

The Melvill Family and India

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On 3 July 1748, in the Scottish town of Dunbar, Baillie John Melvill and Jean Fall,¹ children of two of the prominent families of the town, were married.² Dunbar lies approximately 30 miles due east of Edinburgh and about the same distance north of Berwick-upon-Tweed in the county of East Lothian (which was called Haddingtonshire until 1921). John and Jean Melvill are my wife's five times great grandparents.



Figure 1. Philip and his father at Presmennen taken from *Memoirs of the Late Philip Melvill*. Image courtesy of David Williams.

John and Jean had seven children, four boys and three girls, who are referred to in this case study as 'The First Generation'. The Act of Union between England and Scotland in 1707 had opened up opportunities for Scots, especially the younger sons of the landed and middle classes, in the now British armies and overseas in the expanding empire.³ Two of the Melvill boys, John, the second oldest (c.1751-1818), and Philip, the youngest (1760-1811), followed this path. Both went to India as young men, but their experiences there could not have been more different. John spent the whole of his working life as a civil servant and judge in India before retiring back to England. Philip came back to Britain still a young man, married and had nine children. Two of his six boys died before fully reaching adulthood, but the other four all had long and varied careers in the service of the East India Company (EIC), three in London and one in India.

This case study explores how the lives of these six men and other members of the family were shaped by their connections, through work or marriage, to the EIC and India. By concentrating on Philip's children and grandchildren, it illustrates how some

¹ In some references she appears as Joan or Jane.

² Dunbar parish records, 706/00 0050 0019.

³ Alan Tritton, *When the Tiger Fought the Thistle, The Tragedy of Colonel William Baillie of the Madras Army* (London, 2013), pp. 7-8.

British families made a multi-generational commitment to the EIC and India. Philip had twenty-nine grandchildren who survived to adulthood. Of the nine boys seven joined the EIC and of the twenty girls five married husbands with EIC connections.⁴

Soon after Philip's death, a memoir of him was written anonymously by an evangelical friend (although it could well have been a relation) which has been the source for much of the information about his life.⁵ The author had access to Philip's journals and diaries which (s)he quotes from extensively. Shortly after the First World War (WW1), a great granddaughter of Philip, E.J. Joubert de la Ferté, wrote a book on the Melvill family which gives some of the history of their life in Dunbar, brief biographies of approximately 120 descendants and includes portraits of the some of the more notable members of the family.⁶ It was published privately and had fifty-nine subscribers. In 1970 a three times great grandson of Philip M.E. Melvill (b. 1910), deposited a collection of documents dating from the early nineteenth century to the 1920s with the British Library (BL). Many of these refer to the origin of the Melvill family and, along with the memoir and book, have been used as the source of much of the information in this case study.⁷ Also in the BL are some letters written by Philip to his wife in the years 1804-05.⁸

Because the same Christian names are frequently used in the family, where possible second names or initials are used to differentiate between members. If there is only one Christian name and the context is unclear, names are numbered in chronological order of birth dates. So Baillie John Melvill is 'John I' and Jean Fall 'Jean I'.

The Melvills

The Dunbar Melvills were a junior branch of a family which had settled in Scotland in the eleventh or twelfth century. One source says that the family originated with a Hungarian nobleman called Malevile who accompanied the Saxon prince Atheling and his sisters, the Princesses Margaret and Christina, to Scotland in 1068.⁹ He received lands in Midlothian from King Malcolm Canmore on which he built the first Melville Castle. One descendant wrote in about 1850 'We are descended from Sir James Melville of Hale in Fife, third son of Sir John Melville of Raith. Sir James was ambassador from Mary to Elizabeth and in James VI's Privy Council and died in 1617. His brother Sir Robert Melville was raised to the peerage as Baron Melville of Monimail from which branch the present Earl is descended'.¹⁰

⁴ In this the history of the Melvills over several generations complements the family biography of the Strachays. See for example Barbara Caine, *Bombay to Bloomsbury: A Biography of the Strachey Family* (Oxford, 2005) pp. 17-22.

⁵ Anonymous, *Memoirs of the Late Philip Melvill, Esq. Lieut. Gov. of Pendennis Castle, Cornwall: With an Appendix Containing Extracts From His Diaries and Letters Selected by a Friend...together with Two Letters and a Sermon, Occasioned by His Death* (London, 1812). An abridged version of this was published in Edinburgh in 1825.

⁶ E.J. Joubert de la Ferté, *The Melvill Family, A Roll of Honour of the descendants of Philip Melvill and their immediate connections by marriage in the years of the World War 1914-18* (London, 1920).

⁷ British Library, Mss Eur Photo Eur 071, referred to as the 'BL Melvill papers'. They have been copied and bound in two volumes, with consecutive page numbers.

⁸ BL, Add MS 58438.

⁹ BL Melvill papers, pp. 66-9.

¹⁰ Note by Sir James Cosmo Melvill, BL Melvill papers, p. 61. The reference was to David Leslie-Melville, 8th Earl of Leven, 7th Earl of Melville (1785–1860).

The spelling of the name varies from document to document. On many of the Dunbar parish records it is spelt Melvil with one 'l' while other branches of the family had settled on an 'e' at the end. As one later correspondent put it 'Spelling seems of no account, it varies all through the old books sometimes one 'l', two 'll's or with an 'e''.¹¹ The branch of the family with which we are concerned settled on Melvill but an 'e' was often added by census enumerators, parish clerks and others.

On the 1748 marriage entry in the Dunbar parish records, John's title was Baillie, a civic official in local government in Scotland, specifically in burghs such as Dunbar, where baillies held a post similar to that of an alderman or magistrate in England. The equivalent to an English mayor was the Provost, a post held at that time by Robert Fall, one of Jean's brothers. As well as being a baillie of Dunbar burgh, John was at one time Collector of HM Customs for the burgh. John and Jean lived in Dunbar and had a country house at Presmennen, about five miles from Dunbar.¹²

The Falls

The Fall (pronounced Faw) family was a major presence in Dunbar in the eighteenth century. Jean Fall's grandfather Robert settled in Dunbar about 1692, having worked in Montrose, a coastal town some 50 miles further north from Dunbar as the crow flies, for the Earls of Haddington.¹³ He became a member of the town council and represented the burgh (being the equivalent of an English MP) at the Scottish parliaments until 1702. He had four sons who established themselves in partnership as one of the major merchant enterprises on the east coast. They had a fleet of ships, trading as far as the Mediterranean, the Baltic and North America. They were the driving force behind the prosperity of Dunbar in the eighteenth century with interests in rope making, canvas and sail making, shipbuilding and fisheries. They were also involved in local and national politics and built themselves houses in Dunbar.

Jean Fall's father, James (c.1685-1743) was one of the four brothers. He was the MP for Dunbar from 1734-42 and a baillie from 1735 to the time of his death. He built Dunbar House (later rebuilt and renamed Lauderdale House) at the north end of the High Street, one of the most prestigious buildings in the town. Another daughter, Janet (c.1725-1802), described as a coquette and a beauty, married Sir John Anstruther of Elie but rumours of the Falls being descended from gypsies, led to her been ostracised by society.¹⁴

By 1752 the management of the business had passed to the next generation, three cousins, Charles and Robert Fall (c.1724-96) and a Robert Melvill. In that year they established their most ambitious project yet, the East Lothian and Merse Whale Fishing Company which employed over 200 whalers in five vessels but never prospered. Deaths and crises in banking meant that the business retrenched although in 1787 Robbie Burns mentioned a visit to Dunbar and a dinner with Provost Robert Fall, 'an eminent merchant and most respectable character'.¹⁵

¹¹ Letter from Gwendoline Margaret Brodie Hoare to Michael Ernest Melvill, BL Melvill papers, pp. 170-6.

¹² *Memoirs of the Late Philip Melvill*, p. 1.

¹³ The details about the Fall family come mainly from *The Falls of Dunbar* on the John Gray Centre website at http://www.johngraycentre.org/people/movers_shaker/the-falls-of-dunbar-1692-1796/, accessed 17 August 2013.

¹⁴ A. Francis Steuart, 'The Falls of Dunbar and their Descent from the Gypsies', *The Scottish Antiquary, or, Northern Notes and Queries*, 16:63 (January 1902).

¹⁵ Francis A Groome (ed.), *Ordnance Gazetteer of Scotland: A Survey of Scottish Topography, Statistical, Biographical and Historical* (Edinburgh, 1882-5), © The Editors of the Gazetteer for Scotland, 2002-2013. <http://www.scottish-places.info/scotgaz/towns/townhistory274.html>, accessed 13 December 2013.

When Robert died the Fall empire had virtually ceased to be. Many of the assets, including Dunbar House, had been bought by the Earl of Lauderdale.

The First Generation

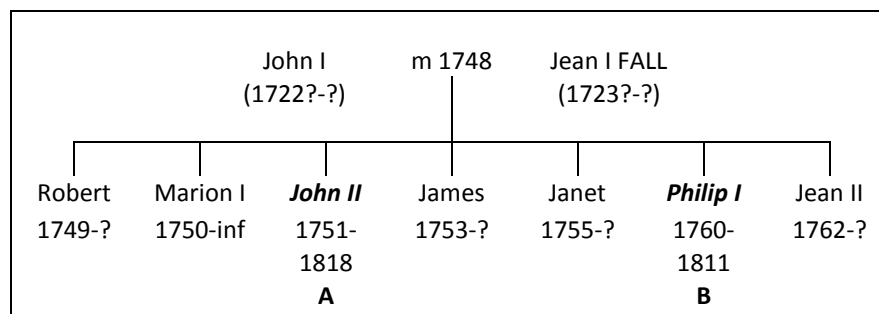


Figure 2. A simplified tree of the first generation. All surnames are MELVILL unless otherwise stated
Names in bold - connected to the EIC; *names in italics* - India connections through career or marriage
 A and B are links to the second generation table (see figure 8).

John Melvill ('John II')

John II, born in Dunbar in 1751, the second son of John I and Jean I, was baptised in Dunbar church on 29 December of that year. Having gone out to India in 1777, the Bengal civil service records for 1780 show him as a writer at Burdwan, a town about 60 miles north of Calcutta. He gradually rose through the ranks in the civil service, being recorded as a factor in 1782 and a junior merchant in 1785. This was the period when his younger brother, Philip I, was staying with him to recuperate after four years imprisonment in Mysore. By 1787 he was paymaster at Cawnpore, 300 miles south-east of Delhi in what is now Uttar Pradesh, returning to West Bengal in 1792 and becoming a judge in Dacca by 1803 with the status of senior merchant. In 1803 the British conquered Orissa, defeating the Marathas and driving them back to their heartlands where they were defeated by an army under Sir Arthur Wellesley (later Lord Wellington) at Assaye in September 1803. A commission was appointed, consisting of John and Lieutenant Colonel Harcourt, to execute a series of treaties with a group of independent rulers who dominated small tracts of territories between the coast (where the British were already) and the hills.¹⁶ His final post, before returning to England in 1813, was as a senior judge at the Court of Appeal in Calcutta.¹⁷

On 4 February 1794 John married Dorothea Carrington (d 1799), the daughter of an estate owner in Barbados and sister of Sir Codrington Carrington (1769-1849), a lawyer in Calcutta at the time of the marriage and later Chief Judge of Ceylon.¹⁸ John and Dorothea had two children in India, John III was born on 5 August 1796 and Edmund on 4 December 1797. Less than two years after the birth of her second son Dorothea died.¹⁹ On his return to England, John II settled in London. On 15 June 1813 he bought Furnace Farm in Surrey at an auction at the Bank of England, paying £10,000 plus £998 for the timber. Furnace Farm covered about 385 acres, situated between what were then the villages of Crawley and Worth in West Sussex and about a mile from each. It had been part of the Cuckfield Place Estate, which had a total acreage of

¹⁶ John Beames, *Memoirs of a Bengal Civilian* (London, 1961), p. 260; John Joseph Stockdale, *History of all the Events and Transactions which have taken place in India* (London, 1805), pp. 222-33.

¹⁷ Bengal Civil Service lists in BL.

¹⁸ ODNB entry for Sir Codrington Edmund Carrington, T. F. Henderson, rev. Roger T. Stearns.

¹⁹ *Gentleman's Magazine*, April (1800), p. 395.

over 8,200 acres, belonging to Warden Sergison who had died in July 1811.²⁰ On the Furnace Farm map is written in pencil 'Sold to Mr Melvill Esq'. In the 1960s, the expansion of Crawley meant that the farm and its lands became housing and light industrial buildings; its name is preserved as the district is called Furnace Green.

In December 1817 John II married Elizabeth Sneade (dates unknown) in Ludlow, Shropshire. He drowned shortly afterwards at Barmouth on 9 August 1818, leaving his 'estate in Sussex'²¹ to his son John III who had been educated at Eton and lived the life of a gentleman. He sold Furnace Farm in August 1819 for £9,000, the drop in value presumably being a result of the post-war agricultural depression, and lived in Amersham and Oxford before dying in Lincoln, unmarried and intestate on 5 March 1828 at the young age of 31. His younger brother, Edmund, also went to Eton before going to Trinity College, Cambridge in July 1817 where he graduated with a BA in 1818 and an MA in 1821 before being ordained at St Mary Marylebone in April 1822.²² He was Chancellor of St David's Cathedral in Pembrokeshire where he died, unmarried, on 27 September 1857, leaving just under £30,000 (c.£1.5m in today's money).²³

Philip Melvill ('Philip I')

Philip I was born on 7 April and baptised on 13 April 1760 in Dunbar.²⁴ At the age of sixteen his father purchased a commission for him in the 73rd Regiment (Lord Macleod's) Highlanders. He was required to go to the far north of Scotland, where Melvill relatives still lived, to raise a number of men for the regiment before he took up his commission.²⁵ In 1779 the regiment sailed for India, although there was a brief mutiny by some of the troops following rumours that the regiment had been sold to the EIC.²⁶ They arrived in the Madras Roads on 8 January 1780 after a ten-month voyage.²⁷ At that time Madras had no harbour and everything had to be transferred to smaller, local boats before the passengers were finally taken through the surf on the backs of local coolies.²⁸

The second Mysore War had broken out soon after the arrival of Macleod's Highlanders between the British and the forces of Hyder Ali, the Sultan of Mysore, who was allied with the French.²⁹ In July 1780, 800 Highlanders joined an army of over 4,000 men, mostly Indian troops, under the command of Major General Sir Hector Munro at St Thomas' Mount cantonment near Madras, before marching to Conjeveram (present-day Kanchipuram) about forty-five miles west

²⁰ William Budgen, *Plans of the Cuckfield Place Estate. Situated in The Several under mentioned Parishes, viz, Cuckfield, Hurstpierpoint, Keymer, Slaugham, Balcomb, and Worth belonging to Warden Sergison, Esquire* (1809), West Sussex Record Office, Sergison MSS 1/526 p27.

²¹ John Melvill's will 7 October 1818, West Sussex Record Office, Add Mss 28474.

²² Cambridge Alumni database entry: <http://venn.lib.cam.ac.uk/Documents/acad/search.html> - accessed 18 August 2013.

²³ *Exeter and Plymouth Gazette*, 14 November 1857.

²⁴ Dunbar parish registers, 706/0020/0222.

²⁵ *Memoirs of the Late Philip Melvill*, pp. 9-11.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

²⁸ V. Sriram, oral information, February 2014.

²⁹ The Second Anglo-Mysore War (1780-1784) was a conflict in Mughal India between the Kingdom of Mysore under its sultan, Hyder Ali, and the EIC/British government. Mysore was a key French ally in India, and the Franco-British conflict raging on account of the American Revolutionary War helped spark Anglo-Mysorean hostilities in India. The EIC's forces were augmented by the King's troops sent from Britain and Hanover, which was also ruled by King George III.

of Chennai where Hyder Ali's forces were camped.³⁰ There they were meant to meet up with an EIC army under the command of Lieutenant Colonel William Baillie who had command of an EIC army of some 3,000 (mostly Indian) men. Baillie had been on campaign, under canvas, in what is now Andhra Pradesh for nearly eight months before being sent to join Munro in a forced march of over 300 miles in less than eight weeks.³¹

Hyder Ali sent 10,000 men and 18 guns under the command of his son Tipu Sultan to intercept Baillie. The first battle, on 6 September just outside Perambancum, some fifteen miles to the north east of Conjeveram, was a victory for the British; Baillie asked for reinforcements to be sent by Munro to enable him to advance further. Historically there had been conflicts between the EIC and British armies over the chain of command. EIC officers tended to be older and more experienced and had gained promotions over a long period, while British army officers usually obtained commissions and promotions by purchase. The mutual antipathy between the officers of the armies often led to disputes, orders being ignored and delays.³² This was evident in this conflict. After an unexplained delay of three days, Munro sent a force to Baillie's aid, which consisted of the 73rd Highlanders, including Philip I, and companies of European grenadiers and sepoy under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Fletcher. They linked up with Baillie on 9 September and advanced towards Hyder Ali's forces. The next morning, near the village of Pollilur, they found themselves surrounded by the superior Mysorean forces and, although the British were initially successful, the sheer weight of numbers and casualties forced the final 400 or so men to retreat into a square and, eventually to raise a white flag. Although quarter was promised, in his papers Philip I described how some of Hyder Ali's forces went berserk, killing the captured and wounded and it was only the intervention of the French officers under Colonel Lally that prevented all the British forces being killed.³³ The Battle of Pollilur was the worst defeat suffered to that date by the British in India. It is depicted in a massive and very detailed mural on the outside west wall of Tipu Sultan's summer palace in Seringapatam (now Srirangapatna), some fifteen miles north of Mysore. Colonels Baillie and Fletcher can be identified along with the Frenchman, Lally.³⁴

Philip had suffered terribly during the battle. A musket ball had shattered his left arm and a sabre severed the tendons on his right wrist. He suffered over twenty wounds and his memoir recounts that he was left naked on the battlefield for two days.³⁵ In all, the Highlanders suffered almost 100 dead, and 100 wounded. The latter, with just twenty three unwounded, were rounded up and imprisoned first in Bangalore and then some (but not including Philip³⁶) were transferred to the fort at Srirangapatna. Held for four years, until the end of the war, only about thirty of the soldiers survived. Colonel Baillie himself died in November 1782, having

³⁰ <http://diksoochi.blogspot.com/2008/01/colonel-baillies-dungeon.html>, accessed 15 February 2011, which quotes from James Browne, *A History of the Highlands, and of The Highland Clans; with an extensive selection from the hitherto inedited Stuart Papers* (Edinburgh, 1850).

³¹ Tritton, *When the Tiger Fought the Thistle*, pp. 230-1.

³² Tritton, *When the Tiger Fought the Thistle*, pp. 149-55.

³³ *Memoirs of the Late Philip Melvill*, pp. 44-5.

³⁴ For a full description of the mural see Dr Veena Shekar, *Historical Paintings of Srirangapatna* (New Delhi, 2010), Ch 3.

³⁵ *Memoirs of the Late Philip Melvill*, p. 46.

³⁶ An undated letter from Philip in the BL Melvill papers, p. 118, says he was imprisoned for four years in Bangalore.

been denied any medical aid and in terrible conditions.³⁷ Very few of the survivors were able to continue in active service. Philip went to Bengal to stay with his brother John and recuperate, and it was not until 1786 that he was well enough to attempt the journey home.³⁸ His wounds and treatment in captivity meant that, for a long time, he was unable to cut his own food and needed help dressing and undressing.³⁹ According to a letter written by his widow, he never regained the full use of his arms.⁴⁰



Figure 3. The mural at the Summer Palace, Srirangapatna, depicting the Battle of Pollilur. Note the defensive British square, the ammunition cart exploding, Colonel Baillie's palanquin and, somewhere in the centre, Philip Melvill fighting. Image courtesy of David Williams.

On his return he was offered a promotion to Captain and the command of an invalid garrison in Guernsey. There he met his future wife, Elizabeth Dobree (1770-1844). He married Elizabeth in 1788 and they had their first three children on the island. The Dobrees were a French Huguenot family who had left their property in Normandy following the revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685 and taken refuge in Guernsey. Elizabeth's father Peter Dobree (1722-1808) was a dean in the protestant church in Guernsey and Philip's memoirs record many discussions on religious topics.⁴¹

After five years in Guernsey, the threat of war with France led the Melvills to leave the island in 1793; the family moved first to Southampton then, after a severe illness, Philip applied to be put on the retired list and moved to Topsham in Devon. However, after a summer of recuperation in 1796, he was offered the command of an invalid garrison at Pendennis Castle in Cornwall. He took over a run down, ill-disciplined company and there was a running conflict

³⁷ Tritton, *When the Tiger Fought the Thistle*, pp. 281-2. Baillie's nephew erected a monument to him at Gumbaz, about a mile from Srirangapatna. The dungeon in the fort at Srirangapatna is named 'Col Baillie's Dungeon' and is open to visitors. For the broader context of this captivity, see Linda Colley, *Captives: Britain, Empire and the World, 1600-1850* (London, 2002).

³⁸ *Memoirs of the Late Philip Melvill*, p. 62.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 66.

⁴⁰ BL Melvill papers, p. 122.

⁴¹ *Memoirs of the Late Philip Melvill*, p. 74.

between the invalid garrison and a militia regiment also quartered in Pendennis.⁴² Within a year he was promoted to Lieutenant Governor, a post he held until his death in 1811. The castle commanded the entrance to Falmouth harbour and was an important defensive position during the wars with France. Soon after his promotion, Philip established the Pendennis Volunteer Artillery; in 1802 he helped found a Church girls' school in 1802 and a boys' school in 1805.⁴³ In 1807 he established the Falmouth Misericordia Society 'for the relief of distressed persons'.⁴⁴ The anonymous author of Philip's memoirs emphasised his Christian convictions, and this was echoed by other writers. An early history of Cornwall says of Philip that 'he was respected and loved by all who were favoured with his acquaintance. By his death the affluent lost an amiable companion; and the poor, a benefactor who sympathised with them in their distress'.⁴⁵



From left: Figure 4. Philip Melvill; Figure 5. Elizabeth Melvill. Both taken from E.J. Joubert de la Ferté, *The Melvill Family, A Roll of Honour of the descendants of Philip Melvill and their immediate connections by marriage in the years of the World War 1914-18* (London, 1920). Image courtesy of David Williams.

In 1804 Philip became seriously ill and a change of air was recommended. He took leave of absence and moved, with his family, temporarily to Bristol but he soon resumed his post at Pendennis while the family remained in Bristol. A number of letters written by him to his wife and children in this period have survived and illustrate the conscientiousness with which he carried out his duties.⁴⁶ Early in 1811 he decided to move his family to London where the children would have better prospects and relocated to Islington.⁴⁷ In August 1811 he returned to Cornwall to put his affairs in order before returning to London for the winter, but fell ill

⁴² Ibid., p. 34.

⁴³ Bob Dunstan, *The Book of Falmouth & Penryn* (Chesham, 1975), pp. 34-5.

⁴⁴ *Memoirs of the Late Philip Melvill*, p. 122

⁴⁵ Fortescue Hitchens, *The History of Cornwall*, Samuel Drew (ed.) (London, 1824), Vol 2, pp.257-585. As cited in Pasfield Oliver, *Pendennis and St Mawes: An Historical Sketch of Two Cornish Castles* (London, 1875), pp. 77-8.

⁴⁶ British Library, Add MS 58438.

⁴⁷ *Memoirs of the Late Philip Melvill*, p. 129.

again.⁴⁸ This time he did not recover and died at Pendennis on 27 October 1811 at the comparatively young age of 51.



From left: Figure 6. The memorial to Philip Melvill in Falmouth Church (with wrong age); Figure 7. Pendennis Castle today. Images courtesy of David Williams.

His contributions to the town of Falmouth were recognised by the road between the town and the castle (now the A39) being named 'Melvill Road'.

His family continued to live in London but his widow Elizabeth, a woman 'of strong character, piety, and keen intelligence'⁴⁹ was left with slender means and five of her children unprovided for.⁵⁰ Soon after Philip's death she wrote to the governors of Christ's Hospital School asking for financial assistance for her younger sons to allow them to remain at the school.⁵¹ By this time his eldest surviving son, James Cosmo, was a clerk at the EIC. Elizabeth died in 1844 in Camberwell. On the 1841 census return she had been living in Grove Lane, Camberwell with two of her unmarried daughters and two servants.⁵²

Other children of John and Jean

Little is known of the other children. The eldest son Robert (1749-?) never married. The eldest daughter Marion (1750-?) died in infancy and one of the other daughters Jean married a Major Rose, a British army officer.⁵³

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 133.

⁴⁹ de la Ferté, *The Melvill Family*, p. 6.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

⁵¹ BL Melvill papers, p. 122.

⁵² 1841 census return HO107/1050/3, p. 4.

⁵³ BL Melvill papers, pp. 102 and 196.

The Second Generation

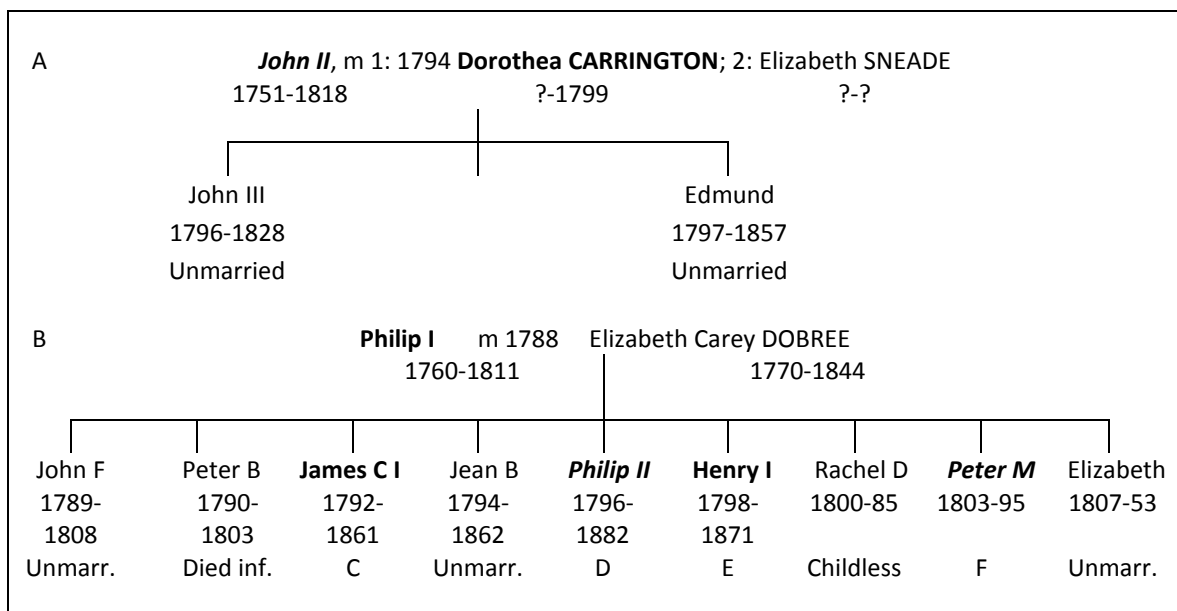


Figure 8. A simplified tree of the second generation. See figure 2 for key.



From left: Philip I's four sons who had careers in the EIC. Figure 9. James Cosmo; Figure 10. Philip; Figure 11.

Henry; Figure 12. Peter. All taken from E.J. Joubert de la Ferté, *The Melvill Family, A Roll of Honour of the descendants of Philip Melvill and their immediate connections by marriage in the years of the World War 1914-18* (London, 1920). Images courtesy of David Williams.

James Cosmo Melvill (1792-1861) ('JCM I')

JCM I was born in Guernsey, the third son of Philip I and Elizabeth, but the first to survive to adulthood. In 1811, through family connection with the Anstruthers (Philip's cousin Sir John Anstruther (1753-1811) had been Chief Justice of Bengal from 1797-1808⁵⁴) his father secured him a position at the EIC office in London.⁵⁵ He rose steadily through the organisation, becoming auditor of the Indian accounts in 1824, Financial Secretary in 1834 and Chief Secretary in 1836, a post he held until his retirement on 3 September 1858 at the time of the EIC's closure.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ ODNB entry for Sir John Anstruther, fourth baronet, J. S. Cotton, rev. T. H. Bowyer.

⁵⁵ *Memoirs of the Late Philip Melvill*, p. 123; however, according to his entry in the ODNB he started with the EIC in 1808.

⁵⁶ de la Ferté, *The Melvill Family*, p. 9.

JCM spent the whole of his working life at East India House in Leadenhall Street, the London headquarters of the EIC since 1648. Towards the end of the eighteenth century, however, the existing buildings were inadequate.⁵⁷ Between 1794 and 1797 the EIC purchased parcels of land around its existing site and, based on a design by its surveyor, Richard Jupp, a new 200 foot long and 60 foot high classical-style façade was built and the existing building extended. It included a residence for the Secretary at the west end of the façade and, later, a library and a museum. One of the highlights of the museum was the mechanical tiger which had belonged to Tipu Sultan (now in the V&A). In 1858 the property was used briefly by the India Office but the new department wanted to be near the Foreign Office so in 1860 moved to Westminster. In 1861 the building was demolished and replaced by new, multi-purpose offices.⁵⁸ It is now occupied by the Lloyd's Building, built in 1986.

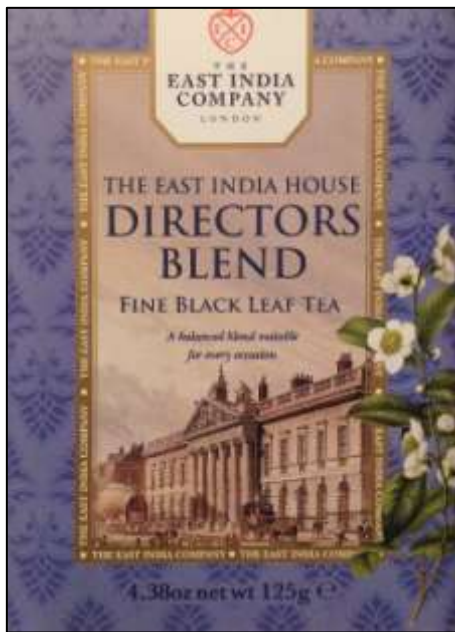


Figure 13. East India Company House as featured on The East India Company tea caddy. Image courtesy of David Williams.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, East India House was the location for one of the largest non-government or non-military organisations in London. Large numbers of clerks serviced the continuous correspondence between London and the Indies. It was a prestigious place to work and clerkships were sought after. They were filled by the nomination of directors, to provide for a relative, a friend or a political supporter but there was no evidence of nominations being sold (an 1809 investigation by a Committee of the House of Commons found no ill-practice).⁵⁹ Working hours were not onerous, starting with breakfast at 10:00am, time for lunch, and finishing by 4:00pm. John Stuart Mill, of whom more later, found time for his philosophical writings during office hours and often used EIC headed stationery for his non-business correspondence.⁶⁰ Pensions for retired employees were generous.

As Chief Secretary JCM's post was the most important home servant, because of the relationship with the Court of Directors and the way in which he could determine and control the agenda of court meetings. While in office JCM appeared before several Parliamentary committees and was regarded as 'one of the shrewdest and most sagacious men whom I have ever met' by a biographer of Indian officers.⁶¹ In 1830, he appeared before a Select Committee when William Huskisson MP was attacking the perceived privileges of the EIC and accusing them of violating their charter.⁶² Huskisson's plan 'at a stroke was defeated by the clear and convincing statements' of JCM.⁶³ In another appearance in 1832 he was described as 'an able advocate'.⁶⁴

⁵⁷ William Foster, *The East India House: its history and associations* (London, 1924), p. 137-44.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 153-4.

⁵⁹ Much of the information about the workings of East India House comes from Foster, *The East India House*.

⁶⁰ John M Robson, Martin Moir and Zawahir Moir (eds), *John Stuart Mill, Writings on India* (London, 1990) vol 33, p. xx.

⁶¹ John William Kaye, *Lives of Indian Officers* (London, 1867) vol i, p. 434.

⁶² <http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1820-1832/member/huskisson-william-1770-1830>, accessed 30 March 2014.

⁶³ Edward Thornton, *The History of the British Empire in India* (London, 1843) vol. v, p.285-6.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 304.

JCM was a traditionalist, believing that economies such as the cutting back of military expenditure were short-sighted (this despite his financial background) and opposing the EIC's territorial acquisitions of the 1840s and 1850s.⁶⁵ He was keen to preserve the independence and prestige of India's remaining princes and also observed the simmering resentment among the EIC's Indian troops because of expenditure cut-backs. He corresponded with EIC's employees in India and with critics and supporters at home. He was often required to deflect opposition to some of the EIC's difficult decisions.

In the period up to the closure of the EIC, JCM and John Stuart Mill, who had risen to be the Examiner of Indian Correspondence - a role which was almost equal in influence to that of the Chief Secretary and possibly had greater responsibilities - were pivotal in the defence of the EIC against Palmerston's attack on its privileges. While their efforts were ultimately in vain, Earl Grey pronounced Mill's petition to parliament as one of the ablest state papers he had read. In his autobiography, Mill spoke of 'the folly and mischief of this ill-considered change'.⁶⁶ JCM had become a member of The Royal Society in 1841, and Commissioner of Lieutenancy of the City of London in 1847. He was awarded a KCB in September 1853.⁶⁷



From left: Figure 14. Sir James Cosmo Melvill by Eton Upton Ellis, c. 1853; Figure 15. Lady Hester Melvill by John James Napier, c. 1858. © British Library Board.

Some of the letters in the Melvill papers in the BL are correspondence between JCM, the College of Arms and various relations of JCM which appear to be an attempt to obtain a grant of arms for the Melvill family.⁶⁸ On the cessation of the EIC, JCM was appointed Government General of the Indian Railways but turned down the offer of high office in the new Indian administration because of his advancing years and failing health.⁶⁹ His abilities were obviously

⁶⁵ These and the following observations are in JMC I's entry in the ODNB, E. I. Carlyle, rev. Katherine Prior.

⁶⁶ Robson, Moir and Moir (eds), *John Stuart Mill*, p. xxvi.

⁶⁷ ODNB entry for James Cosmo Melvill.

⁶⁸ BL Melvill papers, pp. 60-61. This was later followed up in the 1920s by Lt Col P.J. Melvill in correspondence with E.J. Joubert de la Ferté. BL Melvill papers, pp. 62-5.

⁶⁹ de la Ferté, *The Melvill Family*, p. 9.

known at the highest level because when the appointments to the new Indian Office, which took over responsibility for the administration of India from the EIC, were put before Queen Victoria in 1858 she asked how it was that JCM's name was not included.⁷⁰

In 1815 JCM married Hester Jean Frances Sellon (1789-1854) at St Andrews, Holborn. She was the daughter of William Marmaduke Sellon (1757-1824), who owned a number of properties including several public houses in and around Clerkenwell and was 'for many years a hardworking and exemplary magistrate'.⁷¹ His father was the Rev William Sellon (1729-1790) who, when he was perpetual curate at St James, Clerkenwell, earned the nickname 'silver-tongued Sellon' because of his ability to obtain generous donations to the church, especially from ladies.⁷² The family were wealthy and could trace their lineage back to the Plantagenets. The marriage settlement is an extremely long and complicated document which was written to ensure that Frances retained her own fortune and it did not pass to JCM.⁷³

The Sellon family had another link to India. Hester's nephew Edward Sellon (1818-66) joined the Madras Infantry of the EIC army in 1834 and served in India for ten years. He subsequently had a turbulent personal life and was most notorious for being a writer of erotic fiction, based upon his early experiences in India, although he did write some more scholarly works on India as well as a novel based there.⁷⁴ Described by a cousin as 'a hot headed, uncontrollable man',⁷⁵ he eventually he shot himself at the age of 48.⁷⁶



Figure 16. Cannon Hall by Mary Hill c.1900. Taken from (Hampstead Heath 2014 <http://www.hampsteadheath.net>).

By the time of the 1841 census return JCM was living at Cannon Hall in Hampstead with his wife, six daughters, two sons and four servants. The house took its name from the cannons used as bollards outside the house which are said to have been put there by JCM.⁷⁷ It was later occupied by Daphne du Maurier's family. The Melvills lived at Cannon Hall until they moved to Tandridge Court near Godstone in Surrey in the 1850s which they leased from the Earls of Cottenham and where JCM died in July 1861.⁷⁸

⁷⁰ Arthur Christopher Benson and Viscount Reginald Baliol Brett Esher (eds), *The Letters of Queen Victoria, Vol III 1854-61* (London, 1908), p. 229.

⁷¹ *Gentleman's Magazine* (1824), p. 572.

⁷² Baker William Smith, *Memoirs of the Rev William Sellon...* (London, 1852), p. 35.

⁷³ London Metropolitan Archives, ACC/1709/001 (1815).

⁷⁴ Phil Hine, *Lecture Notes: On Edward Sellon*, <http://enfolding.org/lecture-notes-on-edward-sellon-i/>, accessed 3 December 2013. *Annotation to the Sacred Writings of the Hindus* (1865) was his most recognised scholarly work. The novel was *Herbert Breakspear* (1848) about the Mahratta War.

⁷⁵ Marmaduke Hornidge, at Sellon's inquest.

⁷⁶ <http://www.brightonsarchitecture.com/profilewilds.html>, accessed 4 December 2013.

⁷⁷ <http://www.hampsteadheath.net/cannon-hall.html>, accessed 26 March 2014.

⁷⁸ Gerald Walkden, *Tandridge Parish News*, February 2010.

The church at Tandridge has a pew with JCM's name carved into it and he, his wife and three daughters are commemorated in one of the larger graves in the churchyard which has a prominent stone cross.⁷⁹ At All Saints church in Hutton, Essex, there is a window dedicated to JCM and his wife, put there by their daughter, Fanny, who had married the then rector who was instrumental in a major rebuilding of the church in 1873. The Melvill family contributed to the restoration fund.⁸⁰



From left: Figure 17. Tandridge Court; Figure 18. Melvill memorial at the Church; Figure 19. The memorial window in Hutton Church. Images courtesy of David Williams.

Philip Melvill (1796-1882) ('Philip II')

The second of Philip I and Elizabeth's sons to reach adulthood, Philip II, followed a similar career path to his elder brother, JCM I. He joined the EIC in London in June 1815 on the military side and rose to be Military Secretary by 1837. He retired in 1857, as the EIC was being wound up. In 1826 he had married Eliza Sandys in St Keverne Cornwall. They had two sons and nine daughters; two of the daughters died in infancy. Their eldest son, Philip Sandys joined the Bengal civil service (see page 21) and their other son, Teignmouth, having gone to Harrow, Cheltenham College and Trinity College, Cambridge, joined the army and was killed at Isandhlwana, South Africa, during the Zulu War of 1879. He was awarded a posthumous Victoria Cross 'on account of the gallant effort made by him to save the Queen's Colour of his regiment after the disaster of Isandhlwana'.⁸¹ Unlike their brothers only one of their daughters, Mary Augusta (1833-1917), made an Indian connection, marrying the future Major-General Sweedland Mainwaring (1819-1883) of the Indian Army in 1856.

Philip and Eliza retired to her old county of Cornwall and lived at Ethy House, St Winnow, with as many as eleven servants (on the 1871 census return). It is alleged to be where Kenneth Graham wrote *The Wind in the Willows* and that Toad Hall is based on Ethy. It is now a grade II listed Georgian country house with an 18 acre garden and an indoor Greek temple swimming pool. Philip and Eliza spent twenty-five years in retirement in Cornwall and he died there in 1892, when his estate was valued at almost £44,000 (well over £2m today).⁸²

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Mary Kenyon, *A History of All Saints Church Hutton* (Essex County Council, 1999), pages not numbered.

⁸¹ Cambridge Alumni, *ibid*; *London Gazette*, 15 March 1879.

⁸² England & Wales, National Probate Calendar (Index of Wills and Administrations) for 1882, p. 184.

Henry Melvill (1798-1871) ('Henry I')

Henry I was the third of Philip I and Elizabeth's sons to reach adulthood. He had an impressive academic record and moved in the highest of social circles. He went up to St John's, Cambridge, in 1817 and graduated in 1821 with some distinction.⁸³ He was awarded an MA in 1824 and from 1822 to 1829 worked as a fellow and tutor at Peterhouse College, Cambridge. In 1836 he became a Doctor of Divinity. He then held various clerical posts before being appointed as principal of the EIC College, Haileybury, in 1843, a post he held until the college was closed down on 31 January 1858.⁸⁴ He was appointed chaplain of the Tower of London by the Duke of Wellington in 1840, and was Golden Lecturer at St Margaret's, Lothbury, from 1850 to 1856. From 1853 he was chaplain to Queen Victoria; from 1856 Canon Residentiary of St Paul's; and from 1863 rector of Barnes in Surrey. He was still holding these three posts when he died in 1871.



Figure 20. Haileybury College, designed by William Wilkins, unknown artist, c. 1855.
© British Library Board.

Henry had the reputation of being the most popular preacher in London and one of the greatest rhetoricians of his time.⁸⁵ First at Camden Chapel, then at St. Margaret's, and later on at St. Paul's, large crowds of people attended his ministrations. His sermons generally occupied three-quarters of an hour, but such was the rapidity of his utterance that he spoke as much in that time as an ordinary preacher would have done in an hour. His delivery was earnest and animated without distinctive gesticulation; his voice was clear and flexible; while his emphatic pronunciation and his hurried manner of speaking impressed the hearers with a conviction of

⁸³ Cambridge Alumni, *ibid*; 1st Smith's prize and 2nd Wrangler.

⁸⁴ Imogen Thomas, *Haileybury 1805-1987* (Hertford, 1987) p. 24.

⁸⁵ Much of the information about Henry Melvill comes from his entry in the ODNB, G. C. Boase, rev. H. C. G. Matthew.

his sincerity. But his sermons lacked simplicity and directness of style, and his ornate phraseology, his happy analogies, smoothly balanced sentences, appealed more directly to the literary than to the spiritual sense. His views were evangelical.

He had many distinguished admirers. John Ruskin described him thus: 'Henry Melvill, afterwards Principal of Haileybury, was the only preacher I ever knew whose sermons were at once sincere, orthodox and oratorical on Ciceronian principles. He wrote them from end to end with polished art, and read them admirably, in his own manner; by which, though the congregation affectionately expected it, they were always deeply impressed...I owe to him all sorts of good help in close analysis, but especially my habit of always looking, in every quotation from the Bible, what goes before it and after'.⁸⁶ Similarly C.E. Buckland's *Dictionary of Indian Biography* records that 'His tenure of the Principalship of Haileybury is estimated to have been successful: of his success as a preacher there can be no doubt: he was noted for his eloquence, earnestness and skilful management of his voice: published numerous sermons and lectures'.⁸⁷

In 1830 he married Margaret Jennings (1805-1878) whose own family may have benefitted from her husband's EIC connections. Margaret Jennings' brother, Midgley John Jennings (1806-1857), was a Cambridge graduate who was ordained in 1830. He was an EIC chaplain in India from 1832. On 11 May 1857 he and his family were massacred at Delhi, with other members of the Mission, at the outbreak of the Mutiny. A memorial was erected at Cawnpore, on which he is described as 'Priest, Chaplain, and Founder of the S.P.G. Mission to Delhi'.⁸⁸ Henry I and Margaret had nine children, four boys and five girls. The four boys all had careers with the EIC in India and later participated in the British governance of India (see pages 21 to 23). Of their daughters, the eldest, Clara (1831-1900) married Stewart St John Gordon (1829-1866) of the Bengal Civil Service. Henry I died in 1871 and Margaret in 1878. She left the considerable sum of between £60-70,000 (over £3m today).⁸⁹

Peter Melvill Melvill (1803-95)

The youngest son of Philip I and Elizabeth, Peter entered the EIC military service in Bombay in 1819 and rose through the administration side, being Adjutant of Bombay and ADC to Governor and working in Cutch and Sind before becoming Secretary to the Government of Bombay from 1840-59. In 1860 he was knighted for his services, retiring with the rank of Major-General. He was still active in retirement after the demise of the EIC, sitting on Lord Hobhouse's committee on the amalgamation of the Indian and British armies in 1860 and on the Royal Commission to report on memorials of the Indian officers in 1863.⁹⁰

He married Mary Robinson (1814-1881) in Bombay in 1836 and they had three daughters in India. Two of them married Bombay-based civil servants, Elizabeth (1836-89) marrying Charles Gonne (1832-95) and Catherine (1840-72), Arthur de Hochepeid-Larpent, the eighth Baron, (1832-87) in 1859. The youngest Rosina died in infancy.

⁸⁶ E.T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn (eds), *Works of John Ruskin* (London, 1908) vol 35, p. 386.

⁸⁷ C.E. Buckland, *Dictionary of Indian Biography* (London, 1906), p. 285.

⁸⁸ Cambridge Alumni, *ibid.*

⁸⁹ Probate Calendar, 1878, p. 183.

⁹⁰ Buckland, *Indian Biography*, p. 285.

Mary died in early 1881, by which time she and Peter had returned to England. In the 1881 and 1891 census returns, Peter was living at 27 Palmeira Square, Hove in Sussex, one of the most prestigious addresses in the town; in both returns a number of grandchildren, governesses and several servants are registered presumably because the parents were still in India. When he died at the age of 92 in 1895 he left an estate of nearly £60,000 (about £3m today).

Other children of Philip I and Elizabeth Melvill

Their eldest son, John Fall, was born in 1789. His father obtained him a commission as a cadet at the military academy at Woolwich.⁹¹ He was a lieutenant in the Royal Artillery when he was drowned in a boating accident in Madeira on 11 July 1808. Apparently he had been the first to run up the British flag there when Madeira had been occupied by the British in that year.⁹² Their second son, Peter Bonamy was born in 1790 but died in 1803. He was described as 'a boy of great promise, and of the most amiable disposition' but was 'seized with a decline, which in four months brought him to his grave'.⁹³

Two of their daughters, Jean (1794-1861) and Elizabeth (1807-1857) never married and were living together in Camberwell in the 1851 census return. The third daughter, Rachel (1800-1885), married Henry Kemble, MP for East Surrey (d 1857). This couple do not appear to have had any children and when she died, Rachel left over £400,000 pounds,⁹⁴ an enormous sum by any account and well over £20m in today's terms.

⁹¹ *Memoirs of the Late Philip Melvill*, pp. 80-1.

⁹² *Ibid*, pp. 110-1.

⁹³ *Ibid*, p. 80.

⁹⁴ Probate Calendar, 1885, p. 26.

The Third Generation

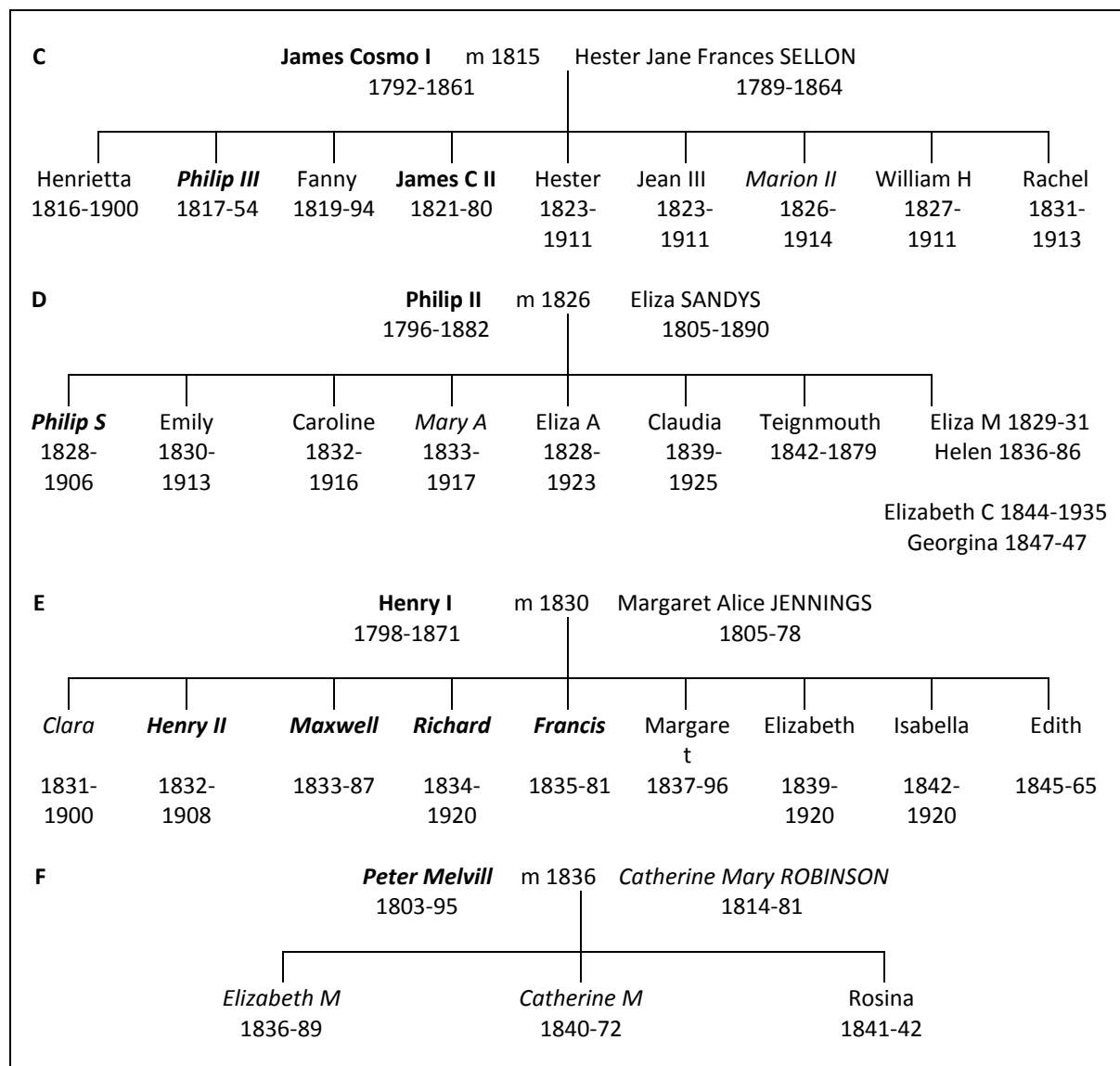


Figure 21. A simplified tree of the third generation. See figure 2 for key.

Philip Melvill (1817-54) ('Philip III')

Philip III was the second child and eldest son of JCM I and Hester Melvill. Born on 3 October 1817, he was educated at Harrow, Peterhouse College, Cambridge⁹⁵ and the EIC College at Haileybury, graduating from the latter in 1839 as a writer. He arrived in India in February 1840; his first posting was as the agent to the Governor General of the North Western Provinces and by 1854 had risen to be secretary to the Punjabi government. He died of cholera in Lahore on 14 July 1854.⁹⁶ On 15 July 1845 he married Emily Jane Hogg (1828-64) in Calcutta;⁹⁷ they had two daughters and one son, all born in India. Their son, Philip Lawrence Melvill (1850-79) joined

⁹⁵ Cambridge Alumni, *ibid*.

⁹⁶ *The Times*, 22 September 1854.

⁹⁷ Allen's India Mail on FIBIS database, <http://search.fibis.org/frontis/bin/>, accessed at various times.

the 97th (Earl of Ulster's) Regiment in 1870 as a lieutenant,⁹⁸ was promoted to captain in 1878⁹⁹ but died shortly afterwards at the young age of 29.

James Cosmo Melvill (1821-80) ('JCM II')

JCM II was born in London on 8 August 1821. He was educated at Totteridge School and joined the EIC office in Leadenhall Street, aged 16, in 1837. His advancement seems to have owed much to his father. William Foster relates the story of a clerk, who kept being promoted quickly and unexpectedly and without particular merit or influence. He discovered that the clerk below him was the son of the Secretary who had devised the stratagem of promoting the clerk immediately above him to create a vacancy his son could fill.¹⁰⁰ While the Melvills are not mentioned by name, it almost certainly relates to them, given JCM I's long tenure as Secretary and JCM II's advancement during that period.

After the transfer of EIC power to the British Crown in 1858, JCM II became Under-Secretary of State for India, a post he held until retirement in 1872. In 1844 he had married Eliza Jane Hardcastle (1822-1904) in Camberwell. After his retirement they went to live in Augusta Road in Folkestone where, judging by the address and the fact that in the 1881 census return they had six servants, they lived in some style. They had four sons, one of whom died in infancy, and five daughters. Their eldest son, another James Cosmo Melvill (1845-1929), was educated at Harrow and Trinity College, Cambridge. In 1874 he married Bertha Dewhurst (1853-1933) of the cotton trading family; he became a director of Geo & R Dewhurst Ltd, East India and China Merchants of London. He was also an acclaimed amateur botanist and zoologist and a fellow of Linnean and Zoological Societies.¹⁰¹ He wrote on zoological and biological subjects. In his retirement when living at Moele Brace Hall in Shrewsbury he corresponded with family and friends on the origins of the Melvill family; copies of many of his letters are in the British Library.¹⁰² Another son, Arthur (1853-1932) was a clergyman and never married.

Other children of JCM I and Hester

In 1844 the eldest child of JMC I and Hester, Henrietta (1816-1900), married a London solicitor, Richard Beachcroft (1805-1872), the founder of a firm which still carries his name. One of their eight children, Emily Charlotte (1848-1937) is one of my wife's great grandmothers. Their second eldest daughter was Fanny (1819-1894), who married Rev Henry Holme Westmore (1815-1890) in 1853. The rebuilding of the church at Hutton in 1873 when he was rector is referred to on page 15. Another daughter, Marion (1826-1914) married James Alexander Wedderburn (1825-1854) who was in the Madras Civil Service. Their youngest son, William (1827-1911) was educated at Rugby and Trinity College,



Figure 22. Henrietta Melvill.
Family-owned portrait. Image courtesy of David Williams.

⁹⁸ *London Gazette*, 2 September 1870.

⁹⁹ *Ibid*, 28 July 1878.

¹⁰⁰ Foster, *East India House*, p. 228.

¹⁰¹ Cambridge Alumni, *ibid*; Obituary in *The Geographical Journal*, 56:2 (August 1920), p. 150.

¹⁰² BL Melvill papers, pp. 187-98.

Cambridge and qualified as a barrister.¹⁰³ He married Elizabeth Lister (1833-1908) in 1862. His final job was as the solicitor for the Inland Revenue and he was knighted in 1888.

Philip Sandys Melvill (1828-1906) (Philip III)

Philip II and Eliza's eldest son was educated at Rugby and Haileybury, where he received several prizes for Sanskrit and Persian. He arrived in India in 1846 and entered the Bengal Civil Service as an assistant to Sir Henry Lawrence, the Resident at Lahore as well as Agent to the Governor-General for the North West Frontier. Lawrence governed the area with the help of his officers such as Philip, who were known as 'Henry Lawrence's Young Men'. Philip became commissioner of a division of the Punjab after an exceptionally short service of thirteen and a half years, then Financial Commissioner of the Punjab before becoming a Judge of the Chief Court in the Punjab. He established a reputation almost unrivalled for an intimate acquaintance with the peoples and their languages. He was then agent to the Governor-General at Baroda until retirement in 1882.¹⁰⁴

In 1851 he married Eliza Johnstone (1832-1920) in Jullundur. They had two sons and six daughters, some of whom died in infancy in India. Their eldest daughter, Eliza Jane (1853-1942) married Charles Joubert de la Ferté (1846-1835) a colonel in the India Medical Service ('IMS') in Jullundur. It was Eliza Jane who, under her married name, wrote the book on the Melvill family referred to on page 2. The de la Ferté's second son, was Air Chief Marshal Sir Philip Bennet Joubert de la Ferté KCB, CMG, DSO (1887-1965), a senior commander in the Royal Air Force during the 1930s and the Second World War.¹⁰⁵

At least two more of their daughters married in India, Harriot (1854-1937) to William Warburton (1843-1911), another officer in the IMS, and Helen (1856-96) to Rowland Bateman (1840-1916), a minister of the church. Their eldest son, Philip James Melvill (1858-1935) was educated at Harrow and Sandhurst and returned to India in the Bengal Light Infantry. He married Jessie Ross (1867-1900) in Bushire in what was then Persia and had a long career in the army, including service in the Persian Gulf, until he retired in 1908. During his time in India he had strongly supported the cause of Christian missions with personal support and financial aid and after retirement was involved in the Church Missionary Society in London.

Henry Melvill (1832-1908) ('Henry II')

Another Henry, the eldest son of Henry I and Margaret joined the Bengal cavalry, part of the EIC army, in 1849 and retired in 1891 with the rank of Lieutenant-General. He was involved in the mutiny of 1857 and the subsequent fighting. He married Elizabeth Curling (1833-1913) and they had six children, three of them boys who all became army officers, one, yet another Henry (1856-1901), was a staff officer in the Indian army.

Maxwell Melvill (1833-1887)

Maxwell was the second son of Henry I and Margaret. He was educated at Tonbridge and Trinity College Cambridge before going to Haileybury College in 1853 where he was a prize-

¹⁰³ Cambridge Alumni, *ibid.*

¹⁰⁴ Buckland, *Indian Biography*, p. 285.

¹⁰⁵ ODNB entry, Edward Chilton, rev. Christina J. M. Goulter.

winner in classics, mathematics, law, and history and political economy.¹⁰⁶ He had a brilliant career in the Bombay Civil service from 1855 to 1887, serving in the Bombay Revenue and Judicial Departments as Assistant Collector and Magistrate, as Assistant Judge at Konkan from 1858 to 1860 and as Assistant Commissioner in Sind from 1862 to 1866. He was admitted to Gray's Inn in 1866. He then rose through the judiciary, becoming a Judge at the High Court at Bombay in 1869 and then a member of the Council of the Bombay Presidency from 1884 until he died, unmarried, of cholera at Garnish Kurd House, near Poona, in August 1887. He was described by one historian as the '...most brilliant member of the Bombay Council'.¹⁰⁷

Richard Gwatkin Melvill (1834-1920)

Henry I and Margaret's third son Richard also had a career in India but with a very different outcome to those of his brothers. His early life was conventional; he was one of the last graduates of Haileybury College before it closed and was a prize winner in Persian. He joined the Bengal Civil Service in 1855. He married Gertrude van Cortland (1837-1918) in Umballa in 1858 and they had six children in India, two of whom died in infancy. He worked at various stations during the next fifteen or sixteen years, excluding a three-year furlough from 1867. When he returned in 1870 he was appointed as Deputy Commissioner in Sirsa which is in the Punjab about 150 miles west-north-west from Delhi and about 80 miles from what is now the Pakistan border. His youngest daughter was born in Sirsa in 1871.

However, by 1873, his wife and children were no longer with him and he had some sort of breakdown. The press reported that he had gone native, changing his name to Shaik Abdool Rahman and was known as 'The Muslim Melvill'.¹⁰⁸ He was described as a 'pervert' who had 'married a Moslem bride. Unfortunately he had a Christian wife to start with'. A letter from a J.M. Machan dated 20 October 1873 confirms the report that on 18 September Richard had made a profession of Mohammadism in the Sirsa town hall before witnesses and married according to the rites of the Mohammedan religion Kureshi Brynon, the daughter of Hydari Brynon, the mistress of the female school in Sirsa.¹⁰⁹ He went on to say that after the marriage Hydari Brynon (aged thirty), her sister aged about sixteen (her husband is an absentee) and her brother took up their residence in the Melvill house.

The same letter says that 'the girl is said to be 8 years of age'... and the marriage was... 'designed to cover an intrigue with the mother'. The writer went on to say that Richard invited him to dinner but refused to talk of the marriage saying that he would rather give up the service than his present mode of life and that 'nothing but superior physical force should tear him away from those who were now drawn to him than anything else in this life'. While this kind of behaviour had been quite usual in the early days of the EIC in India, by the middle of the nineteenth century it was not approved of and was regarded as a form of insanity.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁶ Cambridge Alumni, *ibid.*

¹⁰⁷ William Wilson Hunter, *Bombay, 1885 to 1890; a Study in Indian Administration* (Oxford, 1892), p. 64.

¹⁰⁸ BL Melvill papers, p. 177-86 contain newspaper cuttings and letters on the subject of the Muslim Melvill. Unfortunately the cuttings are not dated nor does it say which newspapers they are from. It is not clear as to which Melvill some of the letters are addressed and the signatures on the letters are not clear.

¹⁰⁹ BL Melvill papers, p. 179-81

¹¹⁰ See William Dalrymple, *White Mughals: love and betrayal in eighteenth-century India* (New York and London: Viking, 2003) and Durba Ghosh, *Sex and the family in colonial India: the making of empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

However, the furore did not last too long. Further press cuttings debated whether he should be prosecuted under British or Moslem law and the consensus was that his Moslem marriage was not recognised under western law, while a second marriage was not illegal for Moslems. So he was not prosecuted, but was dismissed from the civil service.

On the 1891 census returns in England his first wife Gertrude is recorded with three of her children in the Isle of Wight and with her status as 'widow'. In 1901 she still describes herself as a widow but in 1911, which asks for more details about marriages than the previous return, she is boarding with a family and the head records that she is married, has had six children of who three are still living, but does not give her age or the number of years she had been married.

Meanwhile, in India, Richard had seemingly come to his senses and there is a letter to a newspaper in the BL papers (right), unfortunately not dated, in which he apologises for his actions and blames the fact that living in Sirsa is enough to drive anybody mad.¹¹¹ In 1885 he married, at the age of forty, sixteen year-old Emily Mathias (1869-1942), the daughter of Bishunbenanth Mathias, in a Christian ceremony in Dehra Dun. There is no sign in any documentation that he had divorced Gertrude and the second marriage register records his status as 'widower'. Richard and Emily had four children and for some years lived in Landour, about twenty miles from Dehra Dun. On the baptism records for his sons Richard's occupation in 1855 was pleader and in 1888 vakil, an Urdu word for a lawyer or representative. His death was recorded in Dehra Dun in 1920.¹¹²



Figure 23. Letter from R. G. Melvill. Melvill Papers, Mss Eur Photo Eur 071, British Library. ©British Library Board.

Francis Melvill (1835-1881)

Francis, Henry I and Elizabeth's youngest son entered the Bombay Civil Service in 1855. He married Minnie Hayes (1842-1878) in 1875 in Dublin. Most of his career was spent in Sind, where he rose to Chief Commissioner.

¹¹¹ BL Melvill papers, p. 178.

¹¹² FIBIS databases, *ibid*, and BL records of marriages and baptisms.

Conclusion

The Melvill family showed a commitment to the EIC (and its successor organisation) and India from the last years of the eighteenth century well into the twentieth century. They were a good example of those Scots who after the Act of Union took their opportunities with the British army and in the overseas empire to make their careers. By virtue of their EIC service, this Scottish family became increasingly English by marrying into established English families and settling in England. In the early years of the EIC, few of the employees had had university education but its increasing bureaucratisation in the nineteenth century is illustrated by the number of Melvill men who went to universities, especially Cambridge, as the century progressed. Those who did not follow the EIC/India route were usually successful in other spheres, whether in military or civilian life. Many of their daughters married into other, Indian-orientated families or other military men. Some of their families tended to be large with up to eleven children and had good survival rates.

When the EIC was disbanded in 1858 following the Indian Mutiny of the previous year, of the sons of Philip I there were two (JCM I and Philip II) in very senior positions in the London office, a third (Henry I) was principal of the EIC college at Haileybury and the fourth (Peter) had recently retired as Secretary of the Bombay presidency. Seven of the men of the next generation had started (or were about to start) their careers with the EIC and another joined the army and would be awarded a VC; of the women of this generation, five would marry civilians or army officers based in India.

While never achieving the highest offices of state, and without any of them being elevated to the peerage, nevertheless several of the Melvills were knighted and most seem to live comfortable lives both while working and in retirement. The family's wealth and status derived from their association with the EIC in turn enriched diverse aspects of English culture in these and successive generations, including religious life, arts and sciences and architecture. In 1914, on the outbreak of WW1, the effect of the large families and good survival rates combined with a tendency towards public or military service resulted in over sixty of the first Philip Melvill's descendants being directly involved in the First World War with at least fifty helping as nurses, medical orderlies, in factories or as other volunteers.

The chivalrous action of the Frenchman Colonel Lally, who was fighting with Hyder Ali at the Battle of Pollilur in 1780, in saving the life of a badly wounded twenty year-old lieutenant in the 73rd Highlanders was to have wide-ranging and significant effect on the history of the EIC and India and greatly assisted the British war effort from 1780.



From left: Figure 24. Portrait of Philip Melvill in Pendennis Castle; Figure 25. Detail from mural at the Summer Palace (see figure 3) featuring Colonel Lally at the Battle of Pollilur. Images courtesy of David Williams.

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