

4. Indian Ocean Connections

The last part of Henry Prinsep's voyage to Fremantle, Western Australia, which was devoid of port facilities to cope with modern steamships, was bound to be dull and possibly dangerous. 'I had the spirit of adventure upon me', he recalled, so rather than take a more comfortable voyage via Mauritius to the deep-water harbor at King George's Sound, he embarked on the 141 ton sailing ship, 'David & Jessie', with 'an immense box of tasty food, and much wine to comfort me on this hazardous trip'.¹ The next month was a time of almost exquisite boredom, 'an idle, slow and uncomfortable life', as the little ship rolled its way south from Singapore, encountering endlessly rough seas as it skirted the coast of Western Australia. On his first night out, Henry moved his swag from an airless cabin onto deck, and there he 'slept rolled up in my rug, on the seat over the hencoop—the captain on the same seat with his feet just beyond my pillow and during the night I got a reminder of this as my pillow was nearly kicked from under my head. Odd dreams I had of England and the people there, with most improbable renderings of the facts which happened before I left, jumbled up in a wild manner with the customs of these countries.'²

On the morning of 22 May, he awoke to find himself off Fremantle. As the 'David & Jessie' sailed slowly between the island of Rottnest and the mainland, he gazed at the flat, almost featureless and colourless coast of the place that was to be his new home. In this place, so different from the lustrous green of his native England and the colour and vitality of his uncles' India, he wondered whether the best thing to do would be to sell up immediately and return to England, to build a career as an artist, or make a belated attempt to enter the India Office.³ Like many immigrants before and since, he wondered at the sun-bleached drabness of the port town of Fremantle, a place where roads and buildings alike were constructed of limestone and sand, a blinding vista after long weeks at sea. 'The only noticeable building to be seen', he recalled many years later, was Fremantle Prison, 'and from that distance I had imagined that it was a nice terrace where one could get good lodgings; no doubt if one had tried to do so it would have been possible, but it would not have been so easy to leave.'⁴ He had arrived, but did not know then that it would be over 40 years before he would once again set foot in England, to be reunited with his sisters and brothers. Western Australia was to become his permanent home, the place

1 Henry Prinsep in *The Magistrate*, 27 June 1918.

2 Prinsep, Henry C., 'Diaries 1866–1922', SLWA Acc. 499A, 21 April 1866.

3 Ibid., 16 May 1866.

4 Henry Prinsep in *The Magistrate*, 27 June 1918.

where he would try and follow family tradition and create his own colonial dream; the little port on the edge of the Indian Ocean was where he would work to secure an elusive and ultimately unattainable fortune.

Henry Prinsep may have been excited about his voyage to Western Australia and intrigued at exotic sights in the ports along the way, but the principle purpose of his adventure was inescapable. To him had fallen the forbidding task of rescuing his father's Indian Ocean commercial vision, a venture that he hoped would be accomplished quickly, leaving him free to return to his family environment in London and resume his interrupted career as an artist. Soon after his arrival, it became obvious that the farms were close to bankruptcy and that his presence would be required for some years. Furthermore, he met and fell in love with the youngest daughter of a scion of Western Australian landowning families, John Garrett Bussell. Marrying 19-year-old Josephine in 1868, he became closely involved in the affairs of the colony and, after some hesitation, decided to stay. In Western Australia he found a network which included 'old Indians', some of whom had known and worked with his father and uncles, and others born and brought up in other colonial spheres, including the West Indies and Africa. He understood and anticipated that his colonial associations would open doors in the new colony and provide him with opportunities not available to others. He had no need to prove his abilities or *bona fides*. The letters of introduction and the fact that his family name was known and respected guaranteed him a place in the colony's elite society, an audience with the governor or senior colonial officials any time he desired it, and appointment to prestigious posts and the prospect of a civil service post if his entrepreneurial endeavours failed.

His immediate task was the pursuit of his father's ideas of an interconnected Indian Ocean world, one in which trade, goods and labour might flow freely around a series of ports radiating from India. Charles Prinsep had conceived of this web of Indian Ocean commerce as an Indian 'triple empire' with 'such a combination of means upon an extended surface as the world has not yet beheld united under one dominion'.⁵ Henry Prinsep's efforts to fulfil his father's vision of developing the Western Australian colony as part of an Indian Ocean profit region, by supplying Indian markets in horses and timber using Indian money, labour and shipping, preoccupied him during his first eight years in the colony. He anticipated that his colonial networks would bring his aspirations to fruition and, although he was bereft of the commercial and managerial experience that may have given him a chance of succeeding, worked tirelessly to fulfill his father's vision, albeit with an increasing sense of exasperation. His reserves of youthful energy and enthusiasm were no antidote for the problems confronting him.

5 India Office Records, 'East India Company Board's Collections, Proposal by C.R. Prinsep for Transferring Children from India to New South Wales and Van Dieman's Land', 1830–1831, Volume 1240, 40599–40767, British Library, 11 October 1828.

There was little money in the colony and low domestic demand for the goods he was able to produce, while the dream of an Indian Ocean trading venture was destroyed by his inability to respond to demand from Indian markets. After eight years, Prinsep was forced to dispose of the properties to meet the substantial debts accumulated by the venture. Despite his commercial failure, he decided to stay in Western Australian, a place where he could own land and utilise his colonial connections and status as a member of the colonial elite.

Outposts of a subimperial empire

Charles Prinsep's land and business interests in Singapore, Western Australia and Tasmania were formed from a perspective of Calcutta as an imperial hub, a source of administrative and military expertise, Indian labour and goods, and a destination for the produce of these nascent colonies. As historian Thomas Metcalf shows in his 2007 book, *Imperial Connections*, there were many in India who advocated the idea of an Indian 'subimperial center', 'a nodal point from which peoples, ideas, good and institutions ... radiated outwards' to other British colonies in the Indian Ocean region.⁶ Both Indians and Britons 'hastened to take advantage of the opportunities provided by the growth of the colonial empire' through investment of capital, particularly those 'technically trained personnel and military officers', who 'saw in colonial service a way to carve out for themselves positions of greater responsibility' than were available in India.⁷ To Charles Prinsep, Singapore offered considerable potential for the investment of Indian expertise, money and labour in agriculture and transport infrastructure. It was an administrative outpost of the Bengal Presidency and a strategically located depot close to Chinese ports. As Augustus Prinsep wrote in 1829, it was an 'infant Hercules of commerce, which has already strangled the two snakes, Penang and Malacca, that thought to eat him up in his cradle'.⁸ It was also a place where former British Indians might settle, its climate 'more salubrious' than that of Calcutta and 'not so thickly crowded'. 'People of all nations, Oriental, European' and 'grotesque though scanty groups of Chinese, Malays, and demi-English', wrote Augustus, 'submit themselves to the smiling or astonished face of the visitor'.⁹ For one accustomed to the rigours of life as a civil servant in the Mofussil, Singapore offered a much better social life, boasting 'an amazing number of merchants, and no less than nine lady-families'.¹⁰ Charles

6 Metcalf, Thomas R. 2007, *Imperial Connections: India in the Indian Ocean arena, 1860–1920*, University of California Press, Berkeley, pp.1, 7.

7 Ibid., pp.4–5.

8 Prinsep, Augustus 1833, *The Journal of a Voyage from Calcutta to Van Diemen's Land*, Smith, Elder and Co., London, p.17.

9 Ibid., p. 5–6.

10 Ibid., p.27.

Prinsep invested heavily in land, the development of a nutmeg plantation and in a joint stock company to develop harbour facilities, 'an enterprise ... much wanted for the trade of this important entrepot', according to William Prinsep.¹¹ Charles was also enthusiastic about the potential of Australia as a place to invest in land and enterprises, and as a possible destination for his extended family after their Indian service. In 1829, Augustus Prinsep reported favorably on the prospects of Tasmania as a place to live. On arrival in Hobart, he was delighted to find 'a thousand English associations ... carts and cottages, ships and shops, girls in their pattens, boys playing at marbles; above all the rosy countenances, and chubby cheeks, and English voices'.¹² Here he believed members of our 'hitherto lucky family ... might have a chance of happiness, and plenty'.¹³

Charles Prinsep's interest in Western Australia arose nearly a decade after he had bought land in Van Diemen's Land and was, according to Henry Prinsep's memoirs, almost accidental. His father, he wrote, was 'fond of investing his money in newly discovered lands, he was also fond of horses, and his idea ... was to establish horse breeding stations from which could be drawn first-class animals for the Indian turf or the Army'.¹⁴ Intent on purchasing land at Port Phillip, he changed his mind after meeting Swan River Colony Governor, Sir James Stirling, who 'happened to arrive in Calcutta, and my father, hearing of it, invited him to his house': 'Of course there was much talk of Australia, and Admiral Stirling by the end of the evening had persuaded my father that Swan River was far more advantageous as a theatre of operations than Port Phillip'.¹⁵ This whimsical account of Stirling's intervention in Charles Prinsep's plans hints at the growing interest in India in the potential of Australia as a place to invest, particularly after the dilution of the East India Company's trading monopolies in the charter renewals of 1813 and 1833.

Established in 1829 and much closer to Calcutta than the eastern seaboard colonies of Sydney and Hobart, the conveniently-located new colony on the Swan River offered distinct advantages for Indian investment. Chief proponent and foundation Governor, James Stirling, marshalled his Indian connections, including Calcutta-based brother, Edward, and Ross Donnelly Mangles (Chairman of the East India Company in 1857 and a member of the Council of India after 1858), to pressure Imperial authorities to support his proposals. He based much of his argument on the strategic importance of the Swan River, which would serve to augment British trading networks in the Indian Ocean. Initial responses from the Colonial Office, however, were lukewarm. While it could

11 Prinsep, William, 'The Memoirs of William Prinsep', 3 Volumes, British Library, OIOC MSS Eur. D. 1160/1, Volume 2, p.46.

12 Prinsep 1833, *The Journal of Voyage from Calcutta to Van Diemen's Land*, p.51.

13 Ibid., p.107.

14 Henry Prinsep in *The Magistrate*, 27 June 1918.

15 Ibid.

appreciate the value of forestalling French claims to the west coast of Australia, it doubted that a colony would do much to expand 'commercial intercourse with India, the Malays'. Furthermore, the well-known hazards and lack of safe ports on the Western Australian coastline meant that the captains of Indiamen would continue to avoid the area.¹⁶ The Colonial Office had 'no objection' if the East India Company wanted to establish a settlement 'for any purpose at Swan River ... and would afford them every proper facility, but I am not aware of any sufficient motive to induce them to embark on such a project'.¹⁷

The colony eventually got underway after support from Colonial Office Under-Secretary, R.W. Hay, and New South Wales Governor, Sir Ralph Darling, and with assurances by Stirling and Thomas Peel that it would entail minimal cost to the British government, being largely based on a land grant system aimed at attracting 10,000 investors: 'All that would be required would be for the Government to annex the land, send a minimal civil establishment to administer its distribution and uphold the legal system, and a small military detachment for its protection.'¹⁸ Large grants of land were allocated to Stirling and Peel, and other lands in Western Australia were thrown open for selection on similar terms. Potential colonists would be granted lands proportionate to their investments, including the cost of passage for immigrants, transport of stock and farm infrastructure, building materials and other materials needed to establish a house and farm.¹⁹ Investors were initially eager to take advantage of the opportunity to join the venture and embark with James Stirling as he left Portsmouth for the Swan River in February 1829. Two more fleets arrived in August and October, and, by December, Thomas Peel's establishment of 182 men, women and children arrived in 'The Gilmour'.²⁰ Land selections soon covered the river frontage of the Swan River and extended along the coast and inland. In the words of colonial historian Warren Bert Kimberly, it became evident that 'numbers of the settlers were very ill suited to pioneering'. 'They huddled together on the beach', pestered Stirling with 'ignorant questions', blamed him for attracting them to the colony, and made plans to leave. Their 'doleful and exaggerated' reports helped fuel an image of a colony in trouble, where settlers were forced to contend with a hostile and inhospitable terrain, and chronic shortages of food and supplies. On his recuperative visit to Van Diemen's Land in 1829, Augustus Prinsep imagined the Swan River settlers 'floundering in the mud and sand', their expectations of

16 Eddy, J.J. 1969, *Britain and the Australian Colonies 1818–1831: The technique of government*, Clarendon, Oxford, p.242.

17 Statham-Drew, Pamela 2003, *James Stirling: Admiral and founding Governor of Western Australia*, University of Western Australia Press, Nedlands, p.100.

18 Ibid., p.109.

19 Kimberly, W.B. 1897, *History of Western Australia: A narrative of her past, together with biographies of her leading men*, F.W. Niven and Co., Melbourne, p.37.

20 Ibid., p.49.

a bountiful land dashed by a land 'that had no trees'.²¹ Yet, by the time Stirling finished his term as governor, in December 1838, the colony had established a firm foothold on the west coast of Australia. The new governor, John Hutt, set about implementing changes to Stirling's policies on land ownership and, during nearly eight years in the colony, encouraged new settlement schemes in Britain and India. In May 1840, Governor Hutt's brother, William Hurt MP, was instrumental in establishing the Western Australia Company, along with E.G. Wakefield, Charles Mangles and a number of Western Australian businessmen, with the intention of purchasing land in the colony and establishing a settlement to be named Australind, so as to appeal to Calcutta investors.²²

There was also substantial interest in Western Australia from British interests in India, particularly from Charles Prinsep's group of associates in Calcutta, who were looking for new Indian Ocean commercial ventures in the wake of the 1833 dilution of the East India Company monopolies. In 1837, Prinsep formed the Australian Association of Bengal, 'for the purpose of transferring investments from Calcutta to Australia', along with a number of Calcutta business associates, including his brother, William Prinsep; his business partners, Dwarkanath and Prosonacoomar Tagore; East India Company Director, Ross Donnelly Mangles; and James Stirling's brother, Edward.²³ As one of its first acts, the Association chartered the 391-ton barque, *Gaillardon*, to transport Prinsep's establishment to Fremantle, under the management of an Irishman, Thomas Little, a former East India Company soldier and an experienced manager of Indian labour, with the aim of establishing a stud to supply cavalry mounts to the Indian army and beef for domestic markets. Arriving in February 1838, the ship disembarked 13 British men, one 'Chinaman and 37 Lascars', along with building supplies, a herd of Indian buffalo, 20 bags of rice (two for Sir James Stirling), and barrels of ghee.²⁴ On Prinsep's behalf, Little purchased 1,000 acres on a narrow strip of land between the sea and the western bank of the Leschenault Estuary, 140 kilometres south of Perth, which he named Belvidere, after Prinsep's home in Calcutta. Further purchases at Dardanup, near Bunbury, meant that, by 1850, Charles Prinsep held 23,277 acres of 'ideally situated land ... on the fertile foothills and alluvial flat country; ideal for running horses and cattle'.²⁵

21 Prinsep 1833, *The Journal of Voyage from Calcutta to Van Diemen's Land*, p.115.

22 Kimberly 1897, *History of Western Australia*, p.113; Staples, A.C. 1979, *They Made Their Destiny: History of settlement of the Shire of Harvey, 1829-1929*, Shire of Harvey, Bunbury, p.68.

23 Staples 1979, *They Made Their Destiny*, p.67.

24 Government of Western Australia, State Records Office, Colonial Secretary's Office Files Acc 36, 38/158, 60/137. The term 'Lascar' was commonly used in early colonial Western Australia and seems to have been applied loosely to any arrival from India. Webster's Dictionary, however, defines the term as, 'In the East Indies, a native seaman or a gunner'.

25 Staples, A.C. 1955, 'The Prinsep Estate in Western Australia', in *Early Days*, Volume 5, Part 1, p.20. Note the difference in spelling from the name of Charles's Calcutta property, Belvedere.

The properties, stocked with Indian buffaloes and horses from Prinsep's Adelphi estate in Tasmania, initially did well. By 1854 they carried a herd of 162 buffaloes and 259 English cattle, which attracted good prices on the local market.²⁶ The Indian workers, employed under contracts of indenture, were a relatively cheap labour force. To this was added Aboriginal and European labour to muster an expanding herd of cattle and horses. According to Western Australian historian, Charles Staples, Prinsep 'favoured his Indians as domestic and agricultural labourers' because they were so 'docile', and provided a cheap and flexible labour force to grow crops of vegetables and fruit to supply the estate's needs and sell at local markets.²⁷ After a promising start, however, the development of the properties faltered as domestic markets declined, and there were continual problems in exporting Australian-bred horses to India. The overall value of exports from the colony to India, Singapore and the Dutch East Indies steadily declined, after a peak of 14,035 pounds in 1858, and, after 1872, was crippled by a period of low prices for both horses and cattle.²⁸ Letters from W.B. Mitchell, a Yorkshireman who took over management of the estates in 1860, warned Charles Prinsep about the growing difficulties facing the properties.²⁹ 'It is difficult to dispose of produce for money here', he wrote in 1862, 'as a good deal of the trade is done by barter. It is quite impossible to make the concern pay without reckoning on the horse produce.'³⁰ Transport was a further problem. Charter arrangements were unreliable and expensive, while underdeveloped port facilities in Fremantle and Bunbury discouraged captains from seeking Western Australian cargoes and made the safe loading and care of horses risky. By 1863, domestic and Indian prices were falling, and Mitchell predicted that the properties faced inevitable losses: 'Anyone compelled to sell horses to shippers here in the present state of things must make up his mind to accept prices not at all commensurate with the expenses of breeding', he reported in 1862.³¹ He nonetheless accepted that exports to India were a promising commercial option and that, despite high transport costs, profits were still to be made on good quality stock. The colonial government and media supported the potential of an Indian horse trade, and the *Perth Gazette* and *The West Australian Times* regularly reported successful sales of 'strong, weight-bearing animals ... [which] will always command remunerative prices in

26 Staples 1979, *They Made Their Destiny*, p.67.

27 Ibid., p.24. By the time of Prinsep's arrival, most of the original workforce had left Western Australia, probably to return to India. A man named Luttah remained working on the Prinsep estates, but returned to India with Prinsep in 1870. Another man, Naseeb, came to Western Australia with Charles Prinsep's original establishment and remained. He is referred to in CSO file Acc 36, 366/171, as an 'incurably blind' indigent, living on rations in Bunbury in 1856, 'he having no one whatever to look after him'.

28 Milward, John, 'Pioneers of the Warren', unpublished manuscript, personal collection, pp.33-4.

29 Henry Prinsep in *The Magistrate*, 27 June 1918.

30 W.B. Mitchell to C.R. Prinsep, 19 April 1862, in Mitchell, W.B., 'Letter Books', SLWA Acc. 3304A.

31 Ibid.

India'.³² According to the media, prospects for Western Australian trade with India were encouraging, charter ships were available, and completion of a new jetty at Bunbury in 1863 promised greater efficiency in transport.³³

By the time Henry Prinsep disembarked in 1866, a small population and sluggish economy made Western Australia an unpromising place to do business, particularly engaging in an enterprise on the scale envisaged by Charles Prinsep. It was a Crown Colony, the only Australian colony ruled by a Governor and Executive Council of official members, with a predominantly advisory Legislative Council, made up of officials and four appointed non-official members.³⁴ It was not until 1870 that property-owning colonists were granted a limited form of representative government, under which they were empowered to elect 12 members of an expanded 18-member Legislative Council to sit alongside three appointed and three official members: the Colonial Secretary, the Surveyor-General and the Attorney-General. The Governor, however, retained an almost untrammelled level of power, including the power to call and prorogue sittings, dissolve the Council and call elections, a general power of veto, and sole responsibility to introduce money bills.³⁵

Nearly 40 years after foundation, the colony continued to have trouble attracting and retaining a population of settlers. Its status as 'a private enterprise venture which would be government controlled but not government financed', in which administrative costs were to be met predominantly from the sale of land, meant a chronic under-supply of money and labour, and extremely slow rates of growth.³⁶ The inception of convict transportation in 1850 artificially boosted a settler population that numbered less than 7,000 and brought an influx of low cost labour and funding from the Home Office. By the final year of convict transportation in 1868, the numbers of convicts were estimated to be 9,700, a significant proportion of the still tiny population of just over 22,000, nearly two-thirds of whom were male, which was concentrated in Perth and the south-west, including the small settlements of Champion Bay (Geraldton), Bunbury, Busselton and Albany. Colonisation had barely touched the expansive regions north of Perth.³⁷ It was Henry Prinsep's misfortune to arrive in the colony only two years before the cessation of convict transportation brought a return to the depressed conditions that had previously characterised the colonial economy.

32 *Perth Gazette*, 21 June 1845; *The West Australian Times*, 11 February 1864.

33 *Perth Gazette and Independent Journal of Politics and News*, 11 October 1850.

34 De Garis, B.K. 1981, 'Political Tutelage 1829–1870', in C.T. Stannage (ed.), *A New History of Western Australia*, University of Western Australia Press, Nedlands, p.304.

35 *Ibid.*, p.326.

36 *Ibid.*, p.302.

37 Australian Bureau of Statistics 2006, 'Australian Historical Population Statistics', Catalogue No. 3105.0.65.001, viewed online at <http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/DetailsPage/3105.0.65.0012006?OpenDocument>. Data used by the ABS for Western Australia is derived from Colonial Censuses of 1848, 1854, 1859, 1870, 1881, 1891 and 1901.

His initiation into the world of colonial business was to be dominated by a scarcity of money, high labour costs, an underdeveloped network of land and sea transport, and unstable markets, conditions that would test even the most experienced of operators.

‘Fate has been against you’

Prinsep’s economic fortunes steadily declined during his first eight years in the colony. This was a period in which he was acutely conscious of the transnational context in which he was endeavouring to succeed in his business aims. He communicated constantly with family and business contacts in Britain, Calcutta, Madras, Ceylon and Singapore on a variety of business and personal matters, ideas as diverse as the supply of horses and timber to India and Ceylon, and the importation to Western Australia of ‘coolie’ labour from India. Within three years of his arrival, it was clear that his father’s dream of the properties’ potential to profitably supply horses to the Indian army was close to failure, and the estate close to bankruptcy. Low prices for horses on the Indian market, the high costs and unreliability of sea transport, and problems with delivery to the Indian market meant that, for each of Prinsep’s attempts at export, his losses accumulated. His uncles in England and Scotland, the executors of his father’s estate, warned him not to rely on them for financial assistance. ‘It is our duty to devote all we get to the payment of debts existing at the time of your father’s decease’, wrote Thoby Prinsep in March 1871.³⁸

You know the resources on which we depend for clearing the debts; they are the Tasmanian rent say 750 per annum. This is subject to interest claims amounting to about 400 pounds. This year I only got a little more than 500 pounds from Tasmania owing to your brother’s having intercepted 225 pounds to pay the expense of his visit to the island and return. Beside this I got near 200 pounds from Singapore and shall have the same next year but your bills of 200 pounds from Calcutta took all the balance I had in hand ... we can give you no present help from this source.³⁹

Thoby suggested that the properties in Western Australia either be leased as small agricultural blocks, like those in Tasmania, to realise ‘a fixed income however small’, or sold, at a minimum of 7 shillings and sixpence an acre, a price Henry thought would be impossible to achieve in the depressed economic conditions of the colony.⁴⁰ He progressively leased each of the properties to concentrate on

38 Thoby Prinsep to H.C. Prinsep, 23 March 1871, private collection.

39 Thoby Prinsep to H.C. Prinsep, 23 December 1870, private collection.

40 Prinsep, ‘Diaries’, 3 August 1869.

the Indian horse trade and, from 1869, the export of timber sleepers to supply the expansion of the Indian rail system. In March 1870, he decided to risk most of his resources on a shipment of 40 horses and 4,460 sleepers to Calcutta, and sailed from Bunbury on the sailing ship 'Heimdahl', accompanied by Josephine and baby Carlotta. This was to be his first visit to India since his departure as an infant in 1848, and he looked forward to seeing his birthplace, optimistic that the business contacts of the Prinsep family would guarantee a commercially successful voyage. After a six-week voyage to the mouth of the Hooghly River, about 200 kilometres from Calcutta, the ship ran into trouble:

At about 7 o'clock the pilot ordered the anchor up and we commenced to beat up, tack after tack, the tide was with us and carried us along. But as we were off Rangerfulla (?) sand, the pilot allowed the vessel to drift too much to the Eastward ... and we suddenly felt the vessel lean over on its port side and the Captain and Pilot shouting loud for the anchors to be let go. All seemed confusion and more and more we leaned over till we thought the vessel would capsize ... The anchors were got out but still the vessel stuck hard and fast. The tide was roaring against us making a surf under the starboard side ... it was an alarming sight and the captain was much distressed. A small anchor was taken out over the stern and a warp attached to a big block at which all hands pulled with all their force, but the anchor only jumped two or three times. The boats were got out and the Captain told us he would have to send us ashore and some of the deck horses, to do the best we could.⁴¹

After a three-hour row to the shore, Josephine was left 'with a well-oiled black man who wore nothing but a loin cloth and turban', while Prinsep surveyed the route to the nearest settlement:⁴²

In the distance we could see hundreds of Brahmanic cattle grazing and numbers of thatched houses ... It was a long rough walk occasionally through very muddy creeks, overgrown with rank vegetation, affording us I thought cover to tigers ... we did indeed learn on arriving at the Semaphore that some tigers had only a week before carried off some of the cattle from the very spots we had traversed. As we approached the Semaphore the bund was in better preservation and fields were on our right or the eastward and the Dhoob grass most pleasant to our eyes as well as those of the horses. The dogs chased the cattle and I thought the

41 Ibid., 30 April 1870.

42 Brockman, Carlotta, 'Reminiscences of Carlotta Louisa Brockman, née Prinsep, 1882–1956', State Library of Western Australia (SLWA) Acc. 931ACarlotta Brockman, 'Reminiscences', no page numbers.

countrymen would rise in arms against us, but they seemed astonished and numbers of almost naked black men with turbans & c followed us as if we were a show.⁴³

Visiting the wreck the next day, the extent of the disaster became evident, as Prinsep found a scene of 'great confusion', full of dead and trapped horses and the captain intent on declaring the ship a wreck for the purposes of insurance. Returning to shore, Prinsep watched as 'two big native boats put off for the wreck, swarming with natives ... like large cockle shells' and proceeded to 'strip whatever was valuable from the ship'.⁴⁴ Later, 'we heard strange voices and saw an English boat manned by Chittagong sailors and a gentleman in pukka Anglo Indian garb, solar hat, white trousers and all, but no coat or waistcoat. He came up to the house and bowed, told us he would rescue us.'⁴⁵ Arriving in Calcutta, the extent of his financial misfortune gradually dawned on Prinsep, who found that his cargo had not been insured before departure, an oversight he blamed on his Fremantle-based agent, Walter Bickley. Furthermore, he had signed over the cargo to the captain as salvage and so was unable to claim proceeds from the eventual sale of the surviving horses. He arrived in Calcutta with very little money, exacerbated by the loss of his carrier bag with letters of introduction en route.

Despite these severe setbacks, Prinsep's diaries do not disguise his excitement and wonder at Calcutta, where he was quickly contacted by old family friends. Two days after arriving, he went to see Prinsep's Ghat and the Asiatic Society museum, where he viewed 'Uncle James' bust and also a copper one of Uncle Thoby given by Cholaum Mohamed, also a painting of Uncle T'.

Dr. Atkinson the curator was very affable and wished us to become his correspondents and collectors in W. Australia of snakes and animals and promised to give us a collecting box to take back with us. Mr Cantor showed me the house where my mother died and took me to E.I. Reg. Offices and introduced me to Palmer the manager, who gave me little hope of doing anything in sleepers.⁴⁶

He was entranced by Calcutta and its surroundings: 'Such a pretty place and through such a populous country, tanks & villages everywhere, palms, banyans ... and tamarinds, interspersed among English houses with large compounds and natives' huts.'⁴⁷ Impressed by the social life of the 'many excellent people' he met, 'quite a walking peerage', he socialised with cousins and maternal uncles, and was introduced to a large circle of kin and people who had known his Prinsep

43 Prinsep, 'Diaries', 30 April 1870.

44 Ibid., 1 May 1870.

45 Ibid., 1 May 1870.

46 Ibid., 4 May 1870.

47 Ibid., 10 May 1870.

forebears.⁴⁸ A visit to Agra, to stay with Josephine's relatives the Vines, allowed him to view and paint the Taj Mahal: 'A description would give very little idea of its grandeur, situated as it is on the banks of the Jumna, asleep for ever in its large, dark shadowy gardens, lost to all utility by a home for an antiquary, an architect or contemplative philosopher.'⁴⁹ The wonders of British innovation and engineering enthralled him: responses to telegrams to England within 72 hours, a slaughterhouse where 'nearly 200 oxen can be slaughtered at once, with 260 sheep and many other beasts', and sewerage works featuring a 'huge HP engine which pumps up the watered sewerage at the rate of 1200 gallons per minute'.⁵⁰

Prinsep was introduced to Calcutta business men, British and Indian, in an effort to secure future contracts for wooden sleepers, gun-carriages and telegraph poles, and sandalwood. Prinsep assured them that he was able to supply Western Australian hardwoods according to their requirements and subsequently entered a contract with George J. Landells, who had previously been in Australia and accompanied the 1860–61 expedition of Burke and Wills as camel master, before quarrelling with Burke and leaving.⁵¹ The 'export' of Indian maids to the service of 'Western Australian gentlemen' appealed as another possible venture:

It was very interesting to me to see 120 little girls from four to 15 assembled to service ... They cooked their own dinners, cleaned each their own brass basin and on week days guided six sewing machines, turning out 31 suits of police clothing each day. They all seemed happy and clean and I saw a fund of maids on which I mean the W. Australian gentlemen to draw.⁵²

One morning he was confronted with evidence of his past, during a visit by 'Nawab Khan, my father's consummate for 6 years ... [who] brought a letter of my mother's and a piece of writing done by Charlie and me in 1848'.⁵³ Carlotta Brockman related the day his parents' former servants came to remind him of an old contract;

An old man came up to him, 'salaamed' with great respect and gave him a scrap of dirty paper. To my father's great surprise he read scrawled in capital letters upon it 'I promise that when I am a man I will take back all my father's old servants. Charlie Prinsep, Harry "Baba"'. This had been given to my Grandfather's Indian butler by the two little boys when they had left India for England when my father was only five years old.

48 Ibid., 25 May 1870.

49 Ibid., 28 May 1870.

50 Ibid., 25–28 May 1870.

51 Ibid., 3 July 1870; Fitzpatrick, Kathleen 1969, 'Burke, Robert O'Hara (1821–1861)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Vol. 3, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, pp. 301–303.

52 Prinsep, 'Diaries', 28 May 1870.

53 Ibid., 28 May 1870.

And the faithful old fellow had kept it all these years and when Harry 'Baba' had at last turned up again he had collected all the old servants and now they presented themselves to serve again the little boy they had loved, the son of their adored old master! But alas! The little boy was not making his home again among them and 'Jinny' his old Ayah was the only one he could employ and she became my nurse while we remained in Calcutta.⁵⁴

Prinsep's financial situation in Calcutta forced him to borrow money from unwilling cousins and rely on old family friends for accommodation. When Landells offered to advance his passage back to Western Australia, he immediately left, apparently pleased to be doing so, disappointed that his voyage had been unsuccessful, but with renewed hope that timber would eventually be profitable. Prinsep was never again to visit India, although he travelled to Ceylon at least twice over the remainder of his life. To Prinsep, India was remarkable for its natural and built scenery, its British and classical Indian palaces full of 'grandeur', while the countryside, although 'pretty', concealed tigers, was often muddy and overgrown, and presented a contrast to the 'beautifully clean and luxurious' British structures. To Prinsep, India in 1870 was a British place, full of British people and institutions, the centre of imperial commerce in the region, and a place that could make or break his fortunes in a nascent colonial outpost.

He was pleased to return to Western Australia, to 'the flowers and grass' of his homestead at Prinsep Park after six months away, but creditors began to call in debts almost immediately and it now appeared only a matter of time before the onset of bankruptcy proceedings. Prinsep retained his optimism that Indian prices for horses and wood would recover, particularly now that he had first-hand knowledge of the kind of products needed in India. Two charters later in February 1871, however, only increased his level of debt, and horse prices remained 'disastrous', while the next year he received the unwelcome news that his shipment of sleepers had been rejected by Indian purchasers.⁵⁵ His diaries evoke the desperation of his search for solutions: he might sell off the estate parcel by parcel, start a dairying business with his sister-in-law, Frances Cookworthy, from her estate at Busselton, sell up and work for his father-in-law, or possibly even leave Western Australia for England or another colony. His diaries betray his exasperation that things were not easier for him. But still he hopes that things will soon turn around, 'for nothing could be better for me and for all of us brothers and sisters than a sudden rise in the value of land here'.⁵⁶ In April 1873, a substantial vineyard at Prinsep Park realised '115 gallons of Constantia, 22 gallons of burgundy, 24 gallons of white wine', an enterprise

⁵⁴ Brockman, 'Reminiscences'.

⁵⁵ Prinsep, 'Diaries', 5–8 August 1871.

⁵⁶ H.C. Prinsep to Annie Prinsep, 2 November 1873, private collection.

that drew the enthusiastic support of Thoby Prinsep in England: 'I long to get a dozen of your first brew and hope to drink your health in it by Christmas. Your Colony wants sadly some article of export, but it will be some years before it will produce more wine than its inhabitants can drink.'⁵⁷ Despite the difficulties of his position, Western Australia still promised better prospects than a return to England, as Prinsep wrote in April 1871:

I remembered that this day was the anniversary of my landing ... I thought how very different things were with me but still I felt I was more certain of happiness with my darling wife and child though all things looked so depressed, than I formerly was as a wandering Bohemian sort of wight and I knew I could give happiness to them which is the most comforting of all my thoughts.⁵⁸

His life as a colonial land-owner, even one in financial straits, allowed him the status of a gentleman and member of the colonial elite. He became involved in local politics as a member of the Bunbury Town Trust, and actively supported his father-in-law's efforts to seek election to the Legislative Council. In 1869, he was appointed a Justice of the Peace and was regularly called to hear charges and pass sentence on offenders, as well as undertaking other quasi-judicial roles around the colony.⁵⁹ In 1871, he was called on to visit the mid-western port of Geraldton to sit as a Justice in the local court. He stayed for a month in this 'dreary town ... with no trees, no flowers and no society, all sand and broken bottles & several large limestone buildings'.⁶⁰ The Geraldton hinterland was 'fearfully sandy and the remainder rocky and uneven', 'remarkable for the almost total absence of any trees but jam wattles, and for the numerous flat topped hills and small grassy peaks'. Prinsep had plenty of time off from his official duties, and took the opportunity to paint and sketch his way around the region, helped by 'an old native woman [who] held my umbrella over me'.⁶¹

By the middle of 1873, Prinsep was forced to concede that the affairs of the Western Australian estate were untenable. His level of debt and the uncertainties of Indian Ocean trade compelled him to settle his affairs and dispose of the family properties. Charles Staples suggests that Prinsep's inexperience and lack of commercial guile were ill-suited to the unregulated 'law of the jungle' of Western Australian colonial commerce. 'Perhaps his business methods were at fault', he speculated, but 'many more experienced men than he went to the wall during the depression of the 1870s'.⁶² Sara Prinsep agreed that 'fate has

57 Thoby Prinsep to H.C. Prinsep, undated, SLWA Acc. 3592A/24, 15/12.

58 Prinsep, 'Diaries', 22 April 1871.

59 Ibid., 23 March 1869.

60 Ibid., 24 November 1871.

61 Ibid., 26 November–7 December 1871.

62 Staples, A.C. 1955, 'Henry Charles Prinsep', in *Journal and Proceedings of the Western Australian Historical Society*, Volume 5, Part 1, p.34.

been against you', and the estate's executors thought he had been manipulated by 'older and more experienced men ... whose proceedings I can only say are unusual'.⁶³ Prinsep believed that the English executors had been 'harsh with him and would do little to help him straighten out the tangles of the Estate, expecting a very young, inexperienced man to do what was too difficult a task for themselves'.⁶⁴ Yet his relief when he finally settled his affairs was enormous. With personal assets valued at a mere 20 pounds, he called a meeting of his creditors and assigned his father's assets to meet the claims against him, 'then rode along homewards with a more relieved mind than I had felt for months ... I sat up with Josephine for a long time both very happy that our great troubles were over'.⁶⁵ Colonial Secretary Frederick Barlee's offer of a temporary position in the Department of Lands and Surveys in Perth, even at a low rate of pay, was sufficient incentive for Prinsep to turn his back on life as a gentleman farmer and launch into a new life in the city. As he wrote to his sister Annie, 'I hope to give satisfaction and get permanent employment when they see what I can do. One thing does comfort me and that is that there now occurs a chance of turning to account the education my father gave me, which I have felt all along was getting very rusty in my present position.'⁶⁶

Prinsep continued to explore trade and business opportunities with India after his move to Perth, but they became one of many sidelines to supplement a salary that remained low until he became a senior civil service executive in 1894. His active involvement in Indian Ocean trade and his efforts to fulfil his father's dreams of a 'triple empire' ended at this point. The horse and timber trades with India were never to become significant agricultural exports compared with wool, the colony's main export earner until it was overtaken by gold in 1893. The timber trade partially recovered in 1874, after two years of very low exports, but remained a small export industry compared with wool and minerals.⁶⁷ The horse trade with India, after reaching a peak in 1853, declined thereafter, averaging a value of 8,120 pounds per annum.⁶⁸ To Prinsep, a salaried position in the relative comforts of Perth, close to the social and cultural life he craved, seemed a much more attractive option, and 'a delightful change from the hard life we have lately led'.⁶⁹

He retained a peripheral interest in Indian Ocean trade relationships with India throughout the 1870s and 1880s, and promoted a scheme to import Indians to

63 Henry White to H.C. Prinsep, 24 March 1871, private collection; Sara Prinsep to H.C. Prinsep, 23 March 1872, private collection.

64 Brockman, 'Reminiscences'.

65 Prinsep, 'Diaries', 10 September 1873.

66 H.C. Prinsep to Annie Prinsep, November 2 1873, private collection.

67 Appleyard, R.T. 1981, 'Western Australia: Economic and demographic growth, 1850–1914', in C.T. Stannage (ed.), *A New History of Western Australia*, University of Western Australia Press, Nedlands, pp.235–6.

68 These figures are estimates based on Milward, 'Pioneers of the Warren', pp.34–5.

69 Prinsep, 'Diaries', 31 January 1874.

Western Australia as a cheap source of contracted labour to work on farms and as domestic servants. In 1874, he discussed his ideas with Colonial Secretary Frederick Barlee, who promised to raise the matter with the Legislative Council.⁷⁰ Prinsep opened communication with W.S. Halsey, a potential recruiting agent in Calcutta, who offered his services enthusiastically and told Prinsep that he could 'take about a hundred coolies from here tomorrow if wanted', and within a few years 'could get five or six thousand'. He could 'lay my hands on some capital carpenters, the head man of whom has worked for me for some time and can get plenty of his country men for all sorts of work, such as masons, blacksmiths, gardeners, shoemakers': 'When I told him that in your colony he could get possibly eight shillings a day (about five rupees) he got very excited and wanted me to take him there directly saying "I can catch plenty Chinamen"'.⁷¹ Prinsep's ideas did not proceed, failing to gain the support of the Legislative Council, which in 1874 enacted restrictive legislation to control Chinese and 'Asiatic' immigration, exempting arrivals on labour contracts to Western Australian colonists and imposing fines on captains embarking unauthorised immigrants. In following New South Wales and Victoria in moving to restrict Asian immigration, Western Australia was taking its first steps towards participation in a 'white Australia', which would use discriminatory procedures as an effective instrument of exclusion for the next 70 years.

70 Ibid., 6 May 1874.

71 Halsey to Prinsep, 24 November, no year, SLWA Acc. 3594A/63/1.



Louisa Clifton's (1814–1880) painting of Koombana Bay, near the coastal settlement of Bunbury. Clifton arrived in 1841 with her father, Marshall Waller Clifton, who took up land on the Leschenault Inlet. Australind was established by the Western Australia Company in 1840 along the principles of settler immigration enunciated by E.G. Wakefield. The name was intended to appeal to British investors in India. The land Charles Prinsep purchased in 1839, and which Henry later occupied, was located on the sandy strip to the west of the Clifton settlement.

Source: Art Gallery of Western Australia.



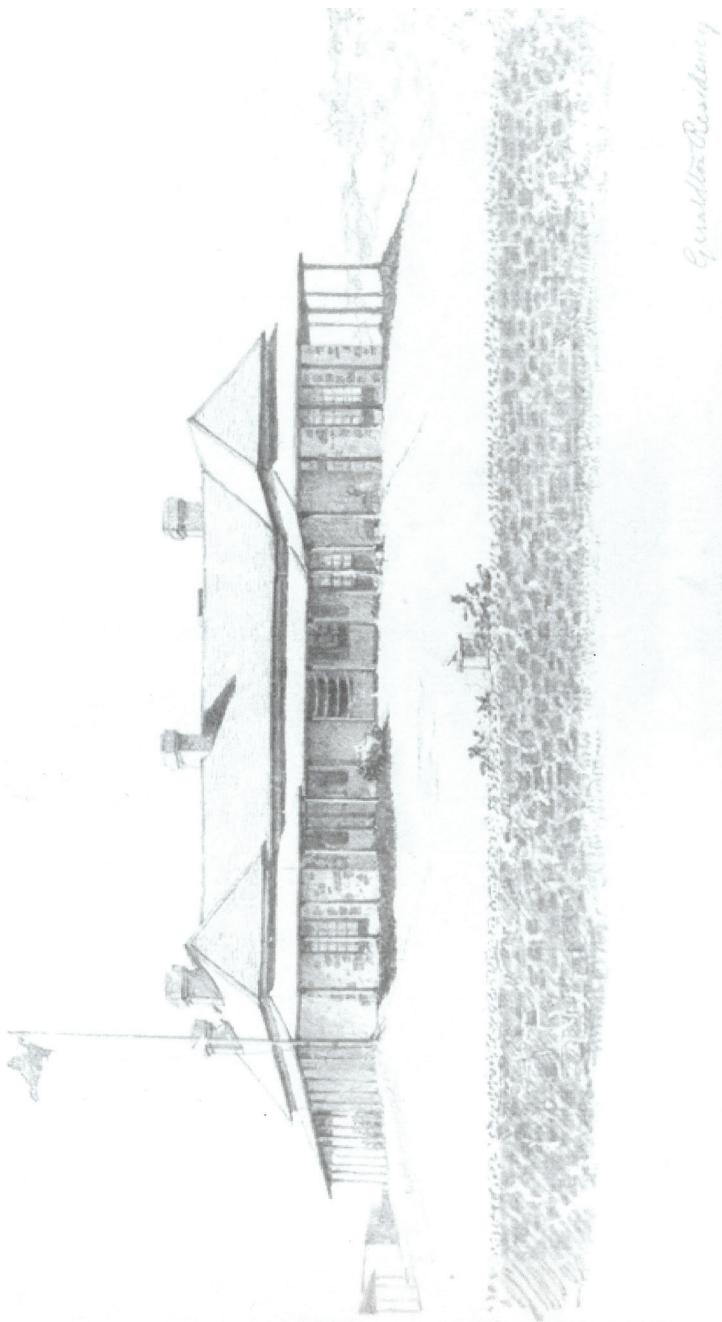
Henry Prinsep travelled constantly around the south-west of Western Australia in search of harvests of jarrah and karri, which he sought (unsuccessfully) to export to India to exploit the expansion of the railway system.

Source: Prinsep Papers, SLWA MN 773 BA 1423/216.



Prinsep stops to light his pipe in the hollow of an old jarrah.

Source: Prinsep Papers, SLWA MN 773 BA 1423/201.



The government residence at Geraldton on Champion Bay in 1871, a place Prinsep described as 'a very dreary town, with no trees, no flowers and no society'. He spent his two weeks in the region painting and drawing the scenery, sitting as a Justice of the Peace and arranging a shipment of horses to Calcutta.

Source: Courtesy of Ailsa Smith, Claremont WA.



While at Champion Bay, Prinsep took the opportunity to travel around the Murchison region, visiting stations such as Knockbrack with his friend, lawyer Septimus Burt.

Source: Courtesy of Ailsa Smith, Claremont WA.



Prinsep painted this large oilpainting, 'Mrs Boldt brings home the Mowberry', with the aim of exhibiting it at the Melbourne International Exhibition in 1880. Before it was sent to Melbourne, he exhibited it in Perth and Fremantle where many paid to see it, earning the artist a reasonable sum. It failed to sell in Melbourne and Prinsep had it brought back to Western Australia, where it hung on the walls of his homes in Perth and Busselton until about 1960.

Source: Courtesy of anonymously held private collection.



‘Map showing Explorations in Western Australia by Miss Hocking, without government authority, 1876, by H.C. Prinsep, Geographer to Her Excellency’.

Source: Scenes of Travel and Adventure in Western Australia, National Library of Australia, Bib ID 3546775.



'Kangaroo Hunting, Serpentine Plain', 1880. This is part of a series of pen and ink illustrations of a trip through the south-west in 1876 with Bessie Hocking, a 'lady of means', who visited the Prinseps in Perth and travelled with them, seeing the sights, drawing and painting the scenery. In the background, Prinsep watches a woman who is most likely Josephine, 'an excellent rider', running down a kangaroo. Prinsep was a keen botanical sketcher, as seen by the detail in this image. For many years he provided sketches and pressings for Dr Hooker at Kew Gardens.

Source: Scenes of Travel and Adventure in Western Australia, National Library of Australia, Bib ID 3547143.



'Bonchop thinks he sees a sea breeze', 1880. Prinsep signed his series of 'Travel and Adventure in Western Australia' 'Bonchop', a nickname of uncertain origin, by which he was known to his friends Bessie Hocking and colonial attorney general Henry Hocking. The party travelled through the Perth hills in a four-wheel trap, camping, visiting scenic places, picnicking and painting.

Source: Scenes of Travel and Adventure in Western Australia, National Library of Australia, Bib ID 3547575.



'An awkward corner of the Woongong Brook', 1880. Two men, probably Prinsep and Henry Hocking, help a woman, either Josephine Prinsep or Bessie Hocking, negotiate a tricky climb on the Woongong Brook in the Darling hills south-east of Perth.

Source: Scenes of Travel and Adventure in Western Australia, National Library of Australia, Bib ID 3547580.



‘Our costume skating soiree, Town Hall, Perth WA 1878’. Contemporary accounts, including the memoirs of Prinsep’s daughter, Carlotta, provide a rich context for this otherwise mysterious scene. The Prinseps, including Henry, spent days preparing for the Governor’s costume ball. In the centre is Captain Harris, with the complicated structure Henry designed to represent Cleopatra’s Needle, in the act of bowing before the Governor Robinson and his wife. Henry as harlequin, Josephine as Contadina, Carlotta and her friend Maude Stone, occupy the foreground, all wearing roller skates.

Source: Scenes of Travel and Adventure in Western Australia, National Library of Australia, Bib ID 3547598.



Henry Prinsep's watercolour of Serpentine Pool in the Darling Range shows a place that is still popular as a swimming and picnicking spot for Western Australians.

Source: Scenes of Travel and Adventure in Western Australia, National Library of Australia, Bib ID 3547608.

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