

### 3. An Anglo-Indian Community in Britain

By the time of his departure for the colonies in January 1866, Henry Prinsep had spent most of his life in Britain, but had grown up with the knowledge that his adulthood was likely to take him overseas, to India or another colony, such as Western Australia or Tasmania, where his father owned substantial estates. At the age of 21, he assumed that his departure would be temporary, and that he would soon return to London to take up his chosen career as an artist after securing his financial future and that of his younger siblings, Annie, Louisa, May and Jim. The trip to the colonies was an adventure, but one which would force him to learn as he went. He was confident that his family background, his education and understanding of colonial life would equip him for whatever challenges lay ahead. His outlook was very much that of a young Briton in mid-Nineteenth Century Britain, confident in the supremacy of his civilisation and his position within it, secure in his belief that colonisation was in the best interests of all and that the colonised had the capacity and the desire to benefit from British rule. He was well-bred, well-educated and well-connected, seemingly equipped to be a successful coloniser, and confident that the networks his background had given him would serve him well in the far-flung reaches of empire.

Britain's empire had changed much since the days Prinsep's father and uncles had lived and worked in Calcutta during the 1820s and 1830s, while, at home, Britons were increasingly conscious of the nation's pre-eminence as an imperial power. The narratives of the principal literary and cultural figures of the day, oracles such as Thomas Macaulay, John Ruskin, Alfred Tennyson and William Thackeray, accustomed Britons to notions that they belonged to the race that had acquired the greatest empire the world had seen, and that this affirmed their superiority amongst the peoples of the world. Yet, an increasing assertiveness as an imperial power also brought controversies and anxieties. In 1857, British society was shocked by reports of the atrocities perpetrated by Indian 'sepoys' against British people in India. Victorian society was incensed by the brutality and ruthlessness of an 'ungrateful' and 'unpredictable' Indian population against what was believed to be a benevolent overlordship.<sup>1</sup> The violence of the British response was widely seen as a fitting response to the actions of those who, employed and trusted by the British, had proven themselves treacherous. This and other revolts against British imperial authority throughout the colonial world—including the Morant Bay rebellion in Jamaica in 1856 and the

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1 Hawkins, Angus 1984, 'British Parliamentary Alignment and the Indian Issue, 1857–1858', in *The Journal of British Studies*, Volume 23, No. 2, p.79. See also Chaudhuri, Sashi Bhusan, 1979, *English Historical Writings on the Indian Mutiny, 1857–1859*, World Press, Calcutta.

long-running 'Maori Wars' in New Zealand between 1845 and 1872—brought the affairs of the Empire into the popular British domain, unleashing public debates about how Britain was to govern its distant realm, how it should relate to the millions of people now living under British rule, the nature of race and difference, British identity and superiority.

Growing up in a self-consciously Anglo-Indian community in England, the young men and women of Prinsep's generation were subject to all the ambiguities of the British colonial mission.<sup>2</sup> Henry Prinsep was an avid consumer of popular literature about Britain's empire, but at the same time was closely connected through family and kin to India and the colonies. The older Prinsep generation was living testimony to a recent Indian past in which they had prospered, but which had also been cruel, as many of their family and kin lay buried in Indian soil or had, like Henry's father Charles and uncle James, returned to England with their health broken. If they survived India, they could look forward to a comfortable retirement and the opportunity to continue their involvement in Indian government and colonial commerce. Uncle William Prinsep, who had left India in 1841 and bought a country house in Surrey, still had enough capital to continue his involvement with Assam tea and the Calcutta tug boat industry, as well as dabble in gold mining in South Africa and Australia. Thoby, able to live well off his pension from over 30 years civil service in Bengal civil service, continued his role in Indian government by successfully seeking election as a director of the East India Company and then, after the assumption of direct Crown rule of India in 1858, as a permanent member of the Secretary of State's Council for India.

The Anglo-Indian community of which Henry was a part permeated almost every aspect of the life he experienced as a child and young adult. At school, he was among other children whose parents were also in India. At home, his invalid father, Charles, was surrounded by the relics and books of his Indian past in his Cheltenham house and was often visited by neighbours he knew from his Indian days. His brother, Charlie, was in India with the 19<sup>th</sup> Hussars, and his cousin, Henry Thoby, was a magistrate in Calcutta and later a judge of the Supreme Court. Five other cousins subsequently joined the civil service or army, while another cousin, Augusta Becher, the only daughter of Uncle Augustus, spent many years in India with her officer husband, Septimus. On holiday, Henry and his siblings stayed in hotels that were owned and patronised by 'Indian people'.<sup>3</sup>

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2 The term 'Anglo-Indian' is used in this chapter to refer to Britons born in India of British parents or Britons who spent long periods in India, many of whom self-identified as 'Anglo-Indian'. See, for example, Grant, Coleworthy 1849, *An Anglo-Indian Domestic Sketch: A letter from an artist in India to his mother in England*, W. Thacker and Co., Calcutta, and Laurie, Colonel W.F.B. 1887, *Sketches of Some Distinguished Anglo-Indians: With an account of Anglo-Indian periodical literature*, W.H. Allen & Co., London. By contrast, in his memoirs, William Prinsep refers to 'old Indians', just as Henry Prinsep's cousin, Augusta Becher, does in her memoirs. The term 'Anglo-Indian' later came to refer specifically to those of mixed Indian and British parentage.

3 Prinsep, James Charles, 'Autobiography', SLWA Acc. 3859A, 1–2.

When they visited their uncles and aunts, William and Mary Prinsep in Surrey and Henry and Alexa White in Inverness, they continued to be surrounded by matters Indian, by cousins and kin about to go to India or on furlough, Indian visitors, Indian cuisine and Indian artefacts in the houses. India thus formed a constant background in the world in which he grew up. It was 'a second home', as Augusta Becher later put it, the land to which 'so many of the family were destined to devote their lives'.<sup>4</sup>

After the death of Charles Prinsep in 1864, Henry Prinsep and his younger siblings moved into the home of Uncle Thoby and Aunt Sara Prinsep, who occupied a large farm house in semi-rural land at Holland Park in Kensington. Thoby and Sara had left Calcutta in 1843, having accumulated a fortune of 50,000 pounds sterling and an annuity of 1,000 pounds a year. From 1858, their home, Little Holland House, became the focus of an active social life energetically promoted by Sara and her sisters, all of them born and brought up in Calcutta by their parents, James Pattle (1775–1845) and Adeline (née de L'Etang) (1793–1845) who had been born and died in India. James Pattle had been a prominent but notorious Calcutta merchant, later described by his great-granddaughter, Virginia Woolf, as 'of marked, but doubtful reputation who, after living a riotous life and earning the title of 'the greatest liar in India', finally drank himself to death'.<sup>5</sup> Woolf gives a lurid account of the deaths of James and Adeline in 1845, and the subsequent departure of their daughters, including her grandmother, Mia Jackson, from Calcutta to England. The arrival from Calcutta of four of Sara's sisters, Julia Margaret (Cameron), Maria (Jackson), Virginia (Somers) and Sophia (Dalrymple), over the next few years brought the formation of a network that was unashamedly and assertively Anglo-Indian, and willing to exhibit their Indianness in a way that appealed to London society.<sup>6</sup>

Little Holland House and its extensive gardens were used by Sara Prinsep and her sisters for Sunday afternoon cultural salons, with the main attraction being their permanent house guest, artist and sculptor George Frederick Watts.<sup>7</sup> Memoirs of

4 Becher, Augusta 1930, *Personal Reminiscences of Augusta Becher, 1830–1888*, edited by H.G. Rawlinson, Constable and Co., London, p.viii.

5 Bell, Quentin 1974, *Virginia Woolf: A biography*, Harvest Books, New York, p.14.

6 Olsen, V.C. 2003, *From Life: Julia Margaret Cameron and Victorian photography*, Palgrave MacMillan, New York, p.47.

7 As well as the two manuscripts by Jim Prinsep, ('Autobiography', and 'De Principe, A.D. 1574–1930', 2 Volumes, SLWA Acc. 3150 A/1–2) many of the letters received by Henry Prinsep from his siblings mention Little Holland House, Aunt Sara and Uncle Thoby, G.F.K. Watts (whom they refer to as 'Signor'), and many of the visitors. These letters are found throughout the State Library of Western Australia (SLWA) collection at MN 773, particularly in the folios comprising Acc. 3592A. Memoirs of the activities at Little Holland House are to be found in a number of secondary sources. For example Blunt, Wilfred 1975, *'England's Michelangelo': A biography of George Frederic Watts OM, RA*, Hamish Hamilton, London; Dakers, Caroline 1999, *The Holland Park Circle: Artists and Victorian society*, Yale University Press, London; Gould, Veronica Franklin 2004, *G.F. Watts: The last great Victorian*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London; and Olsen, V.C. 2003, *From Life: Julia Margaret Cameron and Victorian photography*, Palgrave MacMillan, New York.

the social life at Little Holland House glorify the artistic and intellectual activity of the visitors, drawn to the salon not only by the presence of Watts, but by the 'oriental exoticism' of the Pattle sisters and an informality that bespoke their unusual and un-English background. Pre-Raphaelite artist, Edward Burne Jones, viewed Sara's salons as 'a gallant experiment of a kind made all too rarely in England: the world at large might buckle to the forces of philistinism, but here at least the claims of talent and beauty would receive full recognition'.<sup>8</sup> Visitors were certain to meet interesting people and celebrated Londoners. Alfred Tennyson was one of a procession of regular guests, along with the leading lights of London's political, intellectual and cultural world, William Makepeace Thackeray, Robert Browning, George Eliot, William Gladstone, Benjamin Disraeli, John Ruskin, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, F.D. Maurice, Holman Hunt, Charles Hallé and Joseph Joachim, all of whom were made to feel at home by the Prinseps. Sara Prinsep and her sisters, 'at once homely and extravagantly artistic', promoted Little Holland House as a haven from which everything but high living and the pursuit of beauty was rigorously excluded.<sup>9</sup> In *Moments of Being*, Virginia Woolf imagined Little Holland House as 'an old white country house, standing in a large garden':

The date is around 1860. It is a hot summer day. Tea tables with great bowls of strawberries and cream are scattered about the lawn. They are 'presided over' by some of the six lovely sisters; who do not wear crinolines, but are robed in splendid Venetian draperies; they sit enthroned, and talk with foreign emphatic gestures ... to the eminent men ... rulers of India, statesmen, poets, painters ... The sound of music also comes from those long low rooms where the great Watts pictures hang; Joachim playing the violin; also the sound of a voice reading poetry—Uncle Thoby would read his translations from the Persian poets. How easy it is to fill in the picture with set pieces that I have gathered from the memoirs—to bring in Tennyson in his wide-awake; Watts in his smock frock; Ellen Terry dressed as a boy; Garibaldi in his red shirt.<sup>10</sup>

The Anglo-Indian exoticism of the Little Holland House salons provided a forum in which Indian colonialism and knowledge could be exhibited to the social elites of London. Thoby Prinsep, amongst 'a great many old Indians', represented British expertise on India, reciting his Anglicised renditions of Persian epic poetry and speaking with the authority of an old orientalist on

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8 Burne Jones, Edward 1981, *The Little Holland House Album*, The Dalrymple Press, North Brunswick, p.7.

9 Tennyson, Charles 1950, *Alfred Tennyson*, Macmillan & Co., London, p.294.

10 Woolf, Virginia 1978, *Moments of Being*, Triad, St. Albans, Herts, pp.100–1.



aspects of Indian language, ethnography and politics. 'You might turn to him as to an encyclopaedia', recalled his son Val, 'with the certainty of receiving ... information on any Indian subject.'<sup>11</sup>

Meanwhile, the women of the family exhibited the exotic and idealised aspects of Anglo-Indian culture, dressing in oriental costumes, speaking Hindustani amongst themselves, serving Indian cuisine, and adopting relatively less formal and more personable social mores. Adding to their allure, the salons were occasionally graced by visiting 'native grandees', as Jim Prinsep recalled, former business and political colleagues from India who participated in debates about Indian government and religions, and who helped construct metropolitan images of 'what an Indian gentleman should look like and how he should behave in the imperial metropole'.<sup>12</sup>

## Influence and patronage: Indian government in the metropole

Prinsep family social life in mid-Nineteenth Century metropolitan Britain illustrates Cohn's image of a 'self-perpetuating oligarchy', in which Anglo-Indian identity was manifest through social, business and familial networks.<sup>13</sup> Such identities included appropriation of aspects of Indian literature, architecture, art and design, and Indian religious ceremony, often adapted to forms suitable for metropolitan cultural consumption, which served both to glorify an idealised India and to reinforce a sense of identity distinct from other British people. The older members of the Anglo-Indian community, such as Thoby Prinsep, were products of Indian government styled on the principles of Warren Hastings, in which India was viewed as a 'fitting object for European benevolence', their role as civil servants engaged in the governmental objective of integrating Indians into an 'empire of uniformity', a colonial social body adapted to Indian 'principles and maxims and preserving Indian laws and institutions'.<sup>14</sup> Their later years in India in the 1830s had seen important shifts in governmental policies in the face of liberal ideas of British superiority, Indian backwardness and incapacity, and the obligation of Britain to become a 'benevolent civilizing empire' in which

11 Prinsep, Val C. 1879, *Imperial India: An artist's journals, illustrated by numerous sketches taken at the courts of the principal chiefs in India*, Chapman and Hall, London, p.46.

12 Burton, Antoinette 1998, *At the Heart of the Empire: Indians and the colonial encounter in late-Victorian Britain*, University of California Press, London, p.42. Henry's younger brother Jim mentions the 'Indian grandees' in his 'Autobiography', Volume 1.

13 Cohn, Bernard S. 1987, *An Anthropologist Among the Historians and Other Essays*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, p.510.

14 Buchan, Bruce 2007, 'Europe's Asia': Empire, difference and the moral Geography of European political thought, c 1500 – 1800', paper presented at 'Australasian Political Studies Association Conference', Monash University, 24–26 September, p.16.

Indians would emerge as 'brown Englishmen', as Thomas Macaulay wrote, 'a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but British in taste, in opinions, in morals and in intellect'.<sup>15</sup> The events of the Indian revolt in 1857, widely reported, novelised and serialised in the metropole, reinforced British images of Indians as barbarous and ungrateful, and the civilising mission as fraught with anxieties about the distance of coloniser from a colonised increasingly defined by difference and a perceived incapacity to progress to standards of European civility. In such an environment, the form of British relationships with the others of empire became a subject of intense debate in the metropole, from liberal expressions of the essential likeness of different humans and the capacity of the others to become like 'us' under the benevolence of a civilising empire, to contrasting views that envisaged a hierarchically ordered system in which a superior 'we' must always dominate and control the inferior, reluctant and unruly others.<sup>16</sup>

Families such as the Prinseps contributed to these debates from a position of familiarity with India, which they expressed through past experience, continuing family connections and oriental knowledge. As colonials, they asserted their knowledge of India and sought to influence metropolitan images of an Indian colonial project that they understood had undergone significant changes during the Nineteenth Century. Patrick Brantlinger refers to the burgeoning of a popular literature on India after the turmoil of the 1857 revolt, 'at least fifty' novels before 1900, 'at least thirty more' before World War II, and 'a deluge of eyewitness accounts, journal articles, histories, poems and plays'.<sup>17</sup> This popular literature helped nurture perceptions of an empire of difference, its peoples not only 'primitive and backward in contrast to European standards of progress, development or civilisation', but, since the revolt, now also potentially treacherous and unreliable.<sup>18</sup> A key feature of this hardening of British attitudes to Indians lay in concepts of race and racial hierarchy based on doctrines of human types in which differences were permanent, and were believed to determine the nature of social relationships between races. British superiority was assumed to be based on Anglo-Saxon heritage and membership of an Aryan race, in which the British could be represented as 'the most progressive branch of the most progressive race', which had the power and right to dominate others because of its position at the pinnacle of the hierarchy of civilisation.<sup>19</sup>

15 Macaulay, Thomas Babington, 'Minute on Indian Education (1835)', in Barbara Harlow and Mia Carter (eds) 1999, *Imperialism and Orientalism: A documentary sourcebook*, Blackwell Publishers, Oxford, p.61.

16 Curtin, Philip C. 1971, *Imperialism*, The Macmillan Press, London and Basingstoke, p.xx.

17 Brantlinger, Patrick 1998, *Rule of Darkness: British literature and imperialism, 1830-1914*, Cornell University Press, New York, p.199.

18 Buchan 2007, 'Europe's Asia', p.6; Mackenzie, John W. 1999, 'Empire and Metropolitan Cultures', in Andrew Porter (ed.), *The Oxford History of the British Empire*, Volume 3: The Nineteenth Century, Oxford University Press, Oxford, p.281.

19 Banton, Michael 1977, *The Idea of Race*, Tavistock Publications, London, p.61; Lorimer, Douglas A. 1978, *Colour, Class and the Victorians: English attitudes to the negro in the Mid-Nineteenth Century*, Leicester University Press, Leicester, p.23.

The range of opinion within such racial subjectivities was significant, Lorimer reducing it to rival visions that extended between the humanitarian goals of empire of uniformity, which saw all humans as bound by common origins and shared humanity, and the 'extreme racialists' who saw all races as distinct, with separate origins and different characteristics, and thus subject to separate and unequal development.<sup>20</sup>

On his return to England in 1843, Thoby Prinsep was keen to continue his involvement in Indian colonial government and British imperial affairs. He joined the exclusive Carlton and Athenaeum clubs in London and, in 1851, was elected a director of the East India Company.<sup>21</sup> This directorship provided Thoby Prinsep with an avenue to participate in the defence of the East India Company charter in what was to be the final renewal by the British Parliament in 1853. That year, he published a lengthy monograph which summarised his views on Indian government, derived from nearly 40 years' direct experience and almost ten years' retirement in the metropole.<sup>22</sup> The document betrays little of the conviction that British rule would uplift Indians and transform Indian society, which existed in his earlier works. Tinges of his days as an old orientalist surfaced in his suggestion that the abandonment of the 'grand principles' of non-interference in native religions and limits on the immigration of Europeans in the 1833 *Charter Act* constituted a betrayal of the Indian elites, whose support was essential for the success of the colonising project.

In the absence of concerted strategies to win over the 'lettered classes', which he took to have been abandoned by the Bentinck/Macaulay reforms of the 1830s, Thoby held little hope that the Indian masses could adapt to the benefits of British rule. The 'innate' differences between British rulers and Indian subjects, he argued, must continue to be reflected in systems of colonial government. The system of indirect rule should not only be maintained, but extended, both to maintain alliances with Indian elites and to recognise the knowledge and authority of British administrators in India. The integrity and training of these 'men on the spot', 'bound by the tie of interests as well as by covenant to devote the best part of their lives to India', guaranteed that 'Government is certain to be conducted in due subservience to England, and with efforts to prevent alienation on the part of the governed'.<sup>23</sup> The Governor-General and the East India Company administration should thus be free to govern 'with no restraints of reference to England for previous sanction', in recognition of the high-mindedness and Indian knowledge of the Company civil service. 'An

20 Lorimer 1978, *Colour, Class and the Victorians*, p.23.

21 Philips, C.H. and D. Philips 1841, 'Directors of the East India Company', in *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, October; Prinsep, Sir Henry Thoby, 'Three Generations in India 1771–1904', OIOC MSS Eur. C. 97, Part 2, p.266.

22 Prinsep, Henry T. 1853, *The India Question in 1853*, W.H. Allen & Co., London.

23 Ibid., p.58.

acknowledgement of superior general intelligence in the members of the civil service', he wrote, should take account of the 'qualities in which the natives of India know themselves to be deficient'.<sup>24</sup> A powerful and knowledgeable civil service held a paternalist responsibility for guiding Indians in the correct application of European knowledge, as well as the introduction of British technology. Furthermore, without a firm guiding hand, agitation against British rule risked becoming unstoppable through the 'vain and presumptuous élèves of the Government colleges', who failed to 'appreciate the blessings of peace and order'. 'Why should the seeds of disaffection and disloyalty be sown by our own hand', he asked, 'in a soil well prepared to receive lessons of order, and impressions favourable to the permanence of British rule?'<sup>25</sup>

Although the charter of the Company was eventually renewed in 1853, five years later the *Government of India Act 1858* marked the end of the active involvement of the Company in India. The Act instituted direct Crown rule, and proclaimed Victoria the sovereign of India, her authority to be exercised by a Secretary of State through a Viceroy and Governor-General. In many ways it attempted to preserve continuity in Indian government, with senior Company employees confirmed in their positions, East India Company treaties with Indian principalities maintained, and other policies on equality before the law, freedom of religion and respect for indigenous customs recognised.<sup>26</sup> Membership of the Council of India was also designed to provide continuity, and seven of the 15 council places were initially reserved for nominees of the East India Company, particularly those experienced in Indian colonial government. The Council was constituted to entrench an independent, non-Parliamentary voice on Indian government. Members could only be removed through petition to both Houses of Parliament, the Secretary was obliged to consult the Council before issuing orders, and each member was entitled to register his opinion on any matter put before them. In 1858, Thoby Prinsep was elected to serve on the Council's Political Committee along with a 'formidable array of old Indians' to advise Secretary of State, Sir Charles Wood, who had no background in India. 'Can I, or any other Secretary of State who has not been in India, pretend to set his opinion in detail against such men?', he asked. 'Would it conduce to the transaction of business, if I was overriding them on expressions of opinion on details?'<sup>27</sup> Thus, although the Secretary had the power to overrule the Council, aspects of the principle of 'double government' remained. Since 1784, the Company had exercised administrative powers and the government Parliamentary Board of

24 Ibid., pp.70–2.

25 Ibid., p.69.

26 Moore, Robin J. 1999, 'Imperial India, 1858–1914', in Andrew Porter (ed.), *The Oxford History of the British Empire*, Volume 3: The Nineteenth Century, Oxford University Press, Oxford, p.424.

27 Williams, Donovan 1966, 'The Council of India and the Relationship Between the Home and Supreme Governments, 1858–1870', in *The English Historical Review*, Volume 81, No. 318, p.65.

Control functioned to oversee and monitor their governmental performance, but the new arrangements established the Crown 'as the initiator of policy and the Council now the check on Imperial self-interest'.<sup>28</sup>

Thoby Prinsep does not record his opinion about the transfer of Indian government to Crown rule, but it is likely he shared the views of his fellow Company directors and John Stuart Mill, in 1853 a relatively junior Assistant Examiner in the East India Company, but widely considered to be an authority on Indian government.<sup>29</sup> Like Thoby Prinsep, Mill had opposed the Bentinck/Macaulay education reforms in the 1830s, believing that they would alienate the Indian elites upon whom the government in India depended. In a draft dispatch on the Bentinck proposals, he had warned of the 'sudden change of course' which would 'destroy all confidence on the part of the people in the wisdom of their rulers'.<sup>30</sup> In 1853, he argued against direct Crown rule and for the continuation of the Company government, and asserted that the Company was well on the way to achieving good government in India. Its civil servants provided the 'professional knowledge' and the Company 'had done much to develop the empire ... it had never interfered with Indian religions, and ... as a private enterprise, it cost the British taxpayer nothing'.<sup>31</sup> The 'benevolent despotism' of Company government was the system best suited to India, in Mill's view, 'a legitimate mode of government in dealing with barbarians provided the end is their improvement and the means justified by achieving that end'.<sup>32</sup> This was what differentiated the despotism of the British from the despotism of the previous Mughal rulers: in seeking to implant British ideas of political freedom and self-government, they 'were deliberately creating the conditions for the withering away of their rule'.<sup>33</sup> It was of the utmost importance, according to Mill, 'to make provision ... for compelling those who have a governing power, to listen to and take into consideration the opinions of persons who, from their position and their previous life, have made a study of Indian subjects and acquired experience in them'.<sup>34</sup>

## Family narratives on mid-century India

Thoby's oldest son, Sir Henry Thoby Prinsep, born in Calcutta in 1836 and returning as a magistrate in 1855, later compiled his unpublished 'Three

28 Moore 1999, 'Imperial India, 1858–1914', p.425.

29 Harris, Abram L. 1964, 'John Stuart Mill: Servant of the East India Company', in *The Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science/Revue Canadienne d'Economie et de Science Politique*, Volume 30, No. 2, p.200.

30 Ibid., p.198.

31 Turner, Michael J. 2005, "'Raising up Dark Englishmen": Thomas Perronet Thompson, colonies, race, and the Indian mutiny', in *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History*, Volume 6, No. 1.

32 Mill, quoted by Harris 1964, 'John Stuart Mill', p.191.

33 Harris 1964, 'John Stuart Mill', p.201.

34 Ibid., p.192.

Generations in India' to illustrate how British India had changed over the century since his grandfather John had arrived in Calcutta in 1770.<sup>35</sup> Drawing on the journals of John Prinsep and his father's dictated memoirs of his Indian career, Sir Henry Thoby's account of his own career focussed principally on British social life in Calcutta, and to a lesser extent on some of the highlights of his judicial life, largely ignoring Indian people, indigenous cultural and historical issues. His younger brother, artist Val Prinsep, who had spent two years at Haileybury as a teenager but decided against an Indian career, travelled to India in 1877 to illustrate the Viceroy Lord Lytton's durbar commemorating Queen Victoria's declaration as Empress of India.<sup>36</sup> His observations, combined with the 'vast knowledge of everything connected with the East' imparted to him by his father, gave him the felt ample authority to promote 'kindly feeling between the natives and their rulers'.<sup>37</sup> In his view, the British in India should 'unbend somewhat towards the native ... make more allowance for his prejudices ... not expect a native to be an Englishman'.<sup>38</sup> Acceptance of the 'innate' differences between Indian and British would improve not only the standing of the British amongst Indians, but the quality of government. The British were successful in empire because of the 'contrast we present in our characters': 'Our thoroughness inspires his respect, he believes in our honesty—he has every reason to trust our courage. We give him peace such as he has never enjoyed before, and insure his having justice, even against the great.'<sup>39</sup>

Indian difference and unknowability were also themes for Augusta Becher, whose memoirs of Anglo-Indian life were published posthumously in 1930.<sup>40</sup> Becher went to India in 1849 with her army officer husband, Septimus, and remained until she was repatriated, along with her children, to Britain during the revolt of 1857. Her reminiscences are of a familiar and introspective world of connections and inter-connections, in which Calcutta is a 'second home' for the 'famous stock' of Prinseps and their extensive networks of family and kin. Most of the men and women populating her memoirs consider themselves both British and Indian. Their links to India are expressed through family history and tradition, high levels of mobility between Britain and India, and extensive interconnections through family and social life. Becher's marriage into another 'Indian family' and relocation to India followed a well-trodden path. Even their wedding ceremony incorporated Anglo Indian traditions: 'Uncle William [Prinsep], as usual, the centre of all fun, gave out our health while I was changing dress. "How nice the Missus sounds" was Sep's only comment, after thanks, and the two embraced Hindoo fashion with "Ram Ram" at parting.'<sup>41</sup>

35 Prinsep, 'Three Generations', Part 2, p.45.

36 Prinsep, 1879, *Imperial India*.

37 Ibid., p.4.

38 Ibid., p.347.

39 Ibid., p.342.

40 Becher 1930, *Personal Reminiscences*, p.viii.

41 Ibid., p.55. A footnote explains 'Ram Ram' as 'The usual Hindu salutation – an invocation of the God Rama'.



The social life awaiting Becher in Calcutta featured many of the families she had grown up with in Britain. She lodged initially with Henry's father, Charles Prinsep, at his mansion 'Belvedere', and rapidly made contact with a wide circle of cousins, old family and school friends and connections, and it is with these British men and women that her account of her years in India is principally concerned. By contrast, the Indians that inhabit her world constitute an ever present, usually nameless, and potentially threatening presence. The house servants move 'noiselessly', and try to exploit their British employers. Charles Prinsep, reported Becher, 'spoke hardly any Hindustani, and his head bearer, Hurree, did just what he pleased in and out', but the arrival of a bilingual family member 'hustled all the servants to the right about', and they were soon suitably clothed in 'white and turbans'.<sup>42</sup> Soon after her arrival, she visited the household of an 'old Indian', and was surprised by the informality she found, commenting that, while 'no doubt natives preferred and understood those households better than the more civilised style of ours now coming into vogue', it was important to be 'more careful with the manners both of masters and servants'.<sup>43</sup> Becher's relationships with ayahs constituted her principal contact with Indians, but are tinged with suspicion that the British children will be mistreated or taught undesirable habits: 'my old ayah had washed and dressed him—quite close beside me lest she should pull his ears or nose, as I had heard natives were in the habit of doing'.<sup>44</sup> The period leading up to the 1857 revolt was particularly unnerving for women such as Becher, dependent as they were not only on their husbands, but on their household servants. 'There were many rumours afloat ... before the Mutiny broke out', she wrote, 'it was "in the air" as the natives said, and they all knew it.'<sup>45</sup>

We seemed hemmed in by a wall, without a chance of knowing if help was coming from outside. Cawnpore with its awful story magnified if possible. Shahjihanpore, every soul swept away—at first the one word 'gone!' expressed all from one place to another, Lucknow, Gwalior, Bareilly—all seemed going ... our suspense and anxiety were what none can understand but those who *know*.<sup>46</sup>

The uprisings were suppressed with a brutality that, to Becher, was harsh but justified: 'his was the awful duty', she wrote of a 'distant cousin', 'of carrying out the dreadful sentence of blowing away from guns the mutineers, or those who attempted to break away from the regiments. It was a paramount necessity to prevent them joining the mutineers.'<sup>47</sup> Women and children attached to

42 Ibid., p.62–4.

43 Ibid., p.66.

44 Ibid., p.69.

45 Ibid., p.127.

46 Ibid., pp.138–9.

47 Ibid., pp. 142–3.

the British regiments were ordered to leave India, but their flight to Bombay increased their dependence on people now under suspicion, and brought the risk of ambush on the roads and in the towns. 'When we entered the crowded narrow streets of the city', Becher relates,

we are each alone practically; I have only an attendant, the faithful Ganesh, beside me ... We get by on the greatest difficulty at foot pace, and feeling more than commonly nervous, for every native seemed to look bold and independent that year, and most of them peer curiously into the doolies as they pass.<sup>48</sup>

The Indians encountered by Becher are usually without identity, described as 'faithless', 'vociferating', 'clamouring', unwilling to act without 'buksheesh', and 'the wildest-looking men I have ever seen'. Throughout the dangerous journey to the safety of Bombay, some of Becher's Indian companions remained 'faithful' and provided 'first-rate service'. At other times she outwitted her tormentors through pluck and courage. At one point she was able to recover her supply of stolen 'buksheesh':

I really believe I should not have dared if I had reflected, and only the quickness with which I turned on him surprised the man into showing he had the money. The others laughed all round, and shook their dirty wigs at me. I jumped into my cage and we were off.<sup>49</sup>

## Popular narratives of Indian difference

Becher's story is but one of many contemporary British eyewitness accounts of escape from the traumas of 1857 India. Shortly after her return to Britain, in June 1858, she went to live with Henry Prinsep's family in Walton-on-Thames, and briefly took on the role of the family's governess-housekeeper. Her traumatic experiences in India would have been well known to the family of Henry Prinsep, images of the duplicity of Indians towards British rule providing a counterpoint to the orientalist sentiments of the older Prinseps who had worked in India during the first half of the Nineteenth Century. Middle-class families such as the Prinseps were inevitably subject to popular narratives on imperialism and colonialism as reflected in the literature of the day. Social contact with some of Britain's leading literary figures, novelists and social commentators, such as William Thackeray, Alfred Tennyson, Charles Dickens, John Ruskin, John Stuart Mill and Thomas Carlyle, adds to the image of family members on the periphery of, if not closely involved in changing attitudes to the imperial mission.

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., p 147.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., p.150.

The family of William Thackeray (1811–1863) shared a similar East India Company background with the Prinseps and the families were associated both in Calcutta and after their return to England. The novelist was much older than Henry Prinsep, but both had been born in Calcutta and left as young children, never to return, and India constituted a continuing and important part of their family heritage. As a young man, Prinsep frequently met Thackeray and his two daughters Annie and Harriet, through Thoby and Sara, and became a keen reader of the novelist's popular works. Thackeray's Indian novels, *The Tremendous Adventures of Major Gahagan* (1841), *Vanity Fair* (first serialised between 1847 and 1848), and *The Newcomes* (1853–1855), portrayed a world with which Henry was familiar from his own experience of family and business life in old Calcutta, including the collapse of the Calcutta agency houses in 1830–31, which had brought financial disaster to many British families who were connected to India, including Britons at home.<sup>50</sup> The India of Thackeray's novels occupies a distant, peripheral space in the lives of his British characters and rarely do Indians feature as principal actors.<sup>51</sup> The novels are set at home, with India and other parts of the Empire 'distinctly "away," distant places of exile at the margins of Thackeray's vision of social reality'.<sup>52</sup> The British characters are far removed from the reality of politics, political economy and warfare in India, and instead are 'lovingly if somewhat cynically' constructed as comic parodies, to whom India represents a past, a place they have left but which exercises an abiding influence on their lives. Like the British characters in Augustus Prinsep's *The Baboo*, Thackeray's *Newcomes* fall prey to the duplicity and deceit of a wily Baboo, Rummun Loll, the only Bengali character and the one ultimately responsible for the final ruin of the *Newcomes*.<sup>53</sup> Rummun has succeeded in gaining the trust of British society in India, but reverts to the British stereotype of the Bengali Baboo. As Brantlinger points out, Thackeray's stereotypes of 'white hero' contrasted with 'mahogany-coloured villain' reinforced the image of India as 'a field for potential *British* achievement, conquest, and fortune making and a background of changeless oriental deceit, lasciviousness, and obsequious bowing and scraping to the master race'.<sup>54</sup>

The revolt of 1857 reinforced this image of Bengali deceit, duplicity and mendacity in Britain, and brought a growing conviction that it constituted a violent rejection, as well as demonstrating ingratitude and unwillingness to accept the benefits of British colonialism.<sup>55</sup> Popular literature represented the

50 Thackeray, William Makepeace 1945–46, *The Letters and Private Papers of William Makepeace Thackeray*, 4 Volumes, collected and edited by Gordon N. Ray, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts.

51 Brantlinger 1998, *Rule of Darkness*, p.75.

52 Ibid., pp.93–4.

53 'The Memoirs of William Prinsep', Volume 2, p.249; Prinsep, Augustus 1834, *The Baboo and Other Tales Descriptive of Society in India*, 2 Volumes, Smith, Elder and Co., London, p.312.

54 Brantlinger 1998, *Rule of Darkness*, p. 107.

55 Mackenzie 1999, 'Empire and Metropolitan Cultures', p.281.

India of 1857 to 1859 and its people in terms similar to Becher, using polarised and racially determined depictions of 'good', 'innocent', 'just', 'moral' and 'civilised' British, against 'evil', 'guilty', 'lawless', 'depraved' and 'barbaric' Indians. British literature on India underwent a fundamental change after 1857, assuming the flavour of 'self-conscious, drum-beating jingoism' popularly associated with British militarism and superiority in the Victorian period.<sup>56</sup> No longer was it possible in such accounts for Indians 'to progress in the scale of civilisation' as had been a common liberal view of the British colonial mission in India during the first half of the Nineteenth Century.<sup>57</sup> Popular accounts of the mutiny often depicted it as 'nothing more than an irrational panic on the subject of caste among credulous and superstitious sepoys', which 'evoked a cleansing sense of heroism and self-assertion' in attitudes to empire in the metropole.<sup>58</sup> Such accounts were not uncontested in Britain, Benjamin Disraeli for one arguing that the causes of the revolt lay in 'general discontent', brought about by 'destruction of Native authority', the 'disturbance' of property rights, and the 'tampering with religion' of a government bent on the reform of Indian society'.<sup>59</sup> Yet, the very volume and popular appeal of published eyewitness accounts served to reinforce a discourse of innate difference between Britain and its imperial subject peoples: 'Indians ... were not like Englishmen, and it was fatal to treat them as if they were.'<sup>60</sup>

The controversy over Jamaican Governor Edward Eyre's suppression of the uprising at Morant Bay in 1865 both reinforced and reflected popular views on the innate differences of the British from their colonial subjects, of the rebellious nature of native populations, and the need for strong colonial government. The depth and intensity of support in Britain for the actions of Eyre signalled 'a shift in the conception of what empire meant, and how colonised people were to be governed'.<sup>61</sup> Debate on the morality of Eyre's actions as governor split the British populace. His opponents included John Stuart Mill and 'the doyens of the liberal intelligentsia', while his supporters were led by Thomas Carlyle, 'the prophetic voice of mid-Nineteenth-Century England', who argued that Eyre's 'actions had been heroic, that he had saved the white people from massacre, and that black people were born to be mastered'.<sup>62</sup> As Hall suggests, also at stake were 'questions about Englishness itself', the debate over Eyre marking a moment when 'two different conceptions of 'us', constructed through two different notions of 'them', were publicly contested'.<sup>63</sup>

56 Brantlinger 1998, *Rule of Darkness*, p. 3.

57 Ibid., p.200.

58 Metcalf, Thomas R. 1994, *Ideologies of the Raj*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, pp.44–5.

59 Ibid., p.45.

60 Ibid., p.45.

61 Hall, Catherine 2002, *Civilising Subjects: Metropole and colony in the English imagination, 1830–1867*, Polity, Cambridge, p.52.

62 Ibid., p.25.

63 Ibid.

The perspectives on empire of a family such as the Prinseps suggests an ambiguity about a past in which the older members expressed broad sympathy with principles of English liberalism, that colonial ventures could only be fully justified if British beneficence to its subjects was protected by the rule of law. At the same time, Thoby Prinsep and other members of his generation differed from the liberalism enunciated by James Mill, Jeremy Bentham and Thomas Macaulay and their expectations that colonial policies should aim to 'form a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect'.<sup>64</sup> Thoby Prinsep's understanding of Indian societies, derived from his long residence in India, his support for colonial policies designed to co-opt Indian elites into the British colonial project put him into substantial agreement with those such as Benjamin Disraeli, who believed that the aetiology of Indian opposition to British rule lay in the East India Company's abandonment of the 'grand principles' of religious non-interference, support for Indian language and culture and nurturing of elites.<sup>65</sup>

Yet, even old Anglo-Indians such as Thoby Prinsep were subject to popular accounts and explanations of the 'mutiny', particularly in light of the continuing family presence in India and reports of the brutalities committed by Indians against the British. The social life of the Prinseps in Britain revolved around men such as Alfred Tennyson, whose patriotic statements as Poet Laureate on the obligations of Britain to preserve its empire were well known. Thoby Prinsep was a member of Tennyson's social circle after the Prinseps left Little Holland House and established themselves at Freshwater on the Isle of Wight, near the Tennyson family home, Farringford, in 1874. To Tennyson, Britain was obliged to preserve empire in the face of rebellion and insurgency, and the outbreak of the Indian revolt served 'as a warning to all but madmen against want of vigour and swift decisiveness'.<sup>66</sup> Tennyson strongly supported Edward Eyre's actions at Morant Bay and in 1868 invited the former governor to visit him at Freshwater, where he was photographed by Thoby's sister-in-law, Julia Margaret Cameron, who also lived at Freshwater. Tennyson contributed to the Eyre Defence Fund 'as a tribute to the nobleness of the man, and as a protest against the spirit in which a servant of the State, who has saved to us one of the islands of the Empire and many English lives, seems to be hunted down'.<sup>67</sup> Charles Tennyson recorded a conversation between Tennyson and William Gladstone on Eyre:

Gladstone was strongly against Eyre, and stated his case in an orator's tone, pity mingling with his indignation, and gesture and expression instinct with moral earnestness. Tennyson, who took the view that Eyre

64 Macaulay, 'Minute on Indian Education', p.61.

65 Metcalf 1994, *Ideologies of the Raj*, pp.44–5.

66 Tennyson, Charles 1950, *Alfred Tennyson*, Macmillan & Co., London, p.366.

67 Ibid.

had been justified in the steps he had taken to save European lives did not argue, but kept on asserting prejudices and convictions: 'We are too tender to our savages—we are more tender to blacks than to ourselves ... Niggers are tigers, tigers are niggers [in *obligato*—*sotto voce*].' <sup>68</sup>

## Departure for a colonial outpost

Henry Prinsep's youth and inexperience kept him on the fringes of the debates over empire and colonialism that took place at Little Holland House during the 1860s. Later in life, he recalled a time when, uncertain what he would do with his life, he lived the life of a 'wandering Bohemian sort of wight', training under G.F. Watts to fulfil his aspirations as an artist, working as Thoby's secretary at the India Office, and looking after his younger siblings.<sup>69</sup> While a career in India as an army officer had earlier seemed possible, he instead chose to immerse himself in art and photography. He enjoyed the social life of Little Holland House and Freshwater, and later recalled the people he met during this period of his life, as well as his indebtedness to Thoby and Sara Prinsep for providing him with a home. He was close to the Tennyson family, and established an abiding friendship with the poet's younger son, Hallam, which continued throughout the period in which Hallam Tennyson was Governor of South Australia (1899–1903), Governor-General of Australia (1903–1904), and when youngest sister, May, married Tennyson in 1918. He admired Tennyson deeply, as he recalled in a letter to his brother Jim in 1916:

The old poet, dear old fellow, was particularly kind to me, I thought. He got me to help him plant a small oak tree and then he took me up to the top of his house to a sort of flat and made me admire the beautiful view there from, and then after tea in the fading sunlight, Annie Thackeray, who was seated on the sill of the French windows suddenly turned and said 'Now Alfred, you promised to read to me. Read something now.' He shook his head in a deprecatory manner, apparently rather shy, but no doubt all put on and said 'Well, what shall I read?' Annie said 'I would like to hear Maud.'<sup>70</sup>

It was this charmed and sociable life in England that Prinsep left when he finally bent to the demands of his father's executors to do his colonial service in Western Australia. It was 'much against my will that I left London', he later recalled, 'where I decided to take up the career of an artist, with very good prospects. I was told that I need not be more than a year away, but it was my duty to

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., p.359.

<sup>69</sup> Prinsep, Henry C., 'Diaries 1866–1922', SLWA Acc. 499A, 22 April 1871.

<sup>70</sup> H.C. Prinsep to Jim Prinsep, 2 April 2nd, 1916 (Private collection).



come and view the land which I might probably inherit, so I consented.<sup>71</sup> He knew little about the place, indeed he knew no-one who had been to Western Australia and could offer contemporary advice on the state of the young colony, the potential of the family estates and the indigenous people. The executors were instead dependent on the brief and business-like letters of the estate managers in Western Australia, such as W.B. Mitchell, who they had never met, but whose reports on the affairs of the estate were consistently gloomy.<sup>72</sup>

It had been nearly 40 years since Henry Prinsep's uncle, Augustus, had visited Van Diemen's Land in 1829–30 and recorded his vivid account in a posthumously published book, *The Journal of a Voyage from Calcutta to Van Diemen's Land*. Ailing from the effects of tuberculosis, Augustus was in search of a change and liked what he saw of Tasmania, which appealed to him as a place for his family to settle away from the rigours of India, to own land and participate in the development of the colony. 'The power of again ranging about the fields', he wrote, 'and conversing with nature thus easily ... without fear of a burning tropical sun and the lassitude its presence produces, is to me a never-failing source of delight.'<sup>73</sup> He saw little to excite him in the Aboriginal people of the island colony, although he rarely encountered them during his travels around the island. They were 'luckless mortals', 'dark, short in stature, with disproportionately thin limbs and shapeless bodies, entirely naked ... and a most hideous expression of countenance'. He describes their colonisation as initially harmonious, until Aboriginal people 'ran back into the woods', where they lay in wait for the white man, eager to attack with their 'formidable spears'. Because they were 'undoubtedly in the lowest possible scale of human nature, both in form and in intellect', there was no hope of reconciliation. To Augustus, it was either destroy or be destroyed.<sup>74</sup> There was no prospect of Tasmanians adapting to work for the Europeans, and settlers were obliged to depend for their servants either on their own 'darkies' (as he called the three Indian servants who travelled with him), or locally recruited people, which brought its own problems: 'Even in our own small ménage, our cook has committed murder, our footman burglary, and the housemaid bigamy!'<sup>75</sup>

In his quest to find out about Western Australia, Prinsep could also turn to the pages of Nathaniel Ogle's 1838 manual for emigrants to Western Australia. Uncle Thoby gave him the copy he had acquired when he visited Tasmania in 1832, and the well-worn book accompanied him as he set off on his travels in

71 Prinsep, H.C. 1918m 'Memoirs of an old settler', in *The Magistrate*, 27 June 27 1918, p.86.

72 W.B. Mitchell to Thoby Prinsep, 22 June 1863, 'Letterbooks on Prinsep Estate', SLWA MN 773 Acc. 3304A/1.

73 Prinsep, Augustus 1833, *The Journal of a Voyage from Calcutta to Van Diemen's Land*, Smith, Elder and Co., London, p.64–5

74 Ibid., pp.78–80.

75 Ibid., p.52.

1866.<sup>76</sup> Ogle had never visited Western Australia, but gave practical advice to prospective colonists, including information on the Aboriginal people of the colony. He was optimistic that, with the right treatment, they could become useful members of the new community on the Swan River, but emphasised that colonists had an obligation to ensure that they benefitted from British occupation. 'The aborigines of Australia', he wrote, 'have been represented so degraded as to scarce deserve to be classed among the human species; and that has been given as a reason for their indiscriminate extermination.'

The charge is false: they are not known to be cannibals; they neither scalp, nor roast or torture their captives ... Many among them are highly intelligent, and with very acute perceptions ... [and] will soon become useful allies to the settlement ... as labourers, herdsman and messengers, every month diminishes the lingering apprehension of their becoming troublesome. As we take from them their hunting grounds and means of subsistence, it is our duty to supply them in return with sustenance; always indicating the propriety of some return in labour; thus gradually accustoming them to the exchange of food for work performed.<sup>77</sup>

Another text available to Prinsep was his father's copy of George Grey's 1841 account of two expeditions in northern Western Australia, in which he extensively described his observations of Aboriginal people.<sup>78</sup> Although Grey's assumption of British superiority dominated his account, he recorded his relationships and attitudes to the Aboriginal people he encountered with authority and in unusual detail, which ensured that his observations on government and indigenous people were taken seriously both in the metropole and in colonial Australia. On his arrival at the mouth of the Prince Regent River in the Kimberley, he wondered at the responses of the Aboriginal people to his landfall, as they 'sat spectators and overlookers of every action of such incomprehensible beings as we must have appeared'.<sup>79</sup> Their language he found 'clear, distinct and agreeable to the ear', and the men 'a fine race, tall and athletic'.<sup>80</sup> When Grey later shot and killed a man in self-defence, he found it a 'horrible dream'. The wounded Australian tried to move and lift himself up and others came from the rocks 'crowding round him with the greatest tenderness and solicitude; two passed their arms round him ... and the whole party wound their way through the forest'.<sup>81</sup> Though he was 'never fortunate to obtain a friendly interview with the natives of these parts', he did observe people at close quarters, was drawn

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76 Ogle, Nathaniel 1839, *The Colony of Western Australia: A manual for emigrants to that settlement or its dependencies*, James Fraser, London. Henry Prinsep's copy is now in a private collection in Perth.

77 Ibid., pp.49–53.

78 Grey, George 1841, *Journal of Two Expeditions of Discovery in North-West and Western Australia, During the Years 1837, '38, and '39, Under the Authority of Her Majesty's Government*, T. and W. Boone, London.

79 Ibid., Volume 1, pp.93–104.

80 Ibid., pp.143–4.

81 Ibid., pp.151–2.

into deadly combat, and twice forced into dispute.<sup>82</sup> But although he was able to report their 'haunts', weapons and implements, paintings and drawing, the people had no names, nor was there any exchange of words, language or song. Nevertheless, he expressed his optimism that 'under proper treatment they might easily be raised very considerably in the scale of civilization'.<sup>83</sup>

Such was the imperfect and contradictory knowledge about Australian Aboriginal peoples available to a young coloniser such as Prinsep. Observers like Augustus Prinsep held out no hope that Tasmanian Aboriginal populations had the capacity to benefit from colonial benevolence. Indeed, he appears disdainful of liberal and evangelical aspirations to uplift and convert. His is an account of Caliban-like dimensions, in which Aboriginal people appear on first contact to be welcoming and willing to share their lands and resources, but as coloniser and colonised become more familiar, so does their hatred of each other grow, until it becomes a battle of survival. By contrast, Ogle and Grey acknowledge the deficiencies of Aboriginal peoples in the scale of civilisation but argue that they have the potential to benefit from British benevolence, implying that they are fitting subjects for colonial beneficence and evangelical endeavour.

## Encounters with the others: 'Sights most curious'

Henry Prinsep left Britain with little direct experience of colonising, but confident that the imperial networks garnered through his family's lengthy involvement in India would serve him well. He was armed with written introductions from his well-connected uncles, and the advice of a circle that included people with past and present interests in Western Australia, men such as Thoby Prinsep's long-time colleague in the East India Company and Council of India, Ross Donnelly Mangles, an early investor in the colony and brother-in-law of its first governor, James Stirling. Prinsep assumed that such contacts would smooth his way into colonial life, and that his venture would be successful. He was nonetheless nervous about his ability to do what was necessary, as his upbringing barely equipped him for the tasks he was undertaking. His first stop was to be Singapore, to assess the financial status of his father's nutmeg plantation and make decisions on its viability on behalf of the family estate. Then he was to go to Western Australia, where the family properties were close to insolvency. His task was to either turn these enterprises around and fulfil his father's dreams of Indian Ocean trade, or dispose of them for a price that would help secure the economic future of himself and his siblings.

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid., p.251.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., p.252.

Prinsep had no notion that it would be 40 years before he returned to Britain, or that Western Australia, a peripheral and isolated Indian Ocean colony that none of his family had ever visited, would become his permanent home. The long days at sea gave him a chance to reflect on the marvels of British colonisation and his own colonial ambitions. 'How safe we feel', he marvelled from his 'perfect bit of civilised England, floating on a sea, within three miles of the pathless jungle, filled with tigers and every variety of savage beast, and men more savage still. What will civilisation not do? Aided of course by science.'<sup>84</sup> 'The sights that met our eyes', he wrote on arriving at Gibraltar, 'were most curious'.

Thorough sunburnt Spaniards, with guitar and matador hats, Moorish and Barbary Jews, Mohemmedans with grave countenances and large red and white turbans according as they had seen Mecca or not—all mixed with our own neat English soldiers, in red coats or white smocks.<sup>85</sup>

In Alexandria, the ship was surrounded by 'crowds of Arabs from light brown to dense black, [who] swarmed to the ship and began howling and gesticulating during the unloading of the mail boxes'.<sup>86</sup> Arriving in Singapore, he met and socialised with Chinese merchants, 'Wat Seng the Chinaman' and 'Seng Po, the rich opium farmer', enjoying a raucous evening of exotic entertainment and cuisine, a novel experience for a young man brought up in polite London society:

We began with the famous birds nest soup, and this was followed by stewed sea slugs, and all sorts of abominations embracing dogs, various parts of ... chickens and I fancy worms of some sort, crabs and tea, all pleasantly stirred up with a tumbler of champagne or more between each, so that by the time we were at the 14<sup>th</sup> dish of nastiness we were in 7<sup>th</sup> heaven of delight. After many dishes we arrived at sweetmeats of a curious and gummy nature, still drinking, toasts & songs, the hosts making very eloquent Malay orations and among others we had a Hindu song from Alagapa Chitty, a handsome young naked gentleman who came in to look on ... Wildness came on then and we even galloped about the road in the moonlight and I rode on Seng Poo after Baker.<sup>87</sup>

There was no doubt in Prinsep's mind that Britishness equated with superiority, civilisation and science, and that this was what set his people apart from the others of empire, qualified by right of their place at the pinnacle of civilisation to rule over them. He viewed the Empire and colonisation through the prism of an Anglo-Indian identity that had dominated his upbringing, family and social

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<sup>84</sup> Prinsep, 'Diaries', 12 February 1866.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 10 January 1866.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 19 January 1866.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 27 February, 1866.

life. This was a heritage that carried its own long history, stretching back to an earlier, apparently less complex period of empire, one in which his family had played a significant role that was kept alive by his old and revered surviving uncles. But it also meant a complex, sometimes conflicting and steadily evolving intellectual and ideological legacy for a young colonialist in the 1860s.





**16-year-old Henry Charles Prinsep, known to his family as 'Harry'. This image is from a photograph album held by the State Library of Western Australia and shows the young Prinsep during his final years at Cheltenham College.**

Source: Prinsep Papers, SLWA MN 773 BA 1423/734.





Watercolour painting by Emily Prinsep, 1814, which may represent her mother Sophia and an aunt. Augusta Becher recalls her grandmother Sophia as always indoors, guarding against the sun with a white bonnet and curtains drawn, a legacy of her time in India.

Source: Courtesy of anonymously held private collection.



**The oldest of Henry Prinsep's three sisters, Annie, as a young person, probably at home in Cheltenham or at Thoby and Sara Prinsep's Little Holland House in then semi-rural Kensington.**

Source: Prinsep Papers, SLWA MN 773 BA 1423/429.





**Prinsep, right, with his sister Louisa in a performance of 'Cox and Box' at the home of Charles Prinsep in Cheltenham, about 1862, when Henry was 18. The other character is E.T. Candy, 'afterwards a judge in Bombay'. Henry and his siblings were enthusiastic amateur actors, an interest he continued in Perth.**

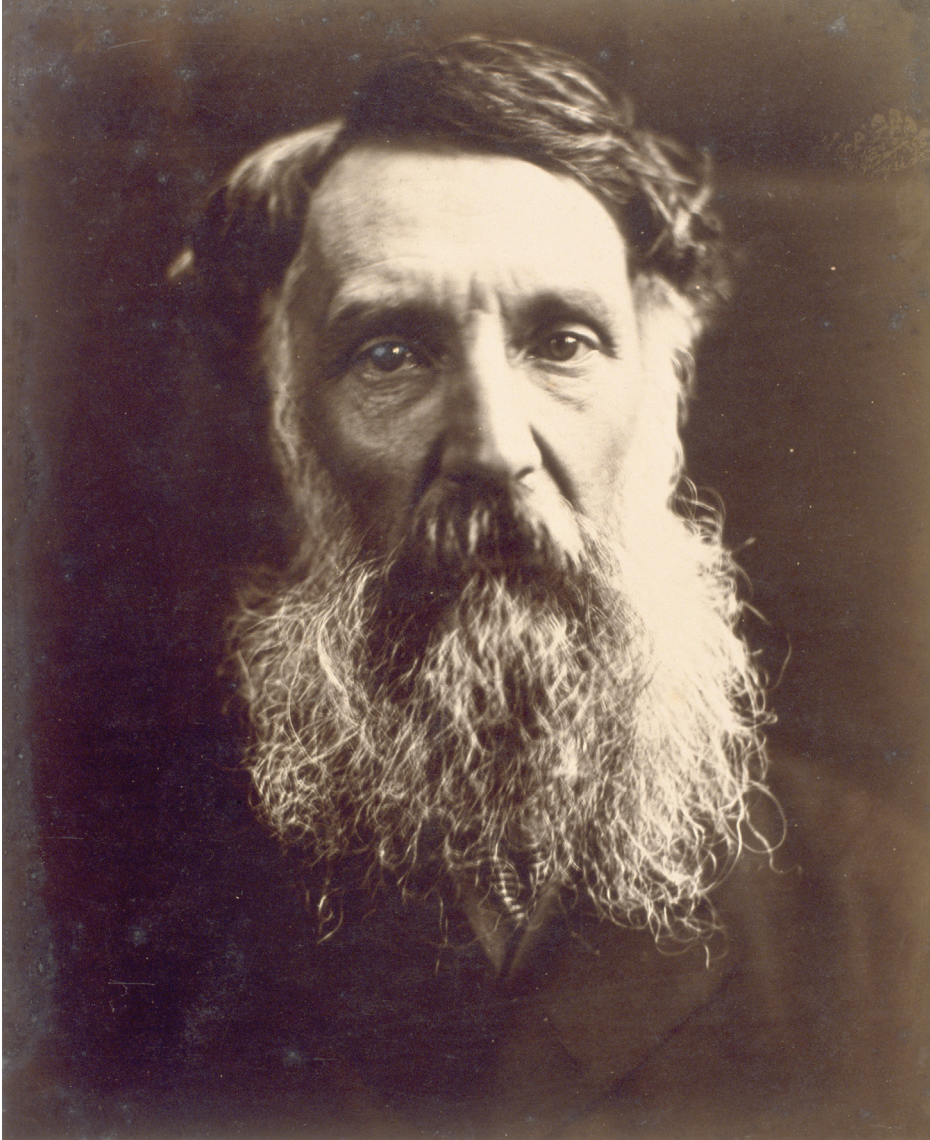
Source: Prinsep Papers, SLWA MN 773 BA 1423/464.



**'Aunt Jules', Julia Margaret Cameron, Sara Prinsep's older sister, photographed by Herschel Hay Cameron. Prinsep shared Cameron's love of photography and spent much time with her family after she moved to Freshwater on the Isle of Wight in 1863.**

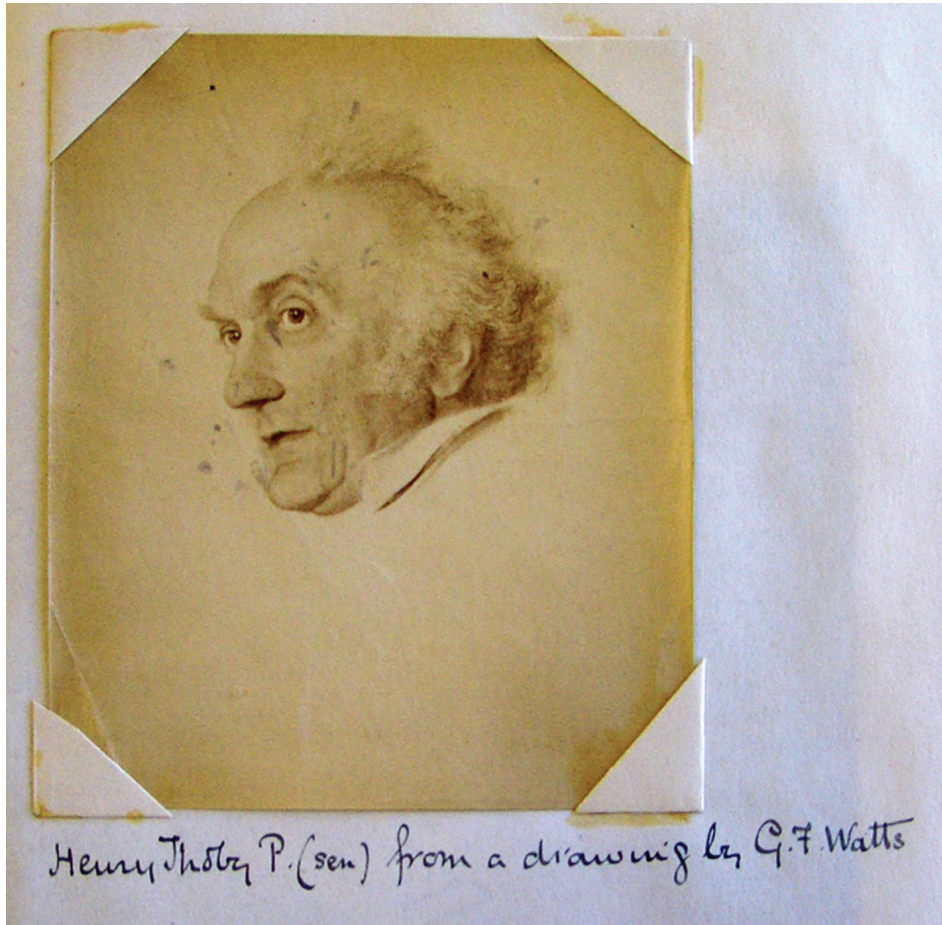
Source: [http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Julia\\_Margaret\\_Cameron#mediaviewer/File:Julia\\_Margaret\\_Cameron,\\_by\\_Henry\\_Herschel\\_Hay\\_Cameron.jpg](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Julia_Margaret_Cameron#mediaviewer/File:Julia_Margaret_Cameron,_by_Henry_Herschel_Hay_Cameron.jpg).





**Edward Eyre (1815–1901), photographed by Julia Margaret Cameron in 1868. The controversy over Eyre’s actions as Governor of Jamaica in suppressing the Morant Bay uprising in 1865 split Britain’s intellectual community. It is not known whether the Prinseps shared their friend Alfred Tennyson’s support for Eyre’s actions or sympathised with John Stuart Mill’s attempts to have him prosecuted.**

Source: National Portrait Gallery, Canberra Access No. 2006.16.



Thoby Prinsep remained influential in Indian government after his return to England, first as a Director of the East India Company and later as a member of the Secretary of State's Council of India. This portrait is by G.F. Watts (1817–1904), the Prinseps' long-term house guest at Little Holland House, and is reproduced in the family scrap book/family bible, 'De Principe 1574–1930', compiled principally by Henry Prinsep's younger brother, Jim, in England.

Source: Prinsep Papers, SLWA MN 773 Acc. 3150A.





**Henry Prinsep's younger sister May (1853–1936), portrait by her cousin, Val Prinsep. May was frequently photographed by Julia Margaret Cameron and painted by Watts and Fredrick Leighton. She married London stockbroker Andrew Hichens and, after his death, Hallam Tennyson.**

Source: Courtesy of anonymously held private collection.



**Another 'aunt' of the Prinsep children and one of the much admired Pattle sisters, Sophia Dalrymple (1829–1911), was sister of Sara Prinsep and Julia Margaret Cameron.**

Source: Prinsep Papers, SLWA MN 773 BA 1423/704.





**May Prinsep often sat for aunt Julia Margaret Cameron, including her Study of Beatrice Cenci in 1866, the same year older brother Harry left for Western Australia.**

Source: [http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Study\\_of\\_Beatrice\\_Cenci,\\_by\\_Julia\\_Margaret\\_Cameron.jpg](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Study_of_Beatrice_Cenci,_by_Julia_Margaret_Cameron.jpg).



**The chapel at Freshwater on the Isle of Wight, where the Prinseps, Camerons and Tennysons regularly attended service and where many are buried, including Thoby, Sara and Annie Prinsep.**

Source: Author's private collection.



**Henry Prinsep's cousin Val Prinsep (1838–1904), son of Thoby and Sara Prinsep. While Henry left for Western Australia, Val stayed in London, married into the powerful Leyland family, and became a prominent member of the Pre-Raphaelite circle of painters, a productive artist and member of the Royal Society.**

Source: Courtesy of anonymously held private collection.





**One of Henry's early photographic efforts from a microfilm reel of his photographic notebooks from 1862–1864, the original of which is missing. The photo shows Henry's cousin, Monty White, with false nose, waking up a sleeping Prinsep.**

Source: Prinsep Papers, SLWA 'Phots', microfilm.





**'The power of again ranging about the fields'. Henry's uncle, Augustus Prinsep, visited Van Diemen's Land in 1829 in an ultimately vain attempt to recover from the tuberculosis he had contracted while on service in India. Augustus found that Tasmania could indeed offer an alternative from the climatic rigours of India, which had ruined his health. He left Tasmania in 1830, perhaps intending to return, but died before the end of the year at sea, en route from Calcutta to England.**

Source: Copy of a lithograph by E.A. Ommaney in Augustus Prinsep's *Journal of a voyage from Calcutta to Van Diemen's Land*, Smith, Elder and Co., London.



**Prinsep (seated at table) at his father's nutmeg estate in Singapore in April 1866. The other British men are not identified, nor is the Malay or Chinese servant in the background.**

Source: Prinsep Papers, SLWA MN 773 BA 1423/744.

This text taken from *Henry Prinsep's Empire: Framing a distant colony*, by  
Malcolm Allbrook, published 2014 by ANU Press,  
The Australian National University, Canberra, Australia.