.



restriction on importing large quantities of tea. In 1755, the Council for China was informed that:

The shopmen by order this day attended the Quanchufu[prefect of Guangzhou] who acquainted them that the Tsongtonk [viceroy] was willing to grant them all the indulgence possible as a proof of it he was directed to inform them that they would be allowed to deal in China ware, wrought silks, and every other article as before with the restriction only that they should not deal in large chests of tea.



Figure 12: Porcelain Shop in Canton.  
This painting is from a set of 24 depicting the porcelain industry in China. It shows a porcelain shop in Canton. 1770-1790, V&A Museum E.59-1910.

Such an arrangement was not conducive for large-scale trade:

This license was extremely satisfactory to the greatest part of the shopmen who sought only to carry on their small trade as usual, whilst those who were more aspiring and had entertained hopes of doing business for the Companies were awed from shewing their dislike...<sup>84</sup>

At the other end, Chinese officials would often issue directives about the abuse of private trade privileges enjoyed by Company merchants. An official court notice from the Qing emperor's court in 1755 stated

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<sup>84</sup> IOR/R/10/3, July 22, 1755.

‘...that the curiosities of value or precious things are imported by private merchants not for account of the Companies, and that the shopkeepers knowing the demand for the Emperor, play many tricks such as raising the price or concealing the things themselves or instructing the Europeans to smuggle them shore. Thus when wanted for the Emperor’s service they were not to be found and as this is one branch of my office I am necessarily obliged to remedy this evil.’

It was therefore decided that the value of such commodities was to be set by the Hongist security.<sup>85</sup>

### Armorials and Private Trade



Figure 13: Platter with East India Company’s coat-of-arms, *Diana* cargo ca. 1816. Collection of Farooq Issa, Mumbai, India. Photo Courtesy: Farooq Issa

Initially, generic blue and white porcelain, inexpensive because there was only one firing in the kiln, was valued as kentledge (ballast) rather than valuable cargo. In addition to providing stability on the high seas, porcelain provided a protective layer for valuable teas and silks against water damage on voyages. East India Company officials, ship captains and supercargoes, discovered that there was a market in England for unusual, large or colourful porcelain. Individuals were able to acquire porcelain made to their own specifications, which they sold when they returned to London. The soaring decorative appeal of tea sets, dinner services and other tableware, spurred on the client’s ability to

<sup>85</sup> “Published the sixth moon, the 20<sup>th</sup> year of the reign of Hien Lung [Qianlong], the 24<sup>th</sup> of July 1755,” IOR/R/10/3. Letter 364, p. 65.

personalize objects using their coat-of-arms, bespoke patterns and designs. Armorial porcelain became a central marker of taste and dynastic prestige.<sup>86</sup>

### The Child Dinner Service



Figure 14: Porcelain plate with the crest of the Child Family, ca. 1700-25.  
Photo Courtesy: Stuart Howat

Among the earliest armorial services for the English market is the stellar service at Osterley made for a member of the Child family. This plate is from the service. It was ordered between 1700 and 1725. It is the only known example decorated with a “powder blue” ground associated with luxury ornamental wares. The powdered cobalt, suspended in water, was blown through a bamboo tube with a gauze cloth at the end onto unglazed porcelain. This evenly distributed the ground colour. White panels designed to be painted with coloured enamels after a glaze firing, were protected from the sprayed cobalt with paper panels. The porcelain was then glazed and fired. It was then painted with translucent enamels over the glaze, in primarily red and green, known as the “famille-verte” or green family palette.<sup>87</sup>

The Child crest repeated on the rim depicts an eagle holding an adder in its beak. Their coat-of-arms in the centre was granted in 1700 to the banker Sir Francis Child, the Elder (1642-1713), who purchased Osterley shortly before his death in 1713. On the basis of

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<sup>86</sup> For an overview of armorial porcelain see David Sanctuary Howard, *Chinese Armorial Porcelain* (Faber and Faber, 1974).

<sup>87</sup> Notes prepared by Patricia Fergusson.

style, it has been suggested that the service was ordered by Francis the elder's oldest son and EIC Chairman Sir Robert Child (1674-1721) since his brother Francis Child (1684-1740) only succeeded him in 1721.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Patricia Fergusson, personal correspondence, May-July 2013. I am grateful to Patricia Fergusson for her comments and notes, which greatly enriched this section.

## TEXTILES AND THE EAST INDIA COMPANY



Figure 15: Indian embroideries at Osterley, ca. 1700-1725, Gujarat, India.  
Photo Courtesy: Stuart Howat

During Francis Child the elder's tenure as EIC committee member and later as a Director, the Company was responsible for augmenting the trade in cotton textiles from India, with calicos accounting for nearly three-quarters of Company trade. The enhanced supply of cotton fabrics and prints into Britain not only upset social hierarchies of elite and everyday use of printed fabrics, but also posed a threat to the livelihoods of wool and silk weavers.<sup>89</sup> In 1721, imported cotton textiles of every description from India, whether pure cotton or mixed composition, were banned and restrictions were placed on the sale of most cotton textiles through what were known as the Calico Acts (1690–1721). This prohibition was not lifted until the 1770s.<sup>90</sup> However, the prohibition was not so successful in curbing the demand for cotton prints and fabrics, the supply of which was picked up by the English East India Company.<sup>91</sup> Some of the best Indian embroideries to enter Osterley appear to date from this period of turmoil and prohibition.<sup>92</sup>

### Indian Textiles

India gained a key position in the thriving Indian Ocean trading network through its ability to market a wide range of goods at competitive prices. The subcontinent's central position on the sea route from East Africa to China made it a strategic stopover for commercial exchange and mercantile activity. The port city of Surat was called the "Blessed port" by India's ruling Mughal dynasty.<sup>93</sup> Bombay, Madras and Calcutta were

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<sup>89</sup> For an overview of the cotton trade see Beverly Lemire, *Fashion's favourite – the Cotton Trade and the Consumer in Britain 1660-1800* (London: Oxford University Press, 1991). Also, Georgio Reillo, *Cotton: The Fabric that made the Modern World* (Cambridge University Press, 2013).

<sup>90</sup> Chapman, 35.

<sup>91</sup> Lemire (1991), p. 90.

<sup>92</sup> We are most grateful to Rosemary Crill at the Victoria & Albert Museum for her input on dating the Indian embroideries to between 1700-1725.

<sup>93</sup> Ashin Das Gupta, *Indian merchants and the decline of Surat c. 1700-1750* (Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 23. First Published by Franz Steiner Verlag, 1979.



also flourishing mercantile hubs and the sites of some of the earliest “factories” set up by the Dutch, French and English East India Companies. Many Indian maritime merchants also owned ships and ran conglomerates both privately and in partnership with the East India Company. Indian textiles, especially the coarse cotton varieties produced in the Coromandel Coast and the Gulf of Cambay (modern day Gujarat) fed into the large-scale demand in the eastern markets of Indonesia, Malaya and China as well as the markets of the Red Sea, Persian Gulf and East Africa. Company merchants arrived in India to find an established textile culture of painted fabrics, block printing, and embroidery. Gradually, a more specialized market for high-value textiles such as Dhaka muslins and Gujarat silks and embroideries were created for private trade, and especially sought after by Company officials and merchants.

English private traders were one of the most important groups of European traders in the eighteenth century and although there was no clear official ruling allowing this, Company servants regularly sanctioned their mercantile activities through carefully crafted indulgences of Company policy.

### **The Indian Embroideries at Osterley**



Figure 16: Chain stitch Detail: Canopy of bed in Mrs Child’s bedroom  
Photo Courtesy: Stuart Howat

At Osterley, the opulent silk embroidered bed pelmet cover and canopy in Mrs Child's bedchamber was likely bought at Surat around 1700-1730, during the height of the popularity of Cambay embroideries in Europe. The textile features a plain cream background, which is contrasted with brightly embroidered patterns of thin branches and leaves in a dark green colour and red and yellow flowers.

It is now understood that these embroideries were created by the artisans of the Mochi (cobbler) caste of Gujarat who originally worked the delicate chain-stitch hook and needlework on leather and later adapted this technique on to cloth.<sup>94</sup> The weavers, it is thought, operated in groups under headmen who were left in charge of actual negotiations and contracts, though there were some individual weavers as well.<sup>95</sup> The weaving process itself was quite seasonal with the best weaving done during the rains since the moist air was less brittle for the threads. Thus most agreements and orders were usually placed before the monsoons set in and the raw cloth dyed and cured in the autumn sun.<sup>96</sup> The Mughal court also actively patronized embroidered textiles, but after the rise of European trade in the subcontinent their designs were adapted to suit the demands of Company trade.

By the first quarter of the eighteenth century, the monopoly of the English East India Company in Gujarat had significantly declined, though it retained the factory in the port town of Surat on the western coast of Gujarat.

### China and Textiles



Figure 17: Detail of Chinese painted silk bed hanging at Osterley House  
Photo Courtesy: Stuart Howat

China was the primary exporter of silk to the East India Company in the eighteenth-century supplying both raw silk for English weavers as well as bulk silk textiles for

<sup>94</sup> Rosemary Crill, *Indian Embroidery*, (V&A Publications, 1999), 12.

<sup>95</sup> Ashin Das Gupta, *Indian merchants* (2004), 34.

<sup>96</sup> Ashin Das Gupta, *Indian merchants* (2004), 60.

retailers with the finer pieces reserved for private trade. Popular designs on silks included a combination of painted patterns and embroidered motifs of flowers, leaves, birds and animals which were part of the craze for a decorative style broadly known as “china-worke” or chinoiserie in Europe. This “oriental” style could be copied in India or China from European pattern books brought through sea trade.<sup>97</sup>

The Canton Factory records for the year 1732 give a particularly vivid account of the commission of painted silks by EIC supercargoes:

“We gave each merchant [at Canton] a particular charge that their skills be made of the best Nankeen silk, that the flowered silks be all new patterns & collours as near as possible to the patterns we delivered them, that the taffaties & gorgorons have a good gloss on them.”<sup>98</sup>

The official purchases by the East India Company in that year also included 308,435 pieces of chinaware for 17,481½ tael and 20,560 pieces of woven silk for 141,852.4 tael along with specific orders for taffetas, handkerchiefs, poisees, satins and bed damasks. The inventory from July 1732-January 1733 also lists an order of:

11,907 taffetas  
2800 handkerchiefs  
2400 poisees  
100 goshees  
863 padasoys  
500 satins  
500 bed damasks<sup>99</sup>

In the backdrop of political warring and unrest between the Company and the Mughal ruler Shah Alam II (r. 1759-1806) the EIC experienced a decline in silver reserves that consequently weakened their power to purchase raw silk. In a letter to Thomas Hodges Esq., Governor of the Council of Bombay Captain Payne reported that they ‘... are sorry to find that you Gentlemen are much in the same situation as those at Madras and Bengal but as Peace is restored we hope that Trade will flourish. Our being disappointed of silver from Bengal and Madras has obliged us to fill our sixteen ships with China ware and tea and not an ounce of Raw silk, which we find bears a good price in Europe.’<sup>100</sup> Thus, Company trade in India and China was closely connected and political fluctuations at either end impacted the nature of commodities that could be shipped back to Europe.

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<sup>97</sup> John Irwin, “Origins of the ‘Oriental Style’ in English Decorative Art” *Burlington Magazine* 97, No. 625 (1955): 106-114. Also see, John Styles, ‘Indian Cottons and European Fashion, 1400-1800’ in Glen Adamson, G. Riello, and S. Teaseley, eds. *Global Design History* (Routledge, 2011), 37-46.

<sup>98</sup> 8 July 1732, Diaries of the Council of China, 1732, British Library G/12/33.

<sup>99</sup> Diaries of the Council of China, BL G/12/33, 1732.

<sup>100</sup> BL IOR/R/10/7, 1769/70, p. 66.



The textiles at Osterley encompass complex creative processes in design practice brought about through networks of East India Company trade in Asia. They highlight the central role of East India Company sea trade in creating a global economy of artistic exchange that shaped the domestic interior in England.

## LACQUER



Figure 18: Detail: Child Family Crest in lacquer  
Photo Courtesy: Stuart Howat

A decorative art in Japan, Korea and China, lacquerware held a particular exotic appeal for its European collectors as a luxury craft especially popular for its polished finish and vibrant luster. Raw lacquer was collected from the milky sap of the *Rhus verniciflua* tree, which was harvested annually and then cured through heating and filtration. The natural plasticity of processed lacquer and its resistance to water, acid, and low heat made it amenable as a decorative surface coating for a range of materials such as wood, leather, and metal. The process of lacquering in itself was labor-intensive – successive coats of lacquer could at times be built up into a pile of over hundred layers. The lacquered object was then stored in a humid, dust-free cabinet to dry.<sup>101</sup>

The English East India Company was one of the primary importers of lacquerware furniture from East Asia in the 18th century through its flourishing network of maritime trade. Though the Company primarily exported tea, silk, and porcelain from China in exchange for British woolens and Indian cottons, a large private trade of lacquered goods flourished alongside. Chinese lacquer furniture became an especially popular import into English country houses as the imperial court relaxed its trade barrier in 1672. By 1700 the

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<sup>101</sup> Summarized from Marianne Webb, *Lacquer: technology and conservation: a comprehensive guide to the technology and conservation of Asian and European lacquer* (Boston: Butterworth-Heinemann, 2000).

East India Company began to conduct regular trade with the Qing Empire directly from its “factory” base at Guangzhou (Canton). Lacquer furniture was made on order by merchant-run guilds at Canton who were licensed to conduct foreign trade. These guilds were equally skilled in their ability to work on bespoke designs for private clients and larger retail orders placed by foreign shop-men looking to sell lacquerware in Europe.

The lacquer collections at Osterley highlight the popularity of a particularly delicate technique of gold engraving on lacquer, a Chinese variant of the Japanese style that combined gold and silver inlay with surface painting on lacquer. Armorial designs on lacquer and porcelain were especially fashionable amongst wealthy families who could wield a strong influence on private trade in Canton because of their intimate connections with the East India Company.

### **Child Lacquer Chest**



Figure 19: View of the Lacquer furniture at Osterley House  
Photo Courtesy: Stuart Howat

The armorial lacquer furniture at Osterley House includes a brilliantly finished wooden lacquer chest, wooden hall chairs, and a stunning eight part folding screen made of leather, brass, and wood.

On display is an elegant rectangular dome top beechwood coffer with brass fixtures finished in black lacquer bearing the Child family crest on its front panel that was brought into Osterley in the second quarter of the eighteenth century. It is possible that the beechwood was brought in from India and traded at Canton. The utilitarian design of the coffer and the minimalist geometric diamond decorative border in gold suggests its use as a traveling sea chest. Such coffers would have been ideal containers to store personal items or to pack specialist buys of armorial porcelain and tea acquired on behalf of the Child family in Canton.

### The Child Lacquer Screen



Figure 20: Detail of decorative section of the lacquer screen, Osterley House  
Photo courtesy: Stuart Howat

The eight-paneled screen is a remarkable example of a large-scale private commission. The screen features what appears to be a palace complex fronting an enclosed landscaped garden with its rivulets, bridges, and fenced gardens. The scene is populated with figures shown engaging in their daily activities. The top sections of the screen bear the Child family coat-of-arms and the bottom section is complimented with a floral design enclosed

within a rectangular cartouche. The decoration is picked up in gold, silver, and red and both the design and technique pay homage to the Japanese aesthetics.

While it would be plausible to assume that all the lacquer furniture at Osterley was commissioned around the same time, the second half of the eighteenth century, the folding screen presents some interesting possibilities. Company records show that in 1730, the period in which Francis Child II was deeply involved in the East India Company, an order for two large lacquered screens was completed.

By the *Princess of Wales* your Honours will have two large lacquered screens with the Company's arms upon them, being made purposely for the Court Room.<sup>102</sup>

The screens were transported on the ship *Princess of Wales* and bore the EIC's coat-of-arms. There is every possibility that Francis the younger had knowledge of this commission, which would have been a noticeable addition to the courtroom. Company Directors and Chairmen were also privy to the arrival of diplomatic gifts on board EIC ships. For example, in 1771 Lord Rochford at St. James's wrote to the Chairman and Deputy Chairman asking about a box addressed to the Queen:

Lord Rochford presents his compliments to the Chairman and Deputy Chairman of the East India Company and sends them the enclosed parcel received in a box from the Nabob of Arcot. Lord Rochford would be glad to know if on board the Ship *Egmont* there is a small box for the Queen, and if there be, he desires it may be sent to the Commissioners of the Customs to keep unopened till Lord Rochford sends a person to receive it from them.  
St James's, 11 Sep 1771.<sup>103</sup>

The contents of the box for the Queen aboard the *Egmont* notwithstanding, the letter shows the extent to which Company heads were involved in the culture of gifting and private trade. Thus, it is possible to date the Child lacquer screen to Francis Child the younger's tenure in the EIC and possibly to the period of the arrival of the screens for the EIC court room.

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<sup>102</sup> G/12/30, 10 Dec 1730. Till date, at least one such screen with the EIC coat of arms is known to exist in the collection of the Peabody Essex Museum. Further information on such screens can be found in W De Kesel, & Greet Dhont, *Coromandel Lacquer Screens* (Brussels, 2002).

<sup>103</sup> BL E/1/55, 1771, Letter 300.

