
Gavin Hamilton of Calcutta and the Nicobar Breadfruit

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Abstract

Two drawings made on Carnicobar Island, possibly early in 1786, by the Calcutta merchant Gavin Hamilton (1754–1820), are discussed. One of them has previously been attributed to Robert Hyde Colebrooke so his later visit to the Nicobar Islands is discussed as is the earlier one of Nicola Fontana. Also discussed is the work of Sir William Jones on the Carnicobar breadfruit (Pandanus leram).

Introduction

This investigation began with work on a collection of teaching and related drawings in the archives of the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh commissioned or collected by John Hope, Regius Keeper of the Garden from 1761 to his death in 1786. Initial outcomes were an exhibition of the collection and the publication of a concise, illustrated biography of Hope in which was reproduced an ink and wash drawing of the ‘Carnicobar Tree’ (the Nicobar breadfruit, *Pandanus leram*), sent to Hope from India by someone called Gavin Hamilton.¹ I had previously studied and catalogued the botanical drawings in the Sir William Jones collection at the Royal Asiatic Society (RAS),² and realised that one of the drawings in that collection, entitled ‘Village on the Nicobar Islands’, was in the same hand as Hope’s drawing. However, the RAS drawing had previously been catalogued with an attribution to Robert Hyde Colebrooke and dated ‘c. 1789’.³

Almost nothing has been published on this Indian Gavin Hamilton, though his name appears as a shadowy figure in various works on the artists working in late-eighteenth-century Bengal. It seemed desirable to discover who he was, and to establish his connections both with Enlightenment Edinburgh and with Sir William Jones; to investigate the misattribution of the RAS drawing, and the various papers on the Nicobar Islands published by Jones in *Asiatic Researches*. A fascinating series of linkages in a complex network has emerged, characteristic of the tight-knit mercantile, intellectual and artistic community of Calcutta in

¹H.J. Noltie, *John Hope (1725–1786): Alan G. Morton’s Memoir of a Scottish Botanist – a new and revised edition* (Edinburgh, 2011), p. 81.

²Unpublished, but parts included, in slightly garbled form, in J. Sokoly and A. Ohta (2010). *India East/West: the age of discovery in late Georgian India as seen through the collections of the Royal Asiatic Society London* (Qatar, 2010).

³R. Head, *Catalogue of Paintings, Drawings, Engravings & Busts in the Collection of the Royal Asiatic Society* (London, 1991), p. 91.



Figure 1. Jones's Drawing.

the last two decades of the eighteenth century. These included Scottish merchants, artists (some amateur, some professional) from England, Scotland, Germany and probably Italy, military engineer-surveyors, Scottish (and an Italian) surgeons, and, at the centre of it all, the great Welsh savant – to say nothing of the Austro-Hungarian Empire's attempt to join the fray of the East India trade.

The Jones Nicobar drawings at RAS

The Jones drawing (Fig. 1),⁴ has, until now, borne the title 'Village on the Nicobar Islands'. There is no contemporary support for this, though the drawing has been remounted and it is possible that it was transcribed from an earlier mount; having no dated watermark, it bears no other feature to indicate a provenance or date. Head speculated that it 'probably came into Jones' possession when it was decided to publish [R.H.] Colebrooke's articles [on the Nicobar and Andaman islands],⁵ but, as will be seen later, Colebrooke's visit did not take place until 1790, doubtless Head's reason for dating the drawing 'c. 1789', the year Colebrooke's expedition started from Calcutta.

Sir William Jones's interest in *Pandanus* was as part of his investigation into Indian plants and their ancient names – in this case 'the fragrant *Cétaca* ... celebrated in *Sanscrit*, by poets for their colour or scent and by physicians for their medical uses'. In 1792 Jones published a paper by Dr Nicholas [sic] Fontana 'On the Nicobar Islands and the Fruit of the Mellori',⁶

⁴RAS 025.014.

⁵Head, 1991, p. 90.

⁶N. Fontana, *Asiatic Researches* 3 (1792), pp. 149–163.

for which he commissioned two engravings of the Nicobar breadfruit (for which ‘mellori’ was a Portuguese name and larum or léram, the local name) from John Alefounder, then struggling to make a living as an artist in Calcutta.⁷ The original drawings for these botanical prints follow that of the Nicobar village in the Jones collection: a grey monochrome drawing showing the habit of the tree,⁸ and a watercolour showing the compound fruit, and two views of one of its segments (‘phalanges’).⁹ Head attributed the former to an ‘Indian artist’,¹⁰ the latter to Alefounder; but, from the annotations, it seems more likely that both drawings are by Fontana himself (the plates are both inscribed ‘Alefounder sculpt.’ rather than ‘delt. et sculpt.’). The tree drawing, with its scale in English feet, must have been made in the field, and it is unlikely that a competent Indian artist would have been to hand on an Austrian ship – it is much more likely to be by Fontana or a military draftsman on the *Giuseppe e Teresa*. No more does the style of the fruit drawing, with its use of transparent watercolour, suggest an Indian artist, and the original inscription (struck through by Jones) comparing the processed fruit with ‘Polenta’ is likely to be by Fontana himself. To Fontana’s paper Jones appended a ‘Note by the President’ on the Indian names of the tree, its potential use as a famine food, its cultivation in the ‘Company’s Botanical Garden’ (i.e. Kyd’s garden at Sipbur, where it had yet to flower), and provided it with a binomial in Linnaean form: ‘PANDANUS Léram’, though Jones noted that he was unsure if it were ‘a new *species*, or only a variety ... of the *Pandanus* of Bengal’. A further record of Jones’s interest in *Pandanus* survives – a drawing,¹¹ which forms part of the joint botanical studies undertaken with his wife Anna Maria in and around their Garden House at Arisnagar on the banks of the Hooghly near Calcutta. This drawing by Lady Jones shows the scented male inflorescence of the ‘Bengal species’ now known as *Pandanus odoratissimus*,¹² annotated by her or her husband: ‘Cétaca, Sans[krit]. Pandanus Linn. The male flower 2 Aug 1791. Arisnagar’.

Rather than relating to the Fontana paper or to the related, but later, Colebrooke ones, the ‘Village on the Nicobar Islands’ drawing is to be associated with a paper Jones had published in 1790: ‘A short description of Carnicobar’ by Gavin Hamilton,¹³ read to the Asiatic Society by the distinguished artist Johan Zoffany (1733–1810). The drawing should thus be entitled ‘Village on Carnicobar Island’. Nothing is known of the visit or visits that lie behind this account, but Hamilton evidently spent some time on the island – enough to witness surgical operations and funeral ceremonies. In the paper Hamilton described the islanders’ huts, provided ethnographical information and a brief vocabulary of their language; but, strangely, given the drawing he made for Hope, there is no mention of the *Pandanus*. He first went to Calcutta in 1778 and, for reasons given below, the visit must have been prior to May 1786. Hamilton’s firm later owned at least two ships,¹⁴ and it was doubtless on

⁷For further details, and the tragic outcome, see M. Archer, *India and British Portraiture 1770–1825* (London etc., 1979), pp. 270–272.

⁸RAS 025.016.

⁹RAS 025.017B.

¹⁰Head, 1991, p. 91.

¹¹RAS 025.062.

¹²The nomenclature and taxonomy is fraught, and it has also been known as *P. fascicularis* and *P. tectorius*.

¹³G. Hamilton, *Asiatic Researches* 2 (1790), pp. 337–344.

¹⁴*Countess of Sutherland* 1450 tons and *Gabriel* 826 tons in the Port of Calcutta in 1801 – see J. Mathison and A. W. Mason, A. W. *A New Oriental Register & EI Directory for 1802* (London, 1802).

a trading voyage that he came to visit Carnicobar, which lies close to the shipping routes between Calcutta, and Burma, Penang and the Indonesian archipelago.

The Hope drawing of the ‘Carnicobar Tree’

In contrast to the Jones drawing, Hope’s (Fig. 2) is accompanied by secure documentation – a covering note that reads:

Dr. Hamilton with best Compliments to Doctor Hope incloses [sic] his Brother Gavin’s draught of the Carnicobar Tree, which he desires to be presented to the Doctor as a slight testimony of the sense he entertains of the obligations he lies under to Doctor Hope.

The verso of the drawing is inscribed in Gavin Hamilton’s own hand: “Drawn from Nature, in the Island of Carnicobar, in the Bay of Bengal. There are many such trees in the Island”.

As an undergraduate at Edinburgh University Gavin Hamilton must have had serious botanical interests as his name appears on Hope’s botany class lists for two years – 1775 and 1777,¹⁵ though he did not graduate MD, apparently intending a career in law. Hope, like Linnaeus, encouraged students who had attended his innovative botany lectures as part of their medical course to send botanical specimens and information to him in Edinburgh – written descriptions and notes (especially on useful plants), seeds to be raised in the Botanic Garden, dried specimens and drawings – from the far-flung points of the emerging empire to which many were posted as surgeons and physicians. Only two drawings from India survive in his collection – the present one, and a botanical study of the ‘moving plant of Bengal’ (now *Codariocalyx motorius*), by an Indian artist, sent slightly earlier from Bengal by James Kerr (1737–1782);¹⁶ at the same time William Roxburgh was sending Hope notes on plants, though no drawings, from the Coromandel Coast. No documentary evidence survives, but it would be surprising if Hope did not supply letters of introduction to enable recent students to contact previous ones already in established positions (perhaps one of the ‘obligations’ Gavin felt he owed to Hope). Whether by this means or otherwise connections certainly developed; for example, one of the executors of James Kerr’s will was John Cree,¹⁷ a Dacca cloth merchant who also traded with Gavin Hamilton’s brother William.

The accompanying note incidentally implies a latest date for the drawing, which must have been received in Edinburgh before Hope’s death on 10 November 1786 and posted at least six months before that – certainly more than four years before Colebrooke’s visit.

Gavin Hamilton (1754–1820)

It seems appropriate to provide here some further biographical information on this little-known, ‘Calcutta’ Gavin Hamilton. The Hamilton clan is a large and highly ramified one, in which the forename Gavin is widely used, so care is required. Best known is the eponymous neo-classical painter (and dealer in antiquities), Gavin Hamilton (1723–1798), who, for much of his life, was based in Rome, where Zoffany knew him, as did the artist Ozias Humphry

¹⁵NAS GD/144/8/21 & 16; Gavin paid the fee of three guineas for 1775, but, as was more usual for offspring of professorial colleagues, his attendance in 1777 was ‘gratis’.

¹⁶Noltie, 2011, p. 30.

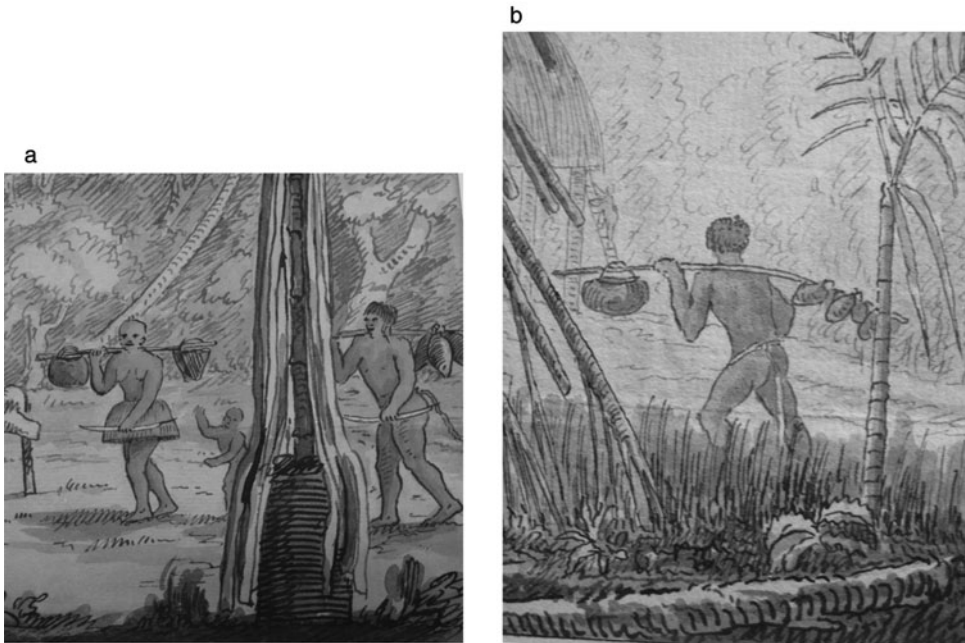
¹⁷BL APAC L/AG/34/29/4. 1782 no. 37.



Figure 2. Hope's Drawing.

(1742–1810) who sketched his portrait there in 1777.¹⁸ When Zoffany went to Calcutta in 1783 he became acquainted with this other Gavin Hamilton (who also had at least minor

¹⁸Scottish National Portrait Gallery PG 198.



Figures 3a and 3b. Drawings from both the Jones collection and the Hope collection showing a similarity in style.

artistic talent), which, not surprisingly, has been the cause of some confusion.¹⁹ The Calcutta Gavin Hamilton belonged to one of many interesting branches of the clan, originating in Airdrie, Lanarkshire, who came to academic prominence in Enlightenment Edinburgh – his grandfather William (1669–1732) was Professor of Divinity and Principal of Edinburgh University one of whose sons Robert (1707–1787) succeeded in the Divinity chair; another of William's sons, Gavin, was a prominent Edinburgh bookseller and publisher.²⁰ In 1745 Robert Hamilton married Jean Hay and they had at least seven children who survived to adulthood. These included William (1746–1819) who went to India, where he became a Senior Merchant in the Madras Presidency; a daughter, Grizel (1748–1836), who married the notable surgeon Benjamin Bell (1749–1806);²¹ and James (1749–1835).²² Gavin was born 6 July 1754, the witnesses to his baptism being his paternal uncle Gavin, the bookseller, and his maternal uncle Alexander Hay.²³

¹⁹There was even another Gavin Hamilton in Calcutta at the same time, commander of the ship *Sydney Cove*, which traded commercial goods with New South Wales where he died in 1799 – BL APAC L/AG/34/29/11.

²⁰For biographies of William and the elder Gavin see entries in H. C. G. Matthew & B. Harrison (eds) *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004), 24, pp. 796, 919

²¹Bell attended Hope's *Materia Medica* class in 1766 and his botany class in 1769 – NAS GD 253/144/8/1 & 2.

²²For biographies of Benjamin Bell and Dr James Hamilton see entries in H.C.G. Matthew & B. Harrison (eds), *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004), 4 p. 910 [but note the portrait captioned as of Bell, is actually of Dr James Hamilton], and 24, p. 855.

²³For Gavin's early life see B. Bell, *The Life, Character & Writings of Benjamin Bell ...* (Edinburgh, 1868); and an unpublished journal of 1882 by the younger Benjamin Bell (1810–1883 – Gavin's great nephew) – typescript in Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh GD 16/3/2/1/2.

a



b



Figures 4a and 4b. Drawings from both the Jones collection and the Hope collection showing a similarity in style.

Gavin's elder brother (the transmitter of the drawing) became the well-known Edinburgh physician Dr James Hamilton 'Senior'.²⁴ James studied in Edinburgh at the High School and University, and then 'spent several years on the Continent'. On returning to Edinburgh he attended Hope's botany class in 1770 and 1771, graduating MD in the latter year.²⁵ Shortly thereafter he became one of the Physicians to the Royal Infirmary (where he would have had a role in clinical teaching and been a colleague of Hope), later adding to his portfolio similar positions at George Heriot's Hospital, the Merchant Maiden Hospital and the Trades' Maiden Hospital; he retired from the Infirmary in 1823. That James, like his brother, had a serious interest in the arts as shown by his unparalleled record of sitting for his portrait – no fewer than thrice to Sir Henry Raeburn, once, if not twice, to John Watson Gordon, once to William Dyce, and, for his bust, to the sculptor Samuel Joseph.²⁶

Having been unsuccessful at law, Gavin's friends applied on his behalf to that great source of Scottish patronage, Henry Dundas, and in 1777 he was offered a lieutenancy in Lord MacLeod's recently raised 73rd (later 71st) Regiment of Foot.²⁷ It is perhaps as well that he failed to take up this offer, as the regiment was destroyed in 1780 at the Battle of Conjeveram in the second Mysore War. Instead, taking the £300 he would eventually have received from his father's will, he followed his elder brother William to India going out on the *Glatton*,²⁸ which sailed in February 1778.²⁹ In India Hamilton became acquainted with the small (yet international) artistic community in Bengal – as already noted with Zoffany, but also with the portrait painter Ozias Humphry, whose correspondence in the Royal Academy throws light on Hamilton and includes three autographed letters from him.³⁰ It is recorded that Humphry painted Hamilton, and that the painting took eight days to complete.³¹ Hamilton gets incidental mention in the literature on Zoffany,³² and also that on the pioneering ethnographic artist, the Fleming, Balthazar Solvyns.³³ The Humphry correspondence shows that these artists all knew each other and took great interest in each other's (potentially competitive) activities. Zoffany included a portrait of Humphry in his famous painting of Colonel Mordaunt's cockfight painted, or at least sketched, when both artists coincided in Lucknow in April 1784.

Gavin Hamilton may well have visited London in December 1789 – as it is likely to have been he (rather than his Roman namesake) who acted as sponsor at the baptism of

²⁴In distinction to Dr James Hamilton 'Junior', his unrelated Edinburgh next-door neighbour: for further biographical material and caricatures of the pair see H. Paton, *A Series of Original Portraits and Caricature Engravings by the late John Kay ... with Biographical Sketches ...* (Edinburgh, 1837).

²⁵NAS GD 253/144/8/2 & 21; he may also be the James Hamilton who attended Hope's botany lectures in 1764 and 1767 – NAS GD 253/144/8/1.

²⁶P. Martin, "The painted doctor: portraits of the Edinburgh physician Dr James Hamilton Senior (1749 – 1835) by Sir Henry Raeburn and his contemporaries", *The British Art Journal* 10 (2009), pp. 32–42.

²⁷Bell, 1868, p. 60.

²⁸E. Cotton, "Letters from Bengal: 1788 to 1795 [the correspondence of Ozias Humphry]". *Bengal Past and Present*, 35 (1935), p. 108.

²⁹BL APAC L/MAR/B/172F.

³⁰Reproduced in Cotton, 1935.

³¹Archer, 1979, p. 200.

³²M. Webster (2011), *Johan Zoffany 1733–1810* (New Haven & London, 2011), pp. 460, 530, 536, 543, 581 – though confused with the Roman one in the Index.

³³R.L. Hardgrave, *A Portrait of the Hindus: Balthazar Solvyns & the European Image of India 1760–1824* (Ahmedabad and New York, 2004), p. 20.

a daughter of Anthony Angelo Tremamondo, another friend of Zoffany, whom Hamilton could have known when Angelo was Riding Master to the Army in Calcutta.³⁴ Hamilton was evidently a likeable character and when he appeared to be mortally ill in 1795 William Baillie (a Calcutta topographical artist) wrote of him “Society will in him lose one of the best tempered ingenious and worthy men it possesses & I shall lament him most sincerely”.³⁵ He recovered, but the only surviving autobiographical statement suggests that Hamilton was something of the confirmed bachelor, confiding to Humphry in 1794 “I always was backward in cultivating new acquaintances especially among the fair sex – and am sorry to find this increase upon me with years”.³⁶

Although going out in EIC service at some point Hamilton left it to become a private merchant, entering into partnership in Calcutta with Alexander Aberdein to form the Agency House of Hamilton & Aberdein. In 1800, both partners were executors of the will of the great Lucknow nabob Claude Martin, but Hamilton disappears from the *East India Register* in 1802. He retired to Tenby, where he set up house with his apparently far more prosperous brother William. They were doubtless enticed to South Wales by Sir William Paxton, a Berwickshire-born Calcutta nabob, latterly in the Agency House of Paxton, Cockerell & Trail, who retired to Wales, where Middleton Hall was built for him to designs of his partner Charles’s brother Samuel Pepys Cockerell.³⁷ Paxton developed Tenby as an upmarket resort from 1802 and must have solicited old India hands (those who had not made enough to set themselves up with estates of their own) to settle there.³⁸ After William’s death in December 1819 Gavin returned to Edinburgh where he lived initially with his brother Dr James at 22 St Andrew Square then with his widowed sister Grizel Bell around the corner at 12 Duke (now Dublin) Street. His great nephew in 1882 records a sad picture of Hamilton in old age “a very stout man, bloated and unwieldy from dropsy both of his body and limbs”; but that “as a young man, he must have been very good looking. We have an oil painting of him, *painted by himself*, which reminds me of Robert Burns”.³⁹ This, which is much more likely to have been the one that took Ozias Humphry eight days than a self-portrait, is regrettably no longer with the family. He survived his eldest brother by only a year – he died on 10 December 1820 and was buried at the Chapel of Ease to St Cuthbert’s, in Buccleuch Street, where his father had been interred in 1787. No tomb or inscription either for Gavin or his brother Dr James survives there – but there is a record of the transport, on a hearse, of Gavin’s corpse from Duke Street.⁴⁰ In his will Gavin left most of his money and property

³⁴C. Swynnerton, “The Angelo Family”, *The Ancestor*, 8 (1904), pp. 1–72. Swynnerton suggests it was the Roman GH, but there are other hints that it was the Calcutta one – Angelo’s wife’s grandfather had run the Edinburgh Theatre, and the other sponsor was Francesca Corri, the mezzo-soprano, whose father Natale was a member of the Edinburgh music publishing family.

³⁵RA HU/4/112, of 4 x 1795.

³⁶RA HU/4/90–1. None of his brothers formally married though William had three natural children with an Indian wife.

³⁷See H. C. G. Matthew & B. Harrison (eds), *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004), 43, pp. 186–187. The house, in severely Neo-Classical style, by contrast with the Faux-Mughal Sezincote that Samuel built for his brother Charles, is no longer extant; its grounds now form the National Botanic Garden of Wales.

³⁸<http://www.penmar-tenby.co.uk/tenby.html>, accessed 21 viii 2012.

³⁹Bell, [1882], pp. 26–27.

⁴⁰NAS OPR Deaths 685/02 0320 0158.

(including a collection of coins and medals) to his various Bell and Hamilton nephews, and a hint of his scientific interests is found in the Dollond telescope left to his brother Dr James.⁴¹

Gavin Hamilton as Draftsman

Though not in the same league as his Roman namesake, Gavin Hamilton was clearly a competent draftsman in the eighteenth-century topographical tradition. He continued to correspond with Ozias Humphry after the latter had returned to London, sending Indian art news – of Zoffany (including a critique of his ‘Last Supper’ in St John’s Church, Calcutta), and of the progress of Thomas and William Daniell, Francesco Renaldi, Arthur Devis, William Baillie and John Alefounder – in exchange for metropolitan news and copies of Rowlandson etchings. On 15 February 1789 Hamilton wrote to Humphry:

You are very good in the complimentary way about my drawings – they do not merit the encomiums you pay and are not worth your acceptance. I sent all I had home on the *Busbridge*; and have been so lazy or otherwise occupied since, that my Collection is very small indeed.⁴²

Five years later Hamilton appears to have given up his artistic efforts, writing to Humphry on 10 January 1794:

I am sorry I cannot send you any more drawings at present; having long since laid down the Pencil – partly from disgust, at finding I did not improve; and partly from having other avocations. Should another fit, or what is more properly rage, attack me, I shall not forget to send you some of its effects – for, any attempts I make in drawing, depend entirely on such fits – Unless I happen to be so influenced, the productions of my pencil, are tame & spiritless.⁴³

Whether these drawings were more elaborate (for example, coloured) than the two survivors is unknown. Hamilton’s Victorian great nephew Benjamin Bell opined that his great uncle’s drawings “indicate talent, but are often, although humorous, broad and coarse – indicating anything but delicacy of mind”.⁴⁴ Given Gavin’s efforts to obtain copies of Rowlandson’s etchings, might these have shown glimpses of bawdy Calcutta life? One can only speculate, as none have ever been identified, and none are in the collections of his descendants.⁴⁵

The Carnicobar Tree drawing

As already noted this drawing was sent to Hamilton’s former botany teacher at some point between 1778 and May 1786. It is more than a botanical drawing and might even be described as ‘proto-ecological’; shown centre-stage is the tree *Pandanus leram* (with its conspicuous prop roots) in a habitat heavily modified by man. On the skyline are silhouettes of the crowns of three coconut palms – source of the island’s main item of trade; in the right-hand foreground

⁴¹NAS SC70/1/25 Edinburgh Sheriff Court Inventories.

⁴²RA HU/4/18–9.

⁴³RA HU/4/90–1.

⁴⁴Bell [1882], p. 26.

⁴⁵John Bell, pers. comm. of 30 vii 2012, though much was lost in a warehouse fire in Colchester during World War II.

is what appears to be a young *Areca* palm, source of the betel nut; in the middle-ground is what appears to be an annual grain crop; the identity of the plant to the left is uncertain. Of ethnographical interest is the thatched roof of the circular hut shown more clearly in the RAS drawing; just visible is one of the ‘tailed’ natives entering the hut by means of a ladder, a motif repeated in the Jones drawing. A Carnicobar man is shown in rear view, carrying a yoke with a large pot and some smaller vessels. He wears the narrow bark loin cloth, which hangs in a loose ‘tail’ from between the buttocks. It is intriguing to speculate as to whether Hope might have shown this drawing to his friend James Burnet, Lord Monboddo, who had interesting ideas on the evolution of man (and speech) and believed that human races might exist possessed of tails – such as had been reported by seventeenth-century visitors to the Nicobar islands.

The Carnicobar Village drawing

The similarity in style between the drawings in the Hope and Jones collections (see Figs 3 a & b; 4 a & b) shows, beyond any reasonable doubt, that they are by the same artist, and most likely made at exactly the same time. Note, in particular, the handling of the crowns of the coconut palms; the method of showing the curve of the trunk and hut stilts by means of curved, parallel hatching; the shading of the thatch of the hut and the shape of its finial (which differs from the Nancowry huts later depicted by Colebrooke); and the method of stylisation of the foliage of broad-leaved trees – also the light ink wash of several shades applied in certain areas over the pen line-work. The attribution on stylistic grounds is strongly reinforced by the subject matter, and the drawing in the Jones collection would seem to be an illustration intended to accompany Hamilton’s paper. At this point Jones did not have an engraver capable of reproducing such a complex image, and in April 1790 wrote: “Alefounder is etching Sanscrit for me; but he is a tyro in that branch of art”⁴⁶ – the other illustrations in the second volume of *Asiatic Researches* are much simpler: diagrams, a primitive botanical drawing, and representations of early scripts. Features referred to in the text specifically illustrated in the drawing are (in order of appearance in the paper):

1. A pair of ‘hogs’, which, later on in the paper, are described as ‘remarkably fat’.
2. A woman – “their heads shaved quite bare, and wear no covering but a short petticoat, made of a sort of rush or dry grass, which reaches half way down the thigh”.
3. Two men – who “wear nothing but a narrow strip of cloth [sic] about the middle, in which they wrap up their privities [sic] so tight that there hardly is any appearance of them”. A similar view of a man climbing the ladder into the house is shown in the background of the Hope *Pandanus* drawing.
4. A Carnicobar dwelling – “each house contains a family of twenty persons upwards ... raised upon wooden pillars about ten feet from the ground; they are round, and, having no windows look like bee-hives, covered with thatch. The entry is through a trap door below, where the family mount by a ladder, which is drawn up at night. This manner of building is intended to secure the houses from being infested with snakes, rats, and

⁴⁶Quoted in Archer, 1979, p. 271.

- for that purpose the pillars are bound round with a smooth kind of leaf, which prevents animals from being able to mount”.
5. In the background the crowns of two coconut palms – the source of the commodity for “the ships that come to trade in cocoanuts”.
 6. The maypole-like structure on the extreme right must be the “kind of monument ... erected over the grave” of a woman whose burial Hamilton witnessed “with a pole upon it, to which long strips of cloth of different colours were hung”.

Fontana’s visit to the Nicobar Islands

It seems very likely that Fontana’s visit, with its first published record of the *Pandanus* for the Nicobar Islands, preceded Hamilton’s visit. Dr Nicola Fontana is as shadowy a figure as Gavin Hamilton – an Italian, according to the title-page of the French translation of his book, from Cremona – was surgeon on the ship *Giuseppe e Teresa*, belonging to the Imperial East India Company of Trieste,⁴⁷ under the command of the extraordinary entrepreneur and adventurer William Bolts (1739–1808).⁴⁸ The voyage took place between 1776 and 1781, during which time Bolts sailed up and down the west coast of India and set up factories in Malabar, before heading up the east coast to Calcutta, during which he tried to take the Nicobar Islands from Danish possession, setting up a base on the island of Nancowry. The stay in and around the Nicobars in July and August 1778 provided the experience behind Fontana’s paper in *Asiatic Researches*, though this was not published until 1792 by which time the author was based in Calcutta. Prior to this Fontana had published an account of the tropical diseases, with a daily meteorological diary, encountered on the voyage.⁴⁹ Fontana must have seen possibilities in Calcutta as he joined the British East India Company in 1783 as an Assistant Surgeon in Bengal.⁵⁰ A visit to London in 1789 is implied from a letter of introduction he secured that year from the Florentine G.V.M. Fabbroni to Joseph Banks.⁵¹ In Calcutta, in addition to Sir William Jones, Fontana must have become acquainted with William Roxburgh, as when Roxburgh was at the Cape of Good Hope in 1798 he entrusted his son George to Fontana’s care on a voyage to London, also a collection of seeds for delivery to Banks.⁵² This was not Fontana’s first visit to the Cape, as in the Nicobar paper is reference to his having shown a drawing of the Nicobar tree to Francis Masson in March 1790, when Masson observed that it differed essentially from “the palm ... found in the interior parts of Africa, which bears a sort of bread-fruit”.⁵³ Later in London, in 1799, Fontana published a pamphlet on the culture of cochineal in Bengal, Banks’s copy of which is in the British

⁴⁷For further details, see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Austrian_East_India_Company – accessed 31 vii 2012.

⁴⁸A disgruntled critic and former employee of the British EIC – see H. V. Bowen in H. C. G. Matthew & B. Harrison (eds), *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004), 6, p. 496.

⁴⁹N. Fontana, *Osservazione intorno alle malattie che attaccano gli Europei ne’ climi caldi e nelle lunche navigazioni ... fatte nel suo viaggio alle Indie dall’ anno 1776 al 1781* (Livorno, 1781).

⁵⁰D. G. Crawford, *Roll of the Indian Medical Service 1615 – 1930* (London, 1930), p. 36.

⁵¹BM Add. MS 8097 176.

⁵²BM Add. MS 33980 143–145.

⁵³Probably the cycad *Encephalartos*, the pith of which yields a starchy, bread-like substance. Masson, the great plant collector for Kew, was in South Africa with C. P. Thunberg from 1786 to 1795.

Library;⁵⁴ in 1800 a London physician pronounced him unfit to return to Bengal on account of hepatitis and abdominal hernia;⁵⁵ but though he resigned his Company service, he appears to have lived for a further 12 years, dying in 1812.

Colebrooke's visit to the Nicobar Islands

As the RAS drawing has until now been attributed to Robert Hyde Colebrooke (1762–1808), it is appropriate to say something about his visit to the Nicobar Islands that lies behind the misattribution. The visit formed part of a survey of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands undertaken with his superior Captain Alexander Kyd of the Bengal Engineers. Colebrooke left a diary of this trip, abstracts of which have been published by Phillimore,⁵⁶ in which it is recorded that the party, sailing south from the Andamans, reached the Nicobar Islands only at the very start of 1790, sighting Carnicobar (the most northerly of the group) on 1 January, surveying Nancowry (in the central Nicobar group, 160 km to the south-east) later that month. Given its position in the Jones collection, and its approximate date on stylistic grounds, it was entirely reasonable that Head should have assumed the drawing to have formed part of the material assembled by Sir William relating to his publication of Colebrooke's articles on the Nicobar and Andaman Islands; but Head also noted that there was related material in the India Office collections.⁵⁷

Jones appears to have had an interest in the islands of the Bay of Bengal and had already published two articles on the Nicobars – those by Hamilton and Fontana already discussed. Colebrooke's 'On the islands Nancowry and Comarty' was therefore the third in a series, published in volume 4 of *Asiatic Researches* in 1795. The paper is illustrated with a plate entitled 'Village huts on Nancowry Island', etched by Colebrooke after a drawing of his own. A contemporary copy of the latter is among the collection of papers referred to above, which were submitted by Alexander Kyd to the Calcutta Government in 1792 – this copy-drawing was reproduced by Mildred Archer,⁵⁸ attributed by her "probably to François Baltazard [sic] Solvyns", who signed two of the other copies in this compilation.⁵⁹ The subject in this image certainly has a generic resemblance to the Jones/Hamilton drawing of Nicobar huts and its rather looser style may owe as much due to the copyist as to Colebrooke's own drawing technique.

⁵⁴Fontana's interest must have started on the Austrian voyage, on which Bolts collected cochineal in Brazil, though the work reported in the pamphlet refers to a later introduction.

⁵⁵BL APAC D/154 f. 94.

⁵⁶R. H. Phillimore, *Historical Records of the Survey of India. Volume 1. 18th Century* (Dehra Dun, 1945), pp. 47–50, with biographical notes on Robert Alexander Kyd *l.c.*, pp. 327–347.

⁵⁷BL APAC MSS Eur. F. 21/I & II; see also G.R. Kaye & E.H. Johnston *India Office Library Catalogue of Manuscripts in European Languages Volume II part II: Minor collections and miscellaneous manuscripts* (London, 1937), pp. 567–570; and M. Archer, *British Drawings in the India Office Library. Volume II. Official and Professional Artists* (London, 1969), pp. 468–472.

⁵⁸Archer, 1969, plate 106.

⁵⁹See also Hardgrave, 2004, p. 29.

Alexander and Robert Kyd and the Mellori

The collection of papers and drawings assembled by Alexander Kyd for the Bengal Government contains much of interest; the drawings of which have been discussed by Archer,⁶⁰ and Hardgrave.⁶¹ In the papers are to be found two references to the Nicobar breadfruit – both of which are tantalising in referring to lost drawings. The first occurs in Appendix 11,⁶² an extract of a journal made by ‘Dr H’ on the island of Nancowry on 22 January 1786:

we likewise saw great quantities of the fruit, which has been compared to the Bread Fruit of the Islands in the South Sea, but there were few of them ripe ... When there I made a very rude sketch of the tree ... which I have sent with this ... I will likewise send you a description of the plant, as soon as I have time to copy it out of my Journal.

Unfortunately this drawing is no longer with the compilation, and the identity of ‘Dr H’ is a mystery – as it must also have been to Kyd, or he would surely have given the author’s full name. The ‘H’ cannot be a mis-transcription of ‘F’ for Fontana as the date is wrong, but might ‘Dr’ be a mistake for ‘Mr’, and the diary and drawing be the work of Gavin Hamilton? The date of the visit, January 1786, would just have given time for a copy to have been received in Edinburgh before Hope’s death in November of that year.

The second relevant paper in the compilation is Appendix 12, ‘Description of the Mellori Bread Fruit’,⁶³ written on 26 April 1790 by Alexander Kyd’s older cousin (at one remove) Colonel Robert Kyd,⁶⁴ in which is discussed several Andaman plants of potential economic use. Robert Kyd, Military Secretary to the Bengal Government, is best known for the Botanic Garden he established in 1786/7 next to his own property at Sibpur on the banks of the Hooghly south-west of Calcutta, which was formally transferred to the EIC by Alexander who inherited it on Robert’s death in 1793. Robert Kyd grew specimens of the ‘Mellori’ in the Botanic Garden (those later described by William Roxburgh, its first paid Superintendent, under the superfluous name *Pandanus millore*), but considered it no different to the native species of Bengal and as described by Hendrik van Rheedee in *Hortus Malabaricus* – by which Kyd probably intended the species with fragrant male flowers now known as *P. odoratissimus*.⁶⁵ Although Robert Kyd stated that a “Drawing of the fruit termed Millore accompany this Letter”, as with the drawing of the mysterious ‘Dr H’, this one is also missing.

From the point of view of revealing Robert Kyd’s outlook on life, surely extraordinary for a Company servant, the comments he made in this document on the perceived idyllic state of islanders such as those depicted by Gavin Hamilton, are worth quoting more fully than the brief extract given by Phillimore:

⁶⁰ Archer, 1969.

⁶¹ Hardgrave, 2004.

⁶² BL APAC MSS Eur. F. 95/1 ff 83–6.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, ff 87–89

⁶⁴ For information on the Kyd family, see C.S. Nairne, *John Nairne (1711–1795) (Minister of Anstruther Easter) and his Descendants* (Privately Printed, 1931).

⁶⁵ Rheedee described four species of *Pandanus* in volume 2 of *Hortus Malabaricus* (1679) – plate 6, under the Malayalam name ‘Kaida-taddi’, is the relevant one.

the natives are reported still to enjoy in no small degree the felicity of the Golden age, from being unfettered with the burthens of Government, Law, Religion, free from the impious inequality of social states— No Zemindars, Talokdars, Collectors, standing Armies, state Coachman, Postillions, Whispers in Wheelgreasers, Helpers, sacrificers, penal statutes, and Executioners, Impeachments, Expost facts regulations, Pawn Brokers and other vermin hitherto found inseparable from Social Government; in a word “That the sheep will do better on being left to take care of themselves, than under the care of Wolves for their Shepherds” realizing the wildest of Rousseau’s notions; insomuch that should the description given of it on further examination be confirmed in Justice to the original Jean Jacques it may be named Rousseau Island.

Such radical views stayed with Kyd up to his death, for in his will,⁶⁶ not only did he leave money to two servants for the following reasons:

To my native Servant known by the name of Rajemahl Missah, the monthly sum of Eight Rupees during his life, in retribution for the unsuitable Education given him, entailing separation from his native Soil and kindred— To the other native known by the name of George in reparation of injury done him by his former Master, in alienating him from his Tribe (understood Rajpoot) converting him to Christianity and secluding him from all future connection with his family

but he desired “that I may be buried in my own Garden without the attendance or offices of any Priest whatever”; specifying in a codicil that:

my Burial may be attended with no Military ceremony, and that I trust my friend Captain Apsley will pay due attention to this article, and see my last remains committed to the ground in my own Garden, on the West side of the Puckah Walled Tank, near to where an Alligator [i.e., avocado] Pear Tree now stands – and, that my Funeral expenses do not exceed three Hundred Rupees.

Evidently this was all a step too far for Captain Apsley, for Kyd was conventionally buried in South Park Street Cemetery, Calcutta, and in the inventory prepared after his death are to be found the following payments ‘[21 June 1793] T. Maudslay, undertaker for the funeral of the deceased Rs 787; Clergyman’s fees per T. Maudslay’s Receipt Rs 52’.⁶⁷

By way of conclusion, it is hoped that by drawing attention to Gavin Hamilton and his drawings, that further works of his might be identified. Henry Noltie H.Noltie@rbge.ac.uk

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⁶⁶BL APAC L/AG/34/29/8. 1793 no. 21.

⁶⁷BL APAC L/AG/34/27/15.