

Our family in India (introductory notes)

My grandmother was a Jacob, who married an Allen. Both families had been in India through most of the Raj (an Allen fought at the Battle of Seringapatam in 1799, according to Charles Allen, author of 'Plain Tales from the Raj'). Here are some examples:-

John Jacob of Jacobabad

By 1855, the lawless desert of the Upper Sind Frontier had been transformed by Brigadier-General John Jacob, who had raised two regiments of irregular horse, the Scinde Horse, planted trees, built roads, houses and canals, and converted "the murderer and robber into a harmless or industrious peasant." He invented a rifle with which his men could hit targets at 3,000 yards, when British soldiers in the Crimea considered 800 yards to be out of range. Described as a model of Plato's philosopher-king, "he was one of those rarest spirits who love work – good, true and noble work – for its own sake" (*The Spectator*). His achievements were the more remarkable, considering that he suffered all his life from an uncontrolled stutter.

Perspicacious and outspoken, he publicly warned of the impending Mutiny, 7 years beforehand, predicting that regiments organised on his principles would remain loyal. He just lived to see both prophecies fulfilled. His regiments were "the nucleus of a new social order and progress" and after the Mutiny, the Indian armies were remodelled on his principles. His name was to be uniquely commemorated in 3 regiments: Jacob's Horse, Jacob's Rifles and Jacob's Mountain Battery.

At his death at 46 in November 1858, it was said, "For 15 years he had ruled these people, his name only was known, feared and respected such as no other ever had been, or ever will be" (Green, 1859, in Lambrinck, 1960). Though tributes poured in from all India and Britain, from press and parliament, it is his reputation among the people of Sind and Baluchistan that has proved most potent. Remembered as much for his generosity and kindnesses to the poor as for his skill in warfare and on horseback, he "was looked upon as next to Mahomed by many of the Hill tribes," according to a Hindu officer of the Bengal Army (Lambrinck, 1960). The appearance of a comet at that time was deemed to signal "the passing away of the wondrous being who had created a new order in the land" (Lambrinck, 1960). His biographer, H T Lambrinck, visiting Jacobabad in 1940, found that his "tomb still figures in a ceremony of intercession, when the spirit of Jacob the 'Wali', the spiritual father of his people, is invoked to restore health to an ailing child... Hindus as well as Muslims observe the ritual at need." My brother-in-law, Paul East, on a more recent visit was told that the citizens of Jacobabad had declined the government's request to Islamify their city's name, not wishing to break their association with 'Jacob the Wali'.

Jacob of 'Western India'

On a recent visit to Mumbai, I wandered into the David Sassoon Library and came across the book 'Western India' by Maj-General Sir George Le Grand Jacob (John Jacob's first cousin). Jacob had written the book after a long and 'trying' administrative and military career, which included putting down the Western rebellion

of 1857 (the Mutiny did indeed spread to Western India). His aim, he said, was for the British to learn the lesson that just and effective government is only possible after studying the feelings of the governed: "Surely if we wish to know whether the shoe pinches, we should rather ask the wearer than the maker." In this, he appears to have been true to his own precepts.

Though the account of the Western rebellion is harrowing, and Jacob's frustration at the inadequacies of British justice and administration is pervasive, there are many fascinating episodes. One such is the account of Jacob's role in a rajah's succession. After surviving an attempted poisoning and returning a large bribe intended for his predecessor, Jacob ensured the accession of a baby who turned out to be the sole male heir. He managed this by placing a guard around the palace during the mother's confinement, ensuring the Company doctor witnessed the birth and then facing down the protests of 3 of the dowager ranees. The old ranees insisted unavailingly that they would not have some smuggled-in coolie's child foisted on them as heir. There is a revealing conversation with the Chief Minister after the return of the bribe. The latter asked Jacob first, why he had come to India if it was not to enrich himself, and second, what was the point of power if one didn't profit from it. The Minister clearly didn't know the Jacobs.

In spite of a slight note of bitterness in Jacob's reminiscences, he achieved at least one notable success. He concluded the Western rebellion peacefully, by persuading all remaining rebels to surrender to the Portuguese and to take safe passage to a new life in Timor, through the generous cooperation of the Portuguese commander of Goa, the Visconde de Novas Torres. This remarkable feat was unrecognised. The British, it seemed, were only interested in glorifying the clash of arms.

'Punjab' Jacob

Colonel Sydney Long Jacob (John Jacob's nephew and my great-grandfather) was credited by *Indian Engineering* (26 April, 1913) with rescuing the now-famous canal system of the Punjab from the state of "utter despondency" into which it had fallen in the 1880s. "In whatever charge he happened to be placed, it seemed to awake like magic to the vigour of his administration... Whatever he touched, wherever his advice was sought, his forceful, clearly-expressed opinions revealed dark places with flashes of forked lightning. He was always in advance of the views of the day, often in opposition, but it was seldom he was not proved to be right in the end."

A classic Jacob, that is, a "genius for inspiring devotion among those under his command", but provoking gall in his seniors, who "feeling that he was more right than it was convenient for them to admit, were not always over-pleased at the candour of his criticisms." His efforts have borne fruit many thousand-fold. Today the Punjab is the granary of the subcontinent.

He also found time to found the Panahpur community for famine orphans, which continues to this day. Sadly, however, his greatest failure was with his eldest son, Sydney Montague Jacob (see below). The father's ardent Plymouth Brethrenism was a strong factor in their dissociation.

Sir George Allen

My other great-grandfather was co-founder of Cooper Allen & Co in Cawnpore (now Kanpur) and *The Pioneer*, India's leading English language newspaper – among other business and journalistic ventures. In an active life, he had lived through the Mutiny in Delhi and survived the wreck of the *Tasmania* off Corsica in 1887. Though an implacable opponent of Hume, the founder of the Congress Party, and indeed of Indian nationalism, he maintained contacts with Congress leaders, such as the first president, Bonnerjee, as well as with government.

Allen's most lasting contribution, however, must be in recognising the precocious literary talents of the young Kipling, which he fostered at *The Pioneer*, in spite of the teenage poet's evident distaste for the routine chores of junior journalists. Clive Rattigan has written that "much of Kipling's best work was produced while he was on *The Pioneer* and in the back files of the paper can, I have reason to believe, be found buried even now verses, sketches and stories by Kipling that have not been unearthed and republished." (Yalland 1994, *Boxwallahs*)

Sydney Montague Jacob

Another classic Jacob, brilliant and unbending, an outstanding mathematician, scholar and captain of the Indian Davis Cup team, he was sadly estranged from his own parents (see 'Punjab' Jacob) and, for much of his life, from most of the family. His residual bitterness may be inferred from the title of his autobiography, *Favour for Fools in a Decadent Empire*. He still retained great charm, however, and I had several long, fascinating conversations with him in his nineties.

He told me this story: in April 1919, he was Director of Agriculture in Amritsar and on the 13th, before setting off on tour, he called on the District Commissioner, Miles Irving. Shocked to find Irving in military uniform and being told that responsibility had been handed over to General Dyer, he berated Irving for this abdication of responsibility. Irving demurred and shortly after they were called to Dyer's HQ, where they were told that Dyer had fired on a mob, killing many. Though Dyer had wired the Lieutenant Governor of the Punjab, Sir Michael O'Dwyer, Jacob insisted that Irving should write out a full report. He eventually prevailed over both Dyer's and Irving's opposition and drove to Lahore to deliver the report, with a Sikh friend, Wathen, the principal of the Khalsa College for the sons of Indian princes. They arrived at 3am and awoke Sir Michael, who read the report and responded frostily to their comments.

Irving's actions were in marked contrast to Jacob's own, when a week later he was asked to accompany troops on a punitive action in a village near Lahore. He insisted to the astonished major that he, Jacob, was in command, left the troops outside the village and, entering unarmed with two officers, dealt with the matter (telegraph wires had been cut).

Incidentally, at an ICS meeting at the Punjab Club in 1918, he had proposed the resolution that India should be granted independence forthwith. Several ICS men spoke against the motion, including Sir Patrick Fagan, who described it as a "betrayal of our sacred trust", and it was resoundingly defeated.

disgrace. He survived, however, to become a vital member of Churchill's 'Secret Circle', with Generals Ismay and Hollis, throughout the war. He accompanied Churchill to most of the major allied conferences, such as Casablanca and Yalta. Years later, his assessments of the war leaders and their roles proved most revealing. After the war, he was to become one of the outstanding director-generals of the BBC.

Writing this, I have been struck by a recurring trait of the Jacobs. Ever their own men and unbending to the establishment, they formed their own opinions, regardless of received wisdom. They were generally right, to the great irritation of their superiors. Thus, they were often under-recognised.

Geoffrey and Monica Lehmann (my parents) (see also Nella Allen, above)

Arriving newly married in India in 1934, they set up the Herbertpur Christian Hospital (HCH), near the River Jamuna in the Doon Valley, in 1936. They chose this beautiful spot because of its remoteness, but it meant they had to build from scratch, laying on water and electricity, making bricks, training workers, both construction and medical. It was soon established as the mountain people's hospital, patronised particularly by the nearby Jaunsaris, but even occasionally from as far as Tibet and Nepal. In the high Himalayas, near the Tibetan border, they sang a folk-song in honour of the hospital and its founders:-

"My son, there are many big houses thronged by several scores of patients. They lie not on wooden planks, but in wooden and iron frames. People get well there. The blind get their lost sight. We took your aged grandfather on our back there. From there he returned, wearing glasses, walking with the help of a stick."

Fungu Mama was badly mauled by a bear. We tied his bleeding body to a bamboo and 16 people with a lantern descended down the hills. He got well and came back sitting on the horse's back..."

"Dr Lehmann is a firingi. He came from across the Seven Seas. He says his God has sent him here. He walks very swiftly, speaks softly with a smiling twinkle in his eyes. He gives medicines and injections, and sings songs praying to his God for the cure of his patients..."

Though latterly the hospital was supported by several international agencies, my parents were always responsible for the bulk of the funding. My father was the only doctor for most of the nearly 40 years he was in charge of what became a 120-bedded hospital. In 1969 for instance, at the age of 65, he saw an average of 240 patients a day, 6 days a week, and performed over 400 eye operations and 100 general operations in the year. He also chaired the Wynberg-Allen School (see Nella Allen, above) for 37 years.

Today, with a staff of 7 doctors, the HCH is one of the stars of the Emmanuel Hospital Association (EHA), which has 19 hospitals and 27 community health projects in Northern India. The work continues to flourish and expand. The family connection remains (see below).

Incidentally, my mother and I were both true children of the Raj, being born in May (women and children were sent to the hills from June to August). Indeed, I was due on my mother's birthday, 25th May, but she tangled with a tonga pony in Mussoone bazaar a few days before. So I was literally kicked out early – such were the perils of life in the Raj.

The current generations

The family tradition has been continued most strongly by my sister and brother-in-law, Su and Paul East, who worked at HCH from 1973-1986, when new visa restrictions forced their departure. They have remained closely associated with the EHA, eg in UK fund-raising, ever since, nowadays visiting India 3 or 4 times a year for their work.

Su and Paul's children, Lawrence and Rachel, were partly educated at Woodstock School in Mussoorie. Lawrence returned there later to work for 2 years and met his wife there. Several of the family have done spells of voluntary work, either at HCH or at Wynberg-Allen or both, eg my cousin, Marion Myers (née Broomhall), and our children, Michael and Ana. Ana has just written a book on India, 'The Pachisi Board'.

The ties hold firm. I know I will be visiting India so long as I am able to.

Donald Lehmann, 12 March 2002

References

The information above is largely from:-

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Boxwallahs: the British in Cawnpore (1857-1901), Z Yalland, 1994

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A few other, brief sources are available