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Sir Hector Munro's Novar Estate ~Fyrish monument



Robert Owen – father of the co-op movement

*'Connections between  
Scotland and India - a personal view'*

*by*

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Good evening, everyone. May I, on behalf of the Heritage Society, extend a big welcome to you all. It's nice to see some visitors here, and some old friends as well. So, this is the third of our summer lectures. I think they're generally acknowledged to have been a success. I was only here for the first one, and this is the last one.

But tonight, of course, we're all looking forward to our guest, my friend, Dr Manish Basu. Manish is going to talk to us about connections between Scotland and India. So, please, everyone, a very good welcome to Manish.

Thank you very much indeed. Gosh, I wasn't expecting so much. But it's lovely, lovely to see you all.

Good evening. But first of all, I must thank Robin for asking me to talk here tonight. And I must also thank all of you for coming here to hear me rambling about connections between Scotland and India.

Talking about connections between any two countries, the mechanisms that lead to the establishment of connections between those two countries can be unique and unusual. As you all very well know, connections between Canada and Scotland were established mainly through emigration during the late 18th and 19th centuries. And a large part of this emigration had to do with highland clearances.

Connections between India and China developed as a result of Buddhism spreading from India into China from the 2nd century BC onwards. So there are special and unusual reasons for connections being established between two countries. Connections between an individual from one country with another quite different country can also be established by enterprise and highly unusual means.

For example, a Burmese friend of mine always claimed that he was a Scot by absorption. Apparently his grandfather ate a Scottish missionary! I cannot claim such high culinary origins from my Scottish connections.

But I can claim to be a Scot by adsorption. Historical images of Scotland and cultural information about Scotland gets adsorbed onto the surface of my brain and into my memory. And that remains.

Fate has also played a very large part in my becoming a Scot by adsorption. I was born of Bengali parents and received my undergraduate education in Calcutta. Calcutta and Bengal have a very strong Scottish flavour. In that, place names such as Elgin Road, Dalhousie Square, Loudon Street, etc. etc. are common. Schools and colleges established by Scots are named Scottish Churches College, Duff College, Bethune School. And they are well known, very well known in fact, in Calcutta. Children are brought up with those names and the names become very familiar. And then there were the Scottish mercantile firms, of course, with names such as McKinnon McKenzie's, McLeod's, Duncan and McNeagle's and large numbers of others. And there were major employers in that part of the world.

I then came to Edinburgh for my postgraduate education. And there I also received education about matters of the heart. Fate has been very good to me. I am now the lucky recipient of a Scottish wife, kind and caring Scottish relations and friends.

Now, how and when did connections between Scotland and India begin? I've told you already about Bengal and Calcutta, all these Scottish names and all that. But when did they begin? I think they began when Scots got involved in East India Company business in Bengal and Calcutta. And then later on, the rest of India, after the Battle of Plassey, which was won by Robert Clive in 1757. That's when it all started, I think.

Why did the Scots go to India to work for the East India Company? This is a quote from Tom Devine's book on Scottish history and it summarises the reasons for Scots going to different parts of the world to earn a living. Destruction of the clan system and taking away their powers through legislation, such as the Clans Acts, the Militia Acts, etc., and a number of other acts as well, especially after the clan rebellion of 1745, led to great changes in the social structure of the highlands. A new class of Whig landowners developed, and the Scottish Militia Act came into being, allowing some landowners to have their own military regiments. One such Whig landowner was Sir Hector Munro.

He was originally from Fowles, but later of Novar. And he went with his clan regiment to India in 1760, three years after the Battle of Plassey. He won some battles for the Company in India, lost some, we won't mention those, and he came back three to four years after leaving Fowles with 120,000 rupees in his bag. A rupee in those days was equivalent to a pound, and Sir Hector decided to establish the Novar estate with the money. But the money wasn't enough, and so he went back to India two years later, and came back with another 120,000 pounds. At the time, the land around Novar, and that part of the Cromarty Firth, was barren and without much character, and Sir Hector decided to build his large mansion, gardens, farmland, and follies resembling Indian temples and gates in and around Novar. Hills were flattened, trees planted, he planted about a million trees apparently, and he planted the first large trees in these areas. Novar is full of beautiful large trees. If you ever get a chance to go to Novar estate, you'll be able to see them. I'll show you pictures of those. Trees planted, buildings built, and a Fyrish monument that you all see as you pass was built to commemorate one of his victories in India. I've got a picture of that. And those columns apparently resemble the gates of a city, which people here call Negapatnam. I don't think it's Negapatnam, it's Srirangapatnam, which was the capital of Hyder Ali and Tipu Sultan. And Sir Hector was involved in battle with Hyder Ali. There were three battles that were fought in fact. One he lost, two he won. It was not only him, there was also Cornwallis who was involved in the whole business. But however, he came back and he built that to resemble the gates of Srirangapatnam.



Novar is full of large trees. In fact, they're named Larch Avenue and this, that and the other. But I'm sure you will agree with me when I say that Sir Hector made good use of the monies that he brought back from India. As a consequence, we are now able to enjoy the gentle and pleasing landscape that he brought into being.



Here is another Scotsman who I find interesting because of his associations with the East India Company and also for his concern for the people of Sutherland and the Highlands generally. He was involved in the setting up of the Fisheries Society, became a commissioner for building of roads and bridges in the Highlands and setting up of the cotton spinning industry in the Highlands, that's right, in Sutherland. George Dempster was born in Dundee in 1732 and he had his education in St. Andrews in Edinburgh. And then he inherited the estate of Dunagan in Forfar. He came to be known as Sir George Dempster of Dunagan and later became the MP for Perth District in 1761.

He became a proprietor or shareholder, a major shareholder of the East India Company in 1763. And his half-brother, John Hamilton Dempster, became a commander and captain of

East India Company ships. They achieved considerable success in the service of East India Company and acquired Skibo in 1786, Pool Rossi in 1781 and Over Skibo Sir George Dempster of Dunagan in 1796.

George Dempster also became involved in the setting up of the Scottish cotton industry with Sir Richard Arkwright, the inventor of the spinning mule and David Dale of Paisley, well-known Glasgow cotton merchant. They established, that's Dempster and David Dale with Arkwright, they established the cotton mills in Stanley in Perth, just north of Perth, and in New Lanark besides the Clyde. He then decided to establish a cotton spinning mill on the Skibo land in Spansiedale, the old name for Spinningdale, and a linen weaving mill in Balnell, or the present day in Newton Point. And that's Newton Point, and there's this shed there in Newton Point, a lot of you must have noticed, and there's this bit of hardware, some sort of a contraption outside. I don't know what these are, I'm still researching on these. I've sent pictures of this contraption to the Manchester Cotton Museum to find out whether it had to do with cotton or whether it's a weighing machine or what. That shed, I'm not quite sure, I've been told



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that that shed was used at one time to store coal for the Carnegies. But whether there was a shed before that, I don't know. Certainly there was a weaving mill that was established by George Dempster in Balnell, and it was called the Balnell weaving mills. And he did all this to generate jobs in this part of Sutherland, which was very, very poor. The mills were built between 1792 and 1794. However, the building of mills didn't work out as a successful venture. A failure, in fact. And in 1806, it was accidentally destroyed by a fire and never rebuilt. And this is a picture of the ruins of Spinningdale from Newton Point. Oh, sorry. Across the bay. Yes, yes, that's it

Sorry, thank you very much. It's across the bay that I'm looking. This is Struie, I need not tell you, from Newton Point. Whenever I view Struie across the water of Dornoch Firth, I see in my mind's eye boats laden with cotton spindles and woven linen on their way to the southern ports of the country. It's a beautiful view from there, in fact. And the water passing there, it's absolutely lovely.

Related to this whole thing that I was talking about the cotton mills and everything else, I have to mention this gentleman. He was a Welshman, Robert Owen his name, and not a Scotsman. He's considered to be the father of the co-operative movement, and also a pioneer of the concept of better living conditions for workers to create a happy atmosphere in mills and factories. Happy conditions lead to better productivity, better people, and better productivity. That's what his motto was. And he established the New Harmony Cotton Mill and Model Township in Indiana in the USA, and people go in droves to see that place. And he also modified New Lanark, which is situated on the Clyde, and I'm sure a lot of you have been to New Lanark to see that township as well, into a model working township. He came to Spinningdale Mill to help Dempster to set up a model



township for the workers, but alas, it didn't come to anything. But that's another connection, and the thing about Spinningdale, not only the ruins, but all these things that I find very interesting.

I'm not sure which green this is. Maggie will kill me. I think it is the 14th green of the RGDC. That is major putting there. But I think this is who you think it is. He hasn't got a cigar, but nevertheless, it's quite clear that it is Clinton. But forget all that. What I want you to concentrate on is the shore line on the other side, the shore line of Easter Ross.

And somewhere in there, Easter Ross, Guineas is tucked in there somewhere. And in the 18th century, Guineas was quite an important and prominent place with Lord John MacLeod of Guineas being the sheriff of Tain and the surrounding area. Lord John MacLeod went away to Sweden with his clan regiment to work as a mercenary for the King of Sweden in 1749.

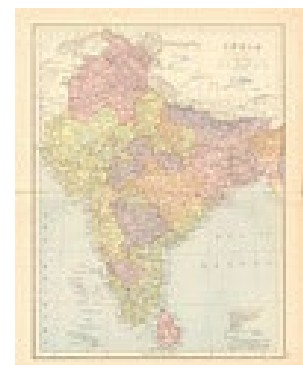
He then went to India with his regiment in 1778 to work for the East India Company. After he came back, he apparently set up the business of sheep farming in Easter Ross lands, and some people believe that he was responsible for introducing sheep in Easter Ross and those parts beyond on the hills as well. All sort of places.

His descendants, however, were involved in the notorious indigo plantations in Bengal, and later one of his descendants, Lieutenant General John Duncan MacLeod of Guineas, became a lieutenant governor of Punjab. John Duncan MacLeod's wife died in India, childless, when he was in service. He came back to Scotland after he retired, after about 30 to 35 years, with two children, John and Jessie, but they didn't seem to have a traceable mother.

Nobody could trace who the mother was. They were not given their father's surname, MacLeod, but his Christian name, Duncan, became their surname, and they were known as John and Jessie Duncan. Untraceable back to the MacLeods of Guineas, I suppose. I have the feeling that they may have been born as a result of his liaison with an Indian mistress. John Duncan and his son, also a John Duncan, became planters in Ceylon. The younger John Duncan's daughter married a coffee planter with the name Monty Philby, and they gave birth to a son, the legendary Jack Philby of Arabia. He was a great man, a scholar. He knew about 18 or 19 languages, Eastern languages and Middle Eastern languages as well, and he was, in some ways, responsible for the setting up of Iraq and all that. Very well-known man, but he in turn fathered a son named Kim Philby, notorious Kim Philby.

Such were the connections with the Easter Ross and East India Company, sheep farming, indigo farming, governing the Punjab and fathering Anglo-Indians. And then Kim Philby had some sort of connection as well.

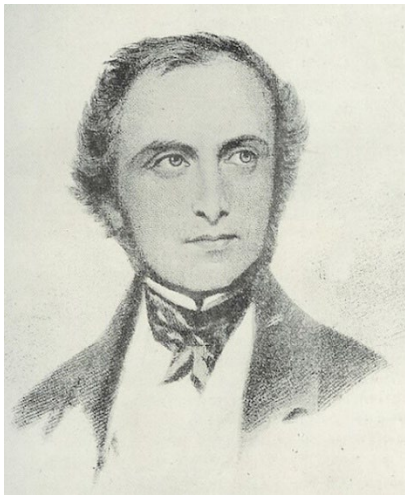
This is a picture of a map of India showing British territory in 1765 and 1805. I'll give you a little time to just make note. You can see how the British territory increases or increased with time. In 1805, it was quite large, in fact, and as British territory got bigger, and as the East India Company wallahs were seen to be making more and more monies, it became necessary, and they were really making big money. The East India Company people, Warren Hastings, for example, made about 10 million pounds.





Clive himself made huge sums of money, and there were rupee nabobs all throughout the highlands, in fact. They seemed to be making more and more money. It became necessary for Parliament to step in, and the East India Company Regulating Act was enacted in 1773, and Pitt's India Act in 1784. These and other acts were brought in to establish Parliament's authority with the East India Company's shareholders and their operatives in India.

At this time, we find a second wave of Scots. Administrators, educationalists, lawyers, merchants unrelated to the East India Company, doctors, missionaries going to India. Some of these people were idealistic people, fired by Enlightenment thoughts about rights of citizens, responsibility of state towards its citizens, economic activity and its relation to good government, etc., and they went to India with the intention of putting these ideas into practice.



My next Scotsman was one of many such men, and he's one of my heroes. His name was John Elliot Drinkwater Bethune. He's hardly known in this country, but he's revered to this day in India as the man who tried to remove the exemption enjoyed by the European British subjects from the jurisdiction of the criminal courts of the East India Company, and a number of other such practices that the East India Company had started there. But more importantly, he is revered as the man who established the first girls' school in Calcutta to dispense Western liberal education. John Elliot Drinkwater Bethune was born in 1801.

His father was Colonel John Drinkwater, who was born in Warrington in Cheshire. His mother's name was Eleanor Congleton, and she was born in Salford, Manchester. But Eleanor's grandmother on her mother's side was a Bethune of Balfour Castle in Fife. Father Drinkwater joined the Manchester Volunteers and participated in and wrote the definitive history of the Siege of Gibraltar. That's what he's very well known for. But he was also a very good friend of Commodore Nelson.

Horatio Nelson was then Commodore and was a good friend of his. And Father Drinkwater witnessed the Battle of Cape St. Vincent off the coast of Trinidad against the Spanish flotilla. And it was he who gave a proper account of the role Commodore Nelson played in the battle and won the battle almost single-handed. And then Nelson, of course, became later, but it was in fact Father Drinkwater who gave the proper account of that whole battle.

Colonel Drinkwater and his wife Eleanor moved to Balfour when Eleanor's brother Gilbert Bethune died, and she and her husband inherited the ownership and the title of the Bethune estates because the brother died intestate. Colonel John Drinkwater became Colonel John Drinkwater Bethune and his son John Elliot Drinkwater Bethune after that. Son John Elliot Drinkwater Bethune went to Trinity College, Cambridge and became the fourth Wrangler in his university exams. He was then called to the bar in 1827. He was employed on several government commissions and subsequently as counsel to the Home Office in London, which he served for 14 years. During that time, he was responsible for a number of acts, and all that sort of thing. Quite a number of acts and I can't remember the names now.

During his student days in Cambridge, he wrote quite a lot of scientific articles. He wrote a book on Galileo Galilei and he wrote a book on the theory of probability. So he was quite a scientist. But he also wrote plays on Joan of Arc. In fact he translated a definitive writing by Gustav Schiller, the well-known German playwright, on Joan of Arc. While in London, he became involved with the 'Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge' established in London at the University College of London. The University College of London, of course, was established by Jeremy Bentham, the utilitarian. Utilitarians, of course, believed in the greatest good for the greatest number. One of the things they used to believe was that they could bring the greatest good for the greatest number by trying to encourage people's innovativeness, as it were. Those were the days when there were various things being discovered, things which enabled manufacture in large quantities, sold in the market, money made. And that money could then be utilised to improve the living conditions of the people. That's what they believed in, and that's why they used to go and give lectures to ordinary people and then produce pamphlets and all that sort of thing, talking about the nature of science, how we do scientific experiments, etc.

In 1848, Bethune was appointed a legislative member of the Supreme Council of India and after his arrival in India, he accepted the presidency of the Council of Education, for which he didn't accept any money, any pay. He became very friendly with some Indians who themselves had been influenced by the ideas propounded by Hobbes, Locke, Bentham, Hume, and other Enlightenment authors. He became very friendly with them. With two of his Indian friends, one of whom provided land, another who provided money, Bethune established the girls' school, which he called 'Hindu School for Girls' at first. Bethune himself sold some of his assets in Britain and put the monies in this venture. Lord Dalhousie, who was then the Governor General, gave his support too, and the school was built and renamed the 'Bethune School for Girls'. It became a pioneer institution, educating middle-class Hindu and Muslim girls in humanities, science, and other subjects.

A number of these girls went on to become great educationalists themselves, spreading Western liberal education throughout India. The first doctors in India from this school went on to study in the medical school, with the first women doctors coming out in 1884, long before it happened in this country. The school is one of the major teaching institutions in Calcutta to this day, and every 12th August, the girls from the school lay flowers on John Elliot Drinkwater Bethune's grave.

He died in 1851, at an early age of only 50 years, and he's commemorated on Indian postage stamps alongside Gandhi, Nehru, and other national leaders. He died a bachelor, and he left his estate to Bethune School in his will. Well, I've come to the end of my musings.

It's a very personal and maybe some type of view of Indo-Scottish connections, but a valid and sympathetic one, I feel. I'd be very pleased to answer any questions you'd like to ask.

Thank you.