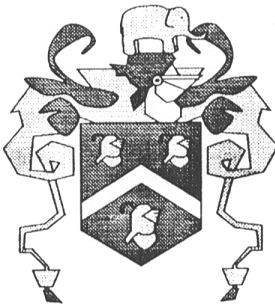


William Fremlen of India



Edna M. Rawlings

To Albert

for his unfailing encouragement

My special thanks to Peter, Graham and Robert - the production team; and to David Fremlin, Bamber Gascoigne, George Cooper, Rosemary Crill of the V & A and the British Library staff for all their help and guidance.

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William Fremlen of India

The story of a 17th century merchant

by

Edna M. Rawlings

FOREWORD

If a handsome valet had not wooed and won a young servant girl in 1858, I might never have heard of William Fremlen. The valet was my great grandfather, Frederick William Swift, and the girl he married was Ellen Capon, youngest child of Maria Margaret nee Fremlin, a member of that old established Kent family.

William himself had no children and, therefore, has no direct descendants, but this fact enables all who can trace their Fremlin lineage to claim him as their own.

I hope that the reader will feel something of the fascination that I have experienced in piecing together his life in the early days of the East India Company.

E.M.R.

Names & Dates

The spelling of names in the 17th century was not standardised and variations, even within a single document, were many. To avoid confusion, I have adopted the spelling which differs only slightly from the modern version but which occurs most often in source material - Fremlen.

During the period covered, the year ran from 1st April to 31st March. For the purposes of this narrative, the modern dating has been used, e.g. 13th March 1645 becomes 1646.

FROM SHOREDITCH TO SURAT

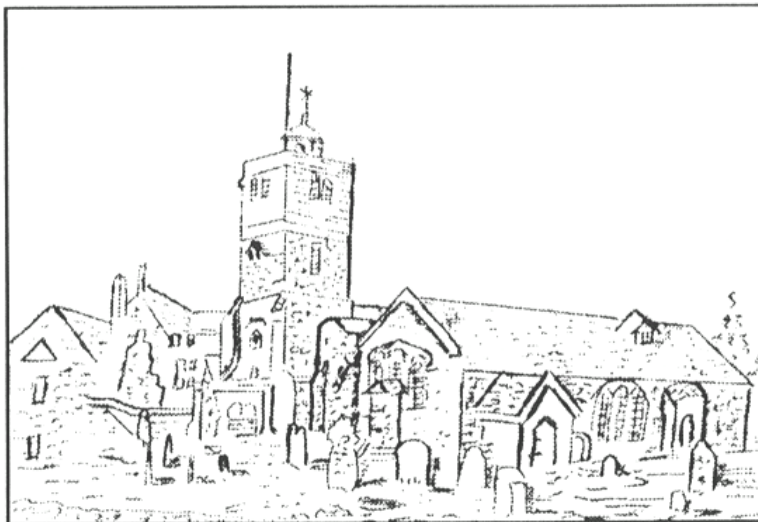
The summer sun shone brightly through the window of his room as George Fremlen called the servant girl to put another pillow at his back. Just sitting up was an effort but now he could look out over the green fields of Birchetts Down to the wood near Five Acres. The farm was in as good heart now as when his father had left it to him - and so it should be, for weren't they all husbandmen with a duty to the lands and people in their care?

Others would come after him, generation after generation, inheriting the lands which had been in the family for some four centuries. In another thirteen years a new century would begin, the seventeenth, and what would that bring, he wondered. No matter, he would not be here to see it; indeed, he might not even see this year's harvest gathered in.

He turned his mind to the task in hand, setting out the disposal of his lands, livestock and household effects to his wife and three sons. The two elder, James and George, were already of lawful age, but Thomas, the youngest, was still at school. Even so, he should receive 'one ewe shepe' with the promise of one third of the residue of the estate on reaching 21. With two sons already working his lands, George felt able to direct that, although Thomas should stay at school till he could read and write, he should then be free to choose whether his future lay here in Kent or in London - in either case, he should be bound to some good occupation and receive twenty pence a quarter during such apprenticeship.

Tomorrow, his friends, William Hesselden and John Knight, would come to act as witnesses to his signature. He took the pen in his hand and started to write "This is the last will and testament of me George Fremlen of Kemsing being sick in body but sound of mind..."

Did the youngest son go to London? It is certainly true that one Thomas Fremlen was married at St. Brides Church in Fleet Street on the seventh of August 1597, his bride being Ann Taillor of Herefordshire. Three years later, when their daughter, Sara, was born, they were living in the parish of St. Leonards in nearby Shoreditch and it was here that their first son, William, was born. He was baptised in that church on the first of November 1607 and became a regular attender; one of the first sounds which became familiar to him was the peal of 12 bells of the old church - bells which Queen Elizabeth had heard on her progress to Enfield and "expressed herself much pleased with them".



St. Leonard Shoreditch Old Church

As his parents exchanged the time of day with fellow worshippers outside the church door after the service, William was intrigued by the skeleton lying full length above the gate with an hourglass and skulls at each side. He asked his father why it was there and was told that it was to remind them of their mortality; he added that the music shown above it was the 100th psalm, exhorting them to "Enter into His gates with thanksgiving...and bless His name". By the time he was nine, the last of Thomas and Ann's children had been baptised and the family over-flowed into another pew, having now four sons and four daughters. As he grew up, William was taken out and about in the City and down to the bustling Docks at Blackwall where the tall ships were being built by the East India Company ready for their voyages to the East, the first such journey by their own ship having taken place in 1601: he loved to watch ships moving down the river from their other yard at Deptford.

Two years before William's birth, in faraway India, the greatest of the Great Moguls, emperor Akbar died and was succeeded by Jahangir, to whom Captain Hawkin, of the East India Company, sailed to seek trading concessions in 1607. Four years later, a factory was established at Masulipatam and in 1613 the Portuguese were defeated at Swally Hole and a factory established at Surat. (A factory consisted only of residences, offices and storehouses, unlike the later manufactories of the Western world). These last two places were to become very familiar to William.

On Monday, April 3rd 1626, he went before the Court of Committees of the East India Company, consisting of Mr. Shereife Petherone, Deputy Governor, Mr. Aldoan Dacy, Mr. Trevor Bateman, Mr. Leate, Mr. Denn, Mr. Warner, Mr. Crispe, Mr. Browne, Mr. Mustard and Mr. William Garway. He was entertained into the company's service for seven years and was to be paid £10 per annum for the first three years, rising by £10 after that time. It was stipulated that he was to be "brought up" in one of the company's factories. He was then just turned 18 years of age, well-educated and confident that he would spend those seven years making his fortune, to return from the East at twenty-five and take his place among the wealthy merchants of the city.

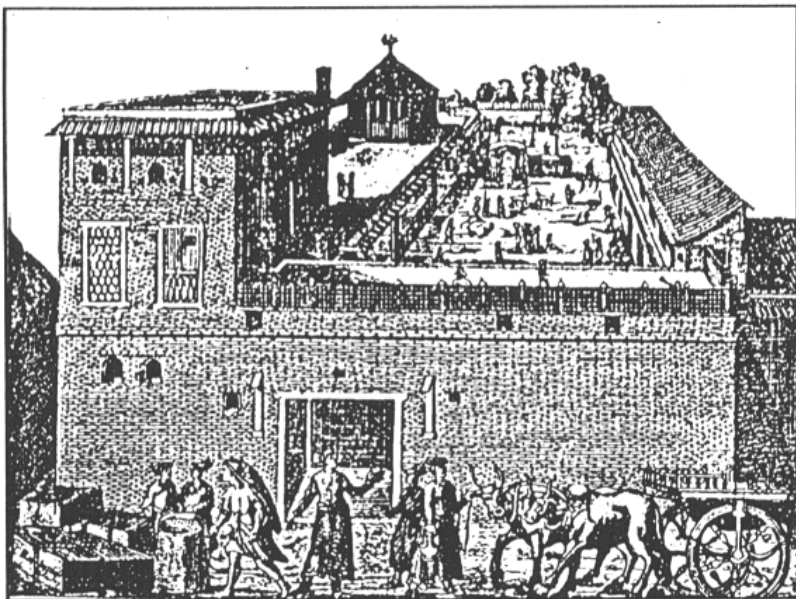
The voyages of the Company's ships were timed so that they rounded the Cape of Good Hope on the outward journey during April and took advantage of the South West monsoon, which blew from May to September. The homeward route later in the year benefitted from the North East monsoon, prevailing from November to March. In this way, excluding any accidents, the round trip was completed within twelve months. William soon found himself at sea, following very much the route to India taken by Vasco da Gama over a hundred years earlier. When the anchors were finally dropped at Swally (now Suvali), the main anchorage for the Company, he saw that such tall sailing ships were in the minority, surrounded as they were by several hundred Arab dhows with red sails, Chinese junks and Mogul vessels, the latter often employed in transporting pilgrims to and from Jiddah, the port of Mecca.

The customs examination was something of an ordeal; the officials, accompanied by a retinue of black slaves carrying whips to dissuade smugglers, would look into any box or trunk at will and levy duty at their own valuation. Once clear of the customs shed, the next stage of William's journey had already been organised. The only boats sailing up the River Tapti from Swally were flat-bottomed coasting vessels carrying Cargo, so he travelled either in a chariot drawn by two buffaloes or in a coach drawn by two white oxen or black horses, their brass chains jangling as they negotiated the alleys of the port before coming out into open country.

The sight which now met William's eyes reminded him of the fields around his home village of Shoreditch or the family estates at Kemsing and Seal, for he was in the richly cultivated and fertile state of Gujerat. But here there were no little sparrows or starlings chattering as they searched for food; instead there were peacocks, green parrots and innumerable bats in the banyan trees that gave shade to travellers. And, instead of the solidly plodding carthorse of the English scene, he caught sight of an occasional camel moving with ungainly gait in the palm-groves.

When the twelve mile ride was nearly over, his attention was drawn to a building in the distance, Surat castle, and he was soon being taken through the

elegant gardens that had been made outside the City walls. Once inside, he was surprised by the lofty houses of brick or stone with flat roofs, some faced with plaster; the people walking by were generally "grave, judicious, neat, tall and goodly clothed in long white callico or silk robes". Soon he was passing the green in front of the Castle and at last he saw familiar English flags fluttering in the breeze from the top of a solid stone and timber building, surrounded now by confusion and noise easily as great as at Billingsgate. Here the packers and warehouse-keepers were conducting their business with the merchants around the English factory which was to be his first home in this land of promise and challenge.



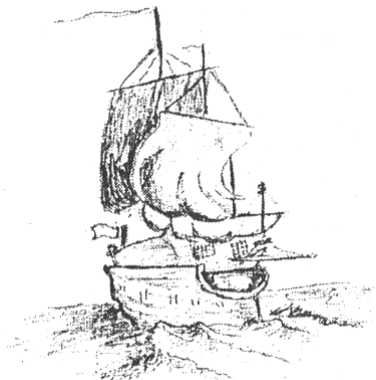
English factory at Surat

William joined the other employees of the company in residence within the factory and soon settled into the ordered routine. He found the variety of courses served in the dining hall amenable, though he missed the beef and pork; apricots, plums and cherries from Persia were very pleasant and a particular dish of chicken boiled in butter and stuffed with raisins and almonds was excellent. The grace before meals kindled thoughts of family meals at home, though the words were rather different - "We, Thy unworthy creatures do most humbly implore Thy goodness for a plentiful effusion of Thy grace upon our employers, that we may live virtuously in due obedience to our superiors..." The exhortation to "live

virtuously" was backed up by a series of fines - five weeks pay if he was not back inside the building by sundown; a shilling if he uttered an oath; half a crown if he missed either of the twice daily prayers or five shillings if he missed on Sunday. The money so raised was distributed among the poor. A maximum amount of drink was set, but was quite liberal - "half a pint of brandy together with one quart of wine at any meal". And, if they could not go out at night, they could certainly hear the sounds that came through barred windows; music and singing, interspersed with the drums, trumpets and shouting of the police as they attempted to impose order among the streets and brothels.

It was not long before another great change took place in William's life; he was sent out to travel with the Company caravans. In January 1628, at the age of 20, he was already journeying with Joseph Hopkinson, Nathaniel West and Nathaniel Wyche, who became a great friend. One letter from this group stated that they had crossed the river at Baroch and lodged in the custom house for the night, intending to start next day by way of Bulparr 'after bribing officials not to examine the packages'. Two months later, he was again travelling with the two Nathaniels, the cargo including saltpetre and calico: he reported that a looking glass, intended for transport to Agra, was found to be damaged and it was decided that this would be repaired and sold locally.

Later the same year, he was transferred to the offices at Agra, where he and another company servant were each paid £30 a year, the other two servants there received £40 and £100. At this time, the total number of Company servants in India, excluding the President, was 59 with a further 12 based in Persia. The largest number at any one place was 23, understandably at Surat, and included 8 writers and "an unprofitable surgeon"! The rest were scattered between nine other bases, the two Nathaniels being at Ahmadavas (Ahmedabad) with Henry Graves.



THE COMPANY'S AGENT

A year after William joined the Company, Jahangir had died and was succeeded by the more famous emperor, Shah Jahan, the first orthodox Moslem Mogul, best known today for his building of the Taj Mahal. Under his rule, Surat became the East India Company headquarters in India and the chief presidency in the East. The splendour of his court at Agra was famous throughout the world, especially the Peacock throne, the most magnificent of seven in use and certainly the most expensive, having cost in the region of one million pounds sterling. There were extensive workshops based at Agra and the main industrial cities which produced carpets, shawls, muslins and other luxury goods of the very finest quality.



From a drawing by Jeffrey Burn

Dress of a Gentleman, circa 1640

William was appointed Agent at Court early in 1629 and given a special allowance of £20 a year for the purchase of clothing suited to his new status. As was the custom among the merchants, he wore Western clothing in public but usually changed into the more comfortable Indian styles in his own house or when he was dining with Moslem friends. Such familiarity was not possible with Hindus because of their caste restrictions. He settled into the new life very quickly and the Surat President was soon writing to the Company in London for his salary to be increased since "he is much commended". The agents worked closely in touch with various Indian firms, finding out what they wanted. The demand was largely for novelties and curios, but they also ordered silver, chandeliers, coaches and even greyhounds and mastiffs. There were opportunities for employees to supplement their income by indulging in private trade and it was a source of some concern in the early days that this might get out of hand. The Company drew up a list of the commodities in which such trade was permitted: private exports allowed from the region included certain spices, satin and taffeta quilts, damask, calico and Persian carpets: private imports allowed included woollen stockings and garters, beaver hats with gold and silver bands, looking glasses, knives and Spanish leather shoes. There was a further restriction in that the total goods which could be exported from the region "by priveleged persons" must not exceed 5 per cent of the total tonnage. On some occasions it was necessary to insist that all the Company's goods must be loaded on a particular ship before any private goods were allowed on board.

There was, of course, an element of risk in all trading. Ships might be lost through bad weather or attacks from the Dutch or Portuguese. At sea, the carriers ran the risk of attack by pirates while, on land, the camel caravans were vulnerable to bands of brigands who held life itself in small regard. Also, with the Indian princes often at war with each other, the safety of any route was never certain - the route from Agra via Ahmedabad was particularly dangerous at this time. The final stage, from Ahmedabad to Surat, was to become even more so as another dimension was added to their problems - famine.

Over the centuries, failure of the seasonal rains and the consequent shortage of food, varying only in duration and the area affected, have been accepted as a fact of life by the people of India but the famine of 1630 and 31 stands out for two reasons - its intensity and extent. It swept across central India from the normally very fertile state of Gujerat in the West to the Coromandel Coast in the South East. Stocks of food were exhausted by the end of the first year and, although there was food elsewhere, it could only help those living on the fringes of the area, since the animals necessary to carry supplies any further could not themselves survive with no grass or water along the way.

Those people who could, left: those who could not, starved. The dead lay in the streets with no-one to bury them - those, that is, who did not fall victim to

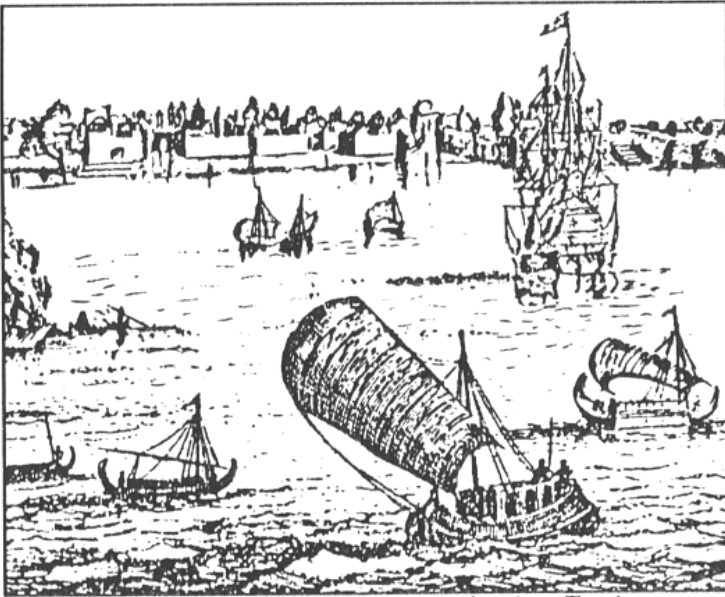
cannibalism. Anyone travelling on the road at this time faced the possibility of being murdered, not for what he carried as in the past, but for what he was. One report of the time says that "men began to devour each other, and the flesh of a son was preferred to his love". All reports confirm the horror of the time. And this was not the end, for when the torrential rains did come, the land was submerged and the inevitable result was cholera and the plague. In March 1630 there had been a move to reduce the cost of maintaining superfluous factors and some were returned to England but, by September, the then President Rastell wrote to London of the need for replacements as all of his twenty-four staff at Surat had died, even men 'in the vigour of life'. President Rastell himself died of the plague in March 1633 and, eight months later, there arrived at Swally a man who was to become very important to William, the new President, William Methwold.

Had William Fremlen been in Surat at this time, he would surely have died but he was still at Shah Jahan's court in Agra while his friends, the two Nathaniels, were travelling in Northern India, all safely away from the disaster. But, although their lives were not at risk, they certainly felt the effects on trade. In England, ships lay idle since there was no point in sending goods to Indian markets where there were no buyers. There were no goods to bring back, as those who had woven beautiful cloth and carpets were now dead, and the factors were faced with the task of finding other commodities and other markets.

William was entrusted with substantial funds, one note mentioning £25,000 for two lots of indigo. And in March 1632, there is evidence of the rise in status which he was achieving. A caravan comprising all of the quicksilver and vermilion and most of the broadcloth landed that year was committed to two men, Leachland and Robinson, who were to take it to Agra. On arrival there, they were to place themselves under the orders of William Fremlen: Leachland, because of his length of service in the Company, would be placed next to him at table and, if Robinson stayed in Agra, he would be placed second. William was to arrange the despatch of the next season's caravan by November and Leachland and Robinson were instructed to do their best to help him. But early in 1634 William's standing in his employers' estimation took a sudden fall - and the cause of his problems was indigo.

The Dutch factors had secured a monopoly in this commodity with Shah Jahan. All the merchants, including William, recognised the problems that this would create and it was, therefore, no surprise when a letter arrived from London "absolutely forbidding the buying of indigo at any price". In spite of this, William entered into a contract with Solomon Voorsknekt to buy a third of some unspecified weight - and, in fact, he appears to have been forced to take half the load, at a cost of £14,400. A further complication arose as to the question of how to transport the indigo, since all the camels normally available were then being used by Shah Jahan in his progress to Lahore.

This bad bargain brought severe financial problems to the Company in India where they now had no further credit left. Those in London were worried that there might be a calling in of all outstanding debts, which would mean that they would have to meet them personally since "all they have in India cannot satisfy the interest that will be due". Little wonder then that they now wrote of William that he was "not the man they took him for, but will deceive their expectations". One possible explanation for this apparent loss of his senses is that William was attempting a private trade coup which went horribly wrong; he would not have been willing to acknowledge it as such, since indigo was high on the list of commodities forbidden to employees' private trade.



The fortified town of Surat on the river Tapti

Trading in general was very bad that year with the Company's affairs declining everywhere. They had six ships engaged in nothing more than guarding each other against attacks from the Dutch; the only freight available to go to Persia was considered unprofitable and it was reported that the warehouse was empty of all valuable commodities, with nothing remaining to sell but amber beads. There was a determined attempt to cut costs, including the closure of all factories except Surat which became "stuffed with a number of persons they know not how to lessen". The Dutch were hostile to anything English and were attempting to ally with the Portuguese, but the Viceroy and Council were still

anxious for a truce and planned to send Methwold (the newly-appointed President for the Company in India) and six others to pursue negotiations at Goa.

In normal circumstances, William might well have been despatched home in disgrace as a consequence of his recent blunder but the Council was now faced with the task of appointing someone to act in the President's place. Borneford was considered to be very reliable but lacked experience. It was pointed out (by Methwold, perhaps?) that William had been with the Company for nine years and, apart from the "indigo business", had served them well. Attention was drawn to his perfection of the Hindustani language and it was decided to ask him to stay a further year as second in command. It was even suggested that, should they be in a position to re-open the factory at Ahmedabad in the near future, he was the only person fitted to undertake this task.

The Goa Convention of 1634 was very successful from the English point of view. Also, far from forming an alliance, the Dutch and Portuguese were now at war, leaving the East India Company with a much freer hand and the opportunities for trade increased once more. Early in 1637, the Court, noting his ability and reiterating the view that he was the fittest man to succeed, decided to raise William's salary to £150 "both to encourage him and in regard of his former services". In spite of this, William felt that, after nearly ten years in India, he would like to get back to England to spend some time with his sisters and their children but fate stepped in to prevent this.

Later the same year, there came news from Persia that the Agent there had died, leaving the Company's affairs in a state of confusion. It was again decided that William was the right man to deal with the situation, but he was most reluctant to go. News of his father's death had caused him to feel homesick and it was with some reluctance that he agreed to accept the mission, and then only after being formally elected to succeed as the next President, when the time came.

He sailed in the *Swan* on November 24th, shortly after his thirtieth birthday, and arrived at Gombroon at the end of the year. He already had some basic knowledge of Persian, picked up during his various journeyings, and used the opportunity to become fluent in the language; an accomplishment which, added to his existing knowledge of Hindustani, was to be of great help to him later.

Having drawn up various regulations for the Persian trade and sent Thomas Merry to Ispahan as the new Agent, he was ready to return. The *Blessing* had brought some Golconda textiles, cassia lignus (a type of cinnamon) and redwood from Surat and these had all been sold at a good price. By the middle of February she was ready to set sail on the return journey with William aboard. The promotion which he had negotiated was not long in coming and he took up the position of President in December of that same year, 1638.



India in William's time

THE PRESIDENT

The judicial powers of the Presidents at Surat and Bantam were contained in His Majesty's letters patent of February 4th 1623 and confirmed in the Court Minutes of September 18th 1633. They were to 'chastise, correct and punishe all and everie the subjecte of Us, our heires and successors, now employed or hereafter to be employed on land or in any parts of the East Indies'. The penalties which they were authorised to inflict in the keeping of order included death, but only in the case of mutiny, murder or any other felony if passed after trial by a jury of twelve or more Englishmen. So that, even in the Lands under the rule of Shah Jahan, the Presidents and Council were to keep order among the servants of the East India Company according to the laws of their own land.

This then was the authority given to William Fremlen at the age of 31. The actual ceremony involving the changeover of presidential power took place on December 27th 1638. In the presence of the Dutch, Portuguese and Ethiopian consuls, Mogul officers representing the Governor of Surat and over 30 of the Company's servants, the retiring President, William Methwold, made a speech in which he exhorted them all to serve his successor with the same diligence and goodwill they had shown to him. After receiving a copy of the royal letters patent and the congratulations of all present, the new President led the company into the English gardens where Methwold entertained them at a 'princely farewell banquet' in the shade of jacaranda and liriodendron trees and surrounded by bougainvillea, hibiscus and alamanda blossoms. Some members of the party played bowls or challenged each other in friendly archery competitions while the elder statesmen chatted. Then came a typical display of dancing by Indian professional dancing girls, followed by traditional music until the daylight faded. The guests went their separate ways, the married factors who had left their families behind meeting in the President's rooms for a final drink.

The following day, a new Governor arrived in Surat and his stately procession was attended by President Fremlen and the principal English merchants.

At this point, it may be worth considering the man from whom William took over, William Methwold. He was 17 years older than Fremlen and, although he had joined the Company in 1615, his service had not been continuous. During the next seven years, he made enemies among those in authority in India and was eventually sent back to face various charges brought against him. The outcome was his dismissal and it was ten years before he re-joined the Company, during

which time he held various posts including Swordbearer to the Lord Mayor of London, which increased his innate love of pomp and pageantry. There is a suggestion that the charges brought against him were later thrown into doubt and certainly the Company tried to re-employ him as Agent in Persia in 1628, but the salary he requested was not acceptable and he withdrew the following year.

When affairs in India were in a disastrous state owing to the famine and plague, the company again approached him, this time with the offer of the Presidency of Surat, on his own terms. Although he was not to trade on his own behalf, the greatly increased salary he requested was agreed. In addition, in deference to the wishes of his wife, it was arranged that he would return to England at the end of five years.

Methwold had a deep love of India and an unshakeable belief that the English presence there was of supreme importance to both countries. For this, he was prepared to face again the perils of the sea journey (his earlier voyage out had included near mutiny) and the shadow of the plague. Within his 5-year term of office, he pulled the Company's affairs round and, as the time drew to a close, he felt it imperative that the person who took over from him would be of the right calibre to maintain and build on what he had fought so hard to achieve.

It was true that William Fremlen was young for such a task - and some said that this resulted in his being "humble to the point of obsequiousness" to those under him, in marked contrast to Methwold's forceful character. On the other hand, during his 12 years' service in India he had become equally at ease with prince and peasant. The new Mogul Governor of the Province was already well known to Fremlen and it was anticipated that the two would work in harmony with each other.

Again, Fremlen had proved himself to be at home with languages other than his own. Methwold was fluent in Dutch, although he had not conquered Persian, and he knew from his own experience how important such accomplishments could be when it came to bargaining and diplomacy.

There were two other matters of importance to Fremlen which became clear to Methwold during their long discussions. First, since he was ambitious, he would be looking to continue his association and advancement with the Company when he returned to London and his performance in the next few years would therefore be crucial. Even the "indigo business" could be seen as an advantage rather than a drawback: apart from demonstrating his ingenuity in organising its transportation, it was a fact that no-one is so careful to keep away from the fire as the man who has once burned his fingers.

Secondly, although Fremlen had made a reasonable fortune already, he was keen to increase this as much as possible in the time left to him. The only way he could do so, within the Company's percentage guidelines, was to increase the volume and profitability of goods traded. Thus, his personal fortunes and those of

the Company were dependant upon one another. All these aspects had been considered by Methwold before he made his recommendations as to his successor. Methwold went on to become Deputy Governor of the Company in London in 1650 and is stated by one source to have been "the greatest Englishman in India before Clive". It says a great deal about Fremlen's character and standing that he should have been chosen by such a man.

The presidential style of living had been known to William but only as an onlooker; now he was to experience it himself. His accommodation was spacious and there were large rooms for meetings of the Council and for entertainment; in fact, he lived in almost as stately a fashion as the Mogul Governor, though his surroundings were not as sumptuous as those to which he had become accustomed during his time at Court. When he came out of his bedroom, servants with silver staves who had stood guard fell into step behind him and followed him from room to room. Once he appeared in the lower rooms, the guards in livery there would immediately spring to attention; if he left the factory, `Bandarines and Moors under two standards marched before him". Among his entourage were his chaplain, physician and surgeon, and the position carried with it well-filled stables for his own benefit.

He would, naturally, sit at the head of the table, with others seated in order of seniority, for all the English merchants dined together; but, at his entry, trumpets were blown and, throughout the meal, there were violins playing softly nearby. Occasionally, usually on special Church festivals, they would dine outside the city in the English gardens, as they had at his inauguration; this would involve a solemn procession with William riding in a palanquin and the rest of the Council in splendid ox-drawn coaches, the other factors riding on Arab horses, with velvet saddles and silver trappings. At such banquets, the presidential silver was brought into use - dishes and drinking vessels - with a silver basin and ewer brought to each diner to wash his hands before and after the meal.

Friday was a fast day, ostensibly for all employees, but strictly adhered to by the President. This did not mean that he ate nothing, but was restricted to "a meane dyett" and that only taken in the evening. On Sunday, there were services for all to attend and this must have been a particular strain on the quiet and very private William for it was his duty to deliver two sermons during the day. Throughout this period in India's history, there were uprisings and conflict and, in William's time, this was particularly true of the five independent states of the Deccan, which had been separated from the empire of Delhi for 230 years. The last of these finally fell to Shah Jahan who appointed his third son, Aurangzib, as viceroy and directed him to subdue Baglan, which lay on the route between Surat and Burhanpur and was very familiar to early European travellers. This task Aurangzib accomplished towards the end of 1637. The following year he moved into the district around Diu, a coastal town to the northwest, and Daman, a port

some 70 miles to the South of Surat, and besieged the Portuguese there. The Imperial forces beleaguered Daman but could not starve out the Portuguese while they had access to the sea. Negotiations took place between the Portuguese and the Dutch, but they would not interfere. After becoming President, William Fremlen was called upon to receive a Portuguese deputation wishing to negotiate with the Governor and the dispute was settled some months later when the Portuguese agreed to pay the Mogul the same rent for Daman as to the previous ruler, Raja. William played a significant part in these delicate negotiations, one source going so far as to say that peace was made through his mediation. As a result his standing was considerably increased, not only with the Portuguese but with the Surat merchants whose interests had been in jeopardy.

An instance of the use of his judicial powers, in which both clemency and superstition played a part, is given in the following episode. In January 1639, there was a consultation on board the *Mary* involving President Fremlen, the council, William Bayley, Thomas Steevens and the purser, Thomas Tomplins. James Bycraft, the boatswain, was charged with mutinous behaviour and sentenced to lose his wages from the date of his offence, to be ducked from the yardarm three times and to be kept in irons during the homeward journey. His two associates, Meredith Jones and Robert Jelly, were pardoned on promise not to repeat the offence. But, with the ship about to depart and Bycraft being brought out for the ducking - and with pleas from William Bayley and Methwold (who was a member of the council) - William remitted this part of the punishment. One reason for this decision was that it would be a good omen for the journey if it began 'with mercie rather than castigation'. Bycraft was also allowed his wages until the date of his being put in irons. As William had sailed and talked with sailors, he would have known the great importance which the common sailor attached to certain omens and superstitions.

The need for new markets and goods following the collapse of the Gujerat weaving industry continued and, early in 1639, William was actively investigating other routes for the transport of goods within India. He eventually satisfied the Council that a direct land route from Agra, negotiated by Bornford, was preferable to the earlier one via the river Indus. By August, he was able to report to London that, although the Company had had some bad factors, its affairs were now in a much better state than had been imagined and trade was flourishing as well as ever.

In November of that year, the Company decided to raise William's salary to £400 a year and back-dated the increase to the previous December, when he had become President. They stated that this was both to encourage him and in regard of his former services. But the "encouragement" was not enough to persuade him to prolong his service in India. The longing for home had increased with news of another death in the family, this time an uncle referred to by Captain Weddell,

another company servant, as 'my good friend'. Two months later, in a letter from Swally Marine, he expressed a wish to return to England in two years - or earlier if a new President could be sent out.

The increase of his personal wealth was certainly of importance to William and was the subject of some discussions with Methwold so that, when the ex-President returned to England in 1639, he carried with him a letter of attorney from William. The prospect of investing some of his capital in a voyage of adventure came in 1641, but there was disagreement as to whether William should be allowed in. The amount proposed was £2,000 and it was stated that he had acquired some estate during his fifteen years in India. The opinion expressed was that it was advisable to let him put money into this venture "rather than that he should bring home his estate in private trade". The matter was finally settled in his favour by a show of hands.

The following year, Methwold was given permission to subscribe to another voyage on behalf of William, the amount this time being £1,500. The *Crispian* had recently landed and its load included 2400 lbs of mace, William's private trade, consigned to Methwold. This was estimated to be worth £1,000, less any freight charges, and would make up the bulk of his subscription. The balance would be met partly from salary due to him and partly from Methwold himself.

November 1641 highlighted another side of Presidential duties. The *Swan* arrived from Bantam carrying what William and his colleagues considered to be a very disappointing cargo and the matter was taken up with the newer presidency there. Relations were already very strained owing to disputes over the apportionment of expenses between the coastal presidencies and it fell to William to use his diplomatic powers to sort this out.

In the following year, a Dutch mission to court resulted in the favourable settlement of the question of rating for the customs on goods exported by them. Previously, the calculation of exact values had left serious openings for extortion and it was therefore considered to be an advantage to have a definite scale laid down. William was involved in negotiations to obtain a similar arrangement for the English traders and letters were sent to Shah Jahan and his son, Dara Shikoh, as a result of which the Emperor complied with their wishes. The exchange of gifts was a recognised part of negotiations at that time. In 1643, a ring set with diamonds and presented to William by the 'Vendore de Fazenda' in Goa was eventually handed to the Company's treasurer in London. On this occasion, William sent handsome presents for Shah Jahan and his sons, Dara Shikoh and Murad Baksh - the cost being rather over £1,000. As a result the Emperor complied with their wishes and sent William a dagger whose gold hilt was set with diamonds, rubies and emeralds; Dara Shikoh sent a medal or 'jewel' of diamonds and rubies. Unfortunately, these did not arrive in Surat until after William had left and they were therefore accepted by the new President, Francis

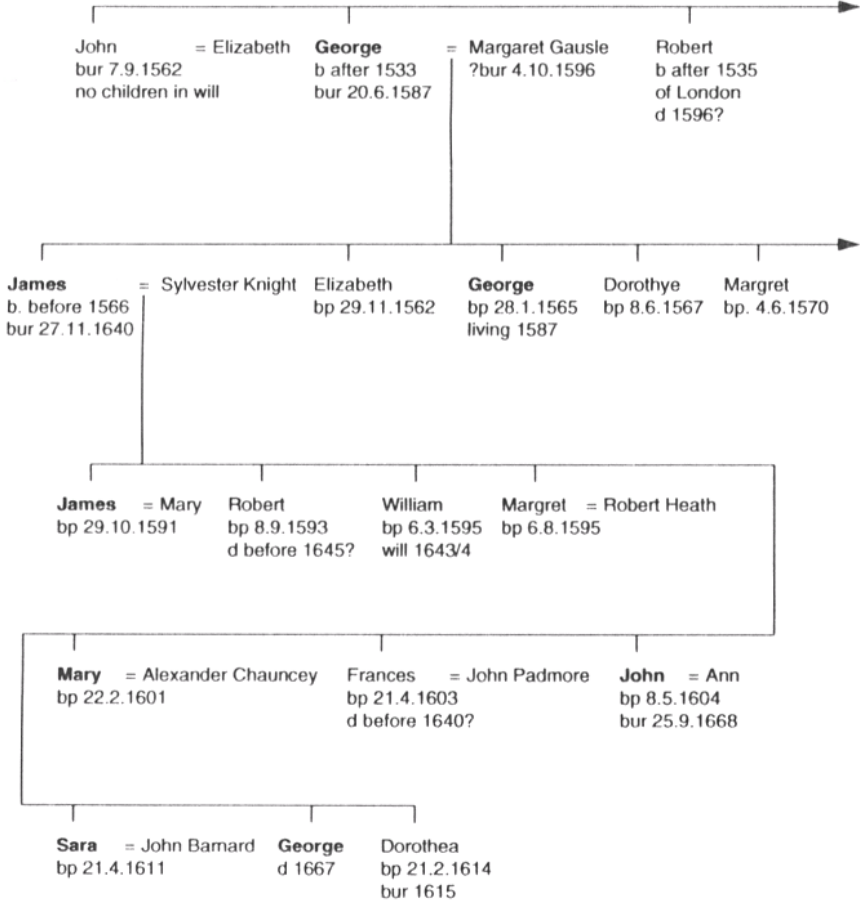
Breton. The jewel was sent home early in 1646, but it is unlikely that William ever received it; the dagger remained in Surat, on the plea that 'it may, upon some occasion or other, happily be useful there'.



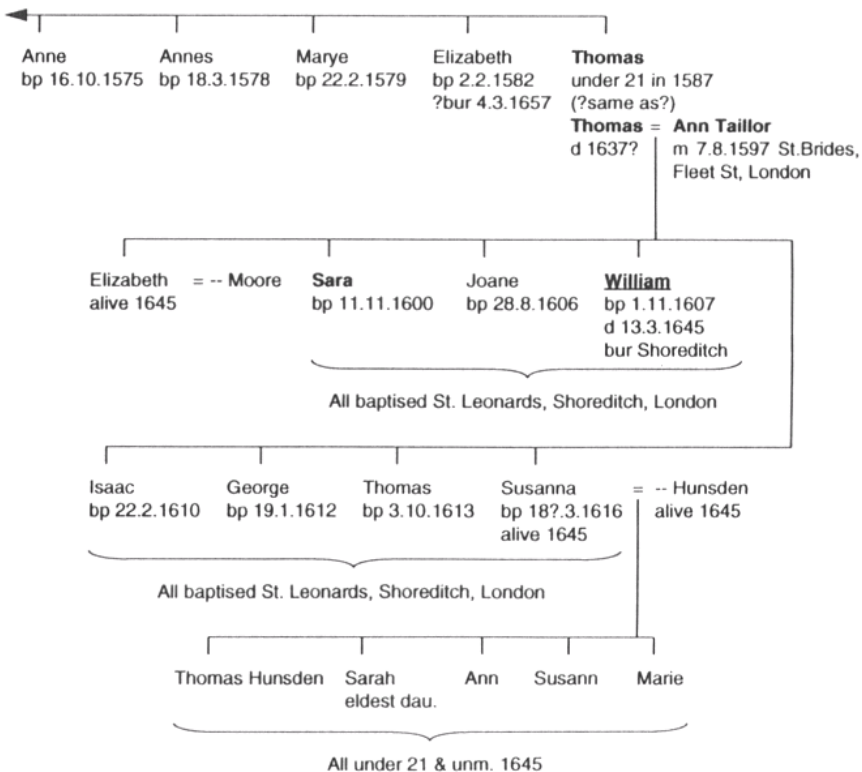
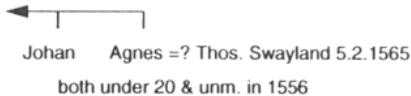
William's journeys, described in the next chapter

**Part of Fremlen family tree showing possible
relationship of William to Kemsing live**

(All of Kemsing except where stated otherwise)



All names in **bold print** are mentioned in the text.



THE LAST JOURNEYS

Towards the end of 1644, William was able to hand over office to his successor and prepare for his journey home. As always at parting, his feelings were mixed as he bade farewell to the many friends he had made during the eighteen years that he had spent in India.

The ship, *Dolphin*, was already being loaded with cargo and supplies when he arrived at Swally Marine and, having ensured that his own trade goods were safely stored in the hold, he supervised the transfer of his personal effects to his cabin. Soon the shout of "Anchors a-weigh" was heard, a fresh breeze filled the sails and the ship moved out into the Arabian Sea, accompanied by the *Hopewell*, *William* and *Endeavour*.

They took the usual south westerly course into the Indian Ocean, heading for the Comoro Islands where they would replenish their supplies of fresh food and water, but it was not long before the wind force increased and they found themselves in the midst of a fierce storm. All hatches were tightly battened down as the ship rolled helplessly in the clutch of great waves. It was impossible to hold her upright or keep on course; the sole aim now was to stay afloat.

Alone in his cabin, William listened to the creak of the masts and groaning of the deck planks which could sometimes be heard above the roar of the storm. Days that were almost as black as night were suddenly lit by searing flashes of lightning, cutting through the dark veil of the storm. William gave up his attempt at daily bible reading and, instead, lay in his hammock reciting some of the favourite passages and psalms committed to memory long ago. His prayers had always included one for those at sea, but this had never been said with quite such fervour as it was now.

At last, the winds moderated and the captain was able to check his position. Whereas they had been heading for the Mozambique Channel separating Madagascar from mainland Africa, he now found that they had been carried well to the east. By keeping to a southerly course, he was able to reach Mauritius, where he met up with *Hopewell*, one of the three ships to set out with *Dolphin* from Swally.

Having completed the most urgent repairs, the two ships sailed south west, rounding the southern tip of Madagascar and hugging the coast till they reached St. Augustine's Bay near Tulear. There they had news of the remaining two ships of the original four; the *William* had been lost in the storm but some of her survivors had been picked up by her sister ship *Endeavour*. This ship had been

the first to reach Madagascar and, having sustained only superficial damage, had taken on board four Frenchmen, who had travelled across the island from a settlement on the east coast, and then continued her journey home.

William received the news of the ship bearing his name with mixed feelings. Although some lives had been saved, much was lost. Someone's venture capital gone; someone's husband, brother, son would not return home. They all knew the risks - the investors, the seamen, the families - but that did not make it any easier. He remembered a fragment of conversation between his father and a Jewish diamond cutter. "Life is all almonds and raisins", the Jew had said, "bitterness and sweetness".

The two ships sailed north to Joanna, one of the Comoro Islands, where they stopped to take on further supplies. William, as ex-president, was senior officer for the Company and his authority held at sea. The captain therefore invited him to consult on their next move but, before a decision had been reached, another Company ship, *Crispiana*, arrived en route to India. Her captain was invited on board to report on conditions around the Cape and when he told them that a Dutch ship, *Mauritius Island*, had been wrecked in storms there, it was felt that their own ships were not in a fit state to proceed and must return to Swally for full assessment and any further repairs. Once *Crispiana* had taken on supplies, she, *Dolphin* and *Hopewell* sailed together north east to Swally.

William watched his battered ship being emptied so that the goods could be dried out and the hull repaired. With no official duties and the best time for sailing having now passed, he felt frustrated and depressed - indeed, he wondered if he would ever see England again. But, on November 29th 1644, he was back on board and setting sail. This time, the first stage of the journey was completed without incident and they reached the Mozambique Channel and the Comoros on December 31st. Their stay was short, as they only needed to take on fresh fruit and water, and they were under way again on January 3rd.

Before long, however, they again ran into strong winds, this time interspersed with calm spells when there was not the slightest breeze to fill the sails, so that it was not until February 16th that they sighted Cape Agulhas, the most southerly part of Africa. They ran into more storms, forcing them round the Cape and preventing them from entering Table Bay as planned. After some discussion between William and the captain, it was decided to set their course northwest and sail on to the island of St. Helena, which they reached on March 11th.

At all such maritime 'staging posts', the provisioning of the ship was only one of the concerns of the captain. Another, just as important at times, was the collecting and passing on of information regarding weather conditions, sightings of pirates, progress of the Company's ships and any other relevant matters. Letters from a captain, and any senior Company official aboard, destined for the offices in London or the Presidencies in India, would be handed over to the captain of a

ship going in that direction. The system worked very well in keeping all parties as up to date as possible with shipping movements.

St. Helena was in a good Position for the type of long stopover of Dutch and English ships which aided this exchange of information. The Dutch ship *Orangia* was already in harbour when the *Dolphin* arrived, but the news from her was not welcome. After leaving St. Helena on her outward journey, the Company ship *John* had run into storms around the Cape and had foundered. The *Orangia*, travelling in the opposite direction, had witnessed the incident and, though herself struggling after the loss of three anchors, had managed to take aboard three survivors, who were now transferred to the *Dolphin*.

William was particularly anxious for news of the *Discovery* and of a small fleet which was known to have sailed from Bantam in Java. He was torn between what he felt to be a duty to wait for such news and his personal wish to reach London as soon as possible. The matter was settled for him when the captain suggested that they should stay on St. Helena for a few weeks to enable the crew to recover completely from the rigours of the voyage so that they were fully fit for anything else that nature might throw at them. William's stay on the island on his outward journey had been quite short and he now found himself content to enjoy the local food and pleasant climate.

Within the next two weeks, four Dutch ships arrived, the *Malacca*, *Olifant*, *Zeeland* and *Delft*, all with stories of bad weather round the Cape. They were, however, able to report that, before they ran into trouble, they had passed three ships of the East India line, the *Sun*, *James* and *Hester*, which were nearing the end of their journey to Madagascar where it was hoped to found a plantation. It was almost another three weeks before more ships arrived headed by the *Dolphin*'s former travelling companion, *Crispiana*, followed shortly by two more Dutch ships, *Haarlem* and *Banda*. From the last two came the welcome news that the ships from Bantam were safe and should arrive before long.

During his time on St. Helena, William had been able to renew his acquaintance with Paulus Crocq, whom he had often met in Surat or at Swally, when the latter was in command of one of the Dutch fleets. With the arrival of the last of his ships, Paulus went aboard the *Dolphin* to bid farewell and God speed to his friend, explaining that he had brought forward his departure by a few days since the previous night's winds had blown the *Haarlem* out to sea. Next morning, William stood and watched as the fine fleet of seven Dutch ships sailed out and over the horizon, before returning to his own ship for further talks with the captain.

When the ill-fated *John* had left St. Helena for the last time, her captain had decided to leave behind some of his passengers - five Englishmen, a Chinese half-caste, five black women and nine children. It was now decided that these could be taken aboard the *Dolphin*, if they wished to be taken to England, and that they

would set sail the following morning with their sister ship, *Crispiana*. This plan was confirmed with the other captain and the two ships set off on May 7th with a fair wind in the sails. The final part of their journey was completed without mishap in two months and William finally stepped ashore in the port of London in July 1645, the whole journey having taken nearly nine months.

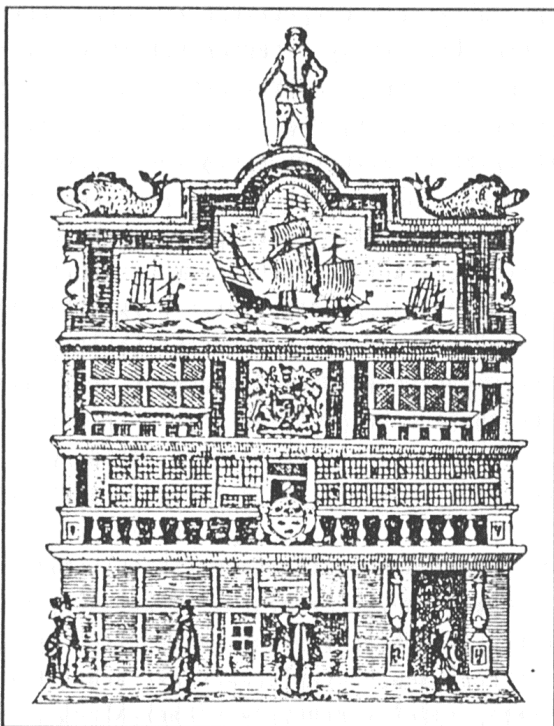
The country to which William returned was rather different from the one he had left nearly twenty years earlier. Although the roots of Civil War had been there for many years, King Charles had retained his place at the head of the country. Indeed, during most of William's absence, he had ruled without Parliament, raising revenue by a number of unpopular taxes but, by November 1640, he was forced to convene Parliament and by August 1642 Civil War became a reality. This part of England's history is well documented elsewhere but, to bring William's return into context, the fateful Battle of Naseby, in which Charles was defeated and might well have been killed, had taken place only the previous month.

For William, matters of State were less important than the knowledge that he was at last back home, some eight years after his first expressed wish to return. Although he was in a position to purchase and furnish a house in London, he decided to take his time and set up home, either with his sister or in some suitable establishment, with his manservant, Black Moill, to see to his needs. This lad may well have been one of the black children picked up at St. Helena, claimed by William and trained during the two months at sea together. He obviously felt some responsibility for Black Moill to the extent that provision was made in his will that this servant should receive £5 per annum for as long as he continued in English service as a Christian and behaved himself.

One of the first things he did was to call on his old colleague, William Methwold, to give him a first hand report on the changing situation in India and discuss various financial matters. In meeting Methwold's family, he found common ground for conversation with his wife, Mary, who lived in Sevenoaks before her marriage and knew the area around Kemsing, the home of generations of Fremdens. Methwold's younger children listened eagerly for news of their brother, Mark, who had gone out to the Coromandel coast only two years before, and for William's own story. Their elder sister, Susan, sat a little apart watching the young man's face as he re-lived that terrible time when the *Dolphin* battled against the elements on the homeward journey. At a pause in his story, he happened to glance across at her and, as he caught her eye, she smiled and William was captivated. His calls on the family were not now simply for discussions with her father but to further his acquaintance with Susan.

But there were business matters to attend to including a special task he had undertaken for one of the Company's employees, John Wilde, who had died at Surat. John had several rings and seals, including some of diamond, agate and

pearl which he had entrusted to William before he set sail from Swally the second time. These were to be handed to the Company treasurer for safe keeping until the beneficiary, Col. Honnywood could collect them.



*East India House in Leadenhall Street, London,
in the seventeenth century*

It had been agreed that all the goods which he had brought home with him as private trade should be free of all freight charges. Now he must arrange for them to go into store until the next market, when all the other goods brought over on the *Dolphin* would be sold. Hopefully, his own mace and nutmegs, the 2 small bales of Chinese twisted silks and the other items would fetch a good price. Methwold had told him that there might be some problems with regard to the settlement of his trading account, which had been under Methwold's direction, and he must take the matter up with the Committee.

However, on 20th August, he was invited to attend a meeting of the Court of Committees on a more agreeable matter. He duly presented himself at the Company's striking new building in Leadenhall Street and was told that "in regard to his service these many yeares" he was to be given the freedom of the Society, whereupon he was sworn and admitted accordingly.

At the meeting next day, after he had handed over John Wilde's jewellery, William heard that the two ships, *Crispiana* and his own *Dolphin*, had been unloaded and now constituted a danger to other shipping. It was decided that they should be taken to the Company's docks at Blackwall for inspection and assessment. William learnt for the first time that concern had been expressed over a year earlier as to the poor quality of iron used in the construction of both the *Hinde* and the *Dolphin*, the latter having been forced to pump at 300 strokes an hour when they were 90 miles off the Grand Canaries. In the light of this revelation, he realised that his ship's survival and his safe return were even more of a miracle than he had thought.

During the next few months, William was able to visit those of his family who had survived his long absence and meet for the first time his nephews and nieces, regaling them with stories of the lands in which he had spent so much of his life. Sometimes, he walked to the docks with them and watched the ships going off down the Thames, ships whose names and destinations he now knew so well. Each Sunday found him again in church, either St. Leonards, Shoreditch or St. Marys, Aldermanbury. He was especially moved by the plight of the poor in London and interested in ideas afoot to provide employment for them under consideration by committees. The plan which was eventually made law by an ordinance (not an Act, since Parliament could hardly request royal assent from a king with whom it was at war) was for "the erection of one or more work-houses for receiving, relieving, and setting the poore on worke and one or more Houses of Correction for the punishing of Rogues, Vagabonds, and Beggars ... that have not wherewith honestly to maintaine themselves." It was also decided that children who came under the Authority's charge should be bound apprentice. The money for this work was to be shared between rich and poor parishes of the City of London and its Liberties and it was to this purpose that a bequest of £100 made by William would be put.

With regard to his personal finances, he finally raised the subject at a meeting of the Committee and was advised that a dispute had indeed arisen over an account which had been presented to the Company. After this was examined it was agreed that the sum of £2,300 was, in fact, due to him and that this should be paid. There was, however, the question of a further £500 for the last year and this was deferred for further discussion. The matter dragged on and, by the time a request was made for interest to be paid on the sum in dispute, William was not well enough to attend in person to plead his case.

Had the strain of responsibility in the past few years taken its toll or was the English winter too much for a body accustomed to the warmth of the East? Whatever the reason, January found William in failing health and, by the tenth he felt that he must consider how best to dispose of the fortune which he had built up over the years. With no wife or children of his own, he turned first to his sisters and their children and then to other kinfolk - Marie, Sarah, James, John and George, no doubt the children of (his late uncle?) James Fremlen of Kemsing.

His thoughts turned to Mary Methwold and her daughter, the lovely Susan. With what surprised delight she had accepted the jewels he gave her. His eyes filled with tears as he contemplated the hopes and dreams that would not come true. How cruel to be snatched away from the promise of such happiness. Now all he could do was to let her know, with a substantial legacy, that she was indeed his "well-beloved Susan".

There were also many old friends to be remembered, including that Nathaniel Wych with whom he had shared so many journeys. At this point he recalled that there was still a substantial debt owing to him by Thomas Merry, the man he had promoted in Persia and who was now well up in the Council at Surat. This then could be claimed and used to pay all those still in India; the names rolled off his tongue - Chowte Taiken, Monabis Moodie, Werge Metta and so many more.

Also due was the rest of his salary - the disputed £500 which had still not been settled. If the Company could not be persuaded to give it to him, would they feel less constrained in giving it to their own hospital? What better use for it than to help those in the East India Almshouses in Blackwall; land could be bought and the income used for them. His special parish of St. Leonards should benefit similarly and a smaller sum be given to St. Mary's. The prisoners in Ludgate and Newgate should benefit, together with Bridewell and Bethlem hospitals. When he had listed all the individual legacies, there remained the question of his own funeral. His final resting place must be the church where he was baptised. There was no doubt in his mind as to who would best carry out his wishes - the trusted friend who knew as much about his affairs as he did himself and who had knowledge of the Indian end of the task - the man who, in happier circumstances, might have become his father-in-law, William Methwold.

On 13th March 1646, Methwold attended a Court of Committees of the East India Company and advised them that Mr. Fremlen was very weak but wished them to know that, as he had acquired all his estate in their service and as an acknowledgement of his thankfulness to them, he had made provision in his will for £500 to be given to their hospital at Blackwall, to be used by the Company as they thought fit. He had also asked that 1500 ryalls (£337) were to be spent on bucklers and covers for camels for the Governor of Surat, and requested that they might be sent in one of the Company's ships. This they agreed to do and, in

acknowledging his bequest to the hospital, they asked Methwold to present their love to Mr. Fremlen.

When Methwold called to visit his friend and tell him of the Court's gratitude, he found that he was too late. William had died that same day.

And so it was that, on the twentyfifth of March 1646, William Fremlen made his final journey along the streets of his native parish in a funeral of 'large and ample manner' as befitted one who had been at the court of the Great Shah Jahan, served his Company diligently and used much of his worldly wealth for the good of others less fortunate than himself.

In the name of God Amen
the tenth daie of January One Thousand six hundred fortie five, And in the
one and twentieth year of the raigne of our Sovereigne Lord King Charles 1 st
I William Fremlyn of London Merchannt beinge sick in bodie but of sound and
perfect mynde and memory thanks bee therefore given to Almightye God,yet
callinge to mynde the certaintie of death and the uncertaine hower thereof, and
beinge desirous to settle and dispose of that which God of his great goodnes hath bestowed
upon me, I doe make and ordaine this my last will and Testament as followeth –
First and principally I yield my soule into the hands of Almightye God my
creator, And my bodie to be decentlie buried in the church of Leonard Shoreditch
at the discretion of myne Executor and Overseers hereafter named, hopinge by
and through the merritts death and passion of myne onlie Savyour and Redeemer
Jesus Christ to have full remission of all my sinnes, and to see my God in the
land of the ever lyvinge. And as touchinge myne Estate in this world. I give and
dispose of the same as hereafter is expressed. First I will that the somme of
six thousand poundes poundes(sic) shall be with all convenient speed after my decease be
laid out of my Estate for the purchase of lands and Tenements of [Socage?] or
free Burgage tenure, And that the same shall upon such purchase made, bee in
due and lawfull manner settled and assured unto the use and behoofe of my sister
Susann Hunsden and her husband for and duringe their naturall lives, and the
life of the longer lyver of them And after bothe their deceases, to the use and
behoofe of Thomas Hunsden nowe sonne of the said Susann and of his heirs for
ever, And I will that from and after such time as the said somme of six Thousand
poundes shall come to the hands of myne Executor, there shall bee allowed unto my
said Sister and her husband and to the Survvyour of them untill such purchase
shall be

THE MEMORIAL

This monument is erected in Memory of
WILLIAM FREMLIN, Esq;
Eldest son of Thomas Fremlin, and Anne, his wife
Both of this Parish, deceased,
Whose better genius
Having disposed his Desires wholly unto Travel.
He was
In the Eighteenth¹ year of his Age,
Entertained by the Honourable East India Company;
And by them employed
Into the remotest regions of Asia
Where
His abilities, and fair comportment,
Found so good Approbation;
That within Three Years after his Arrival,
He was sent to reside Agent, at the Court
Of the Great Mogul.
And then, the more important Affairs of the
Honourable Company, wanting his Assistance,
In the chief Residence at Surat,
He was called thither, to supply the Place
Of Second in Council and command;
Which Trust he Discharg'd
With such approved Diligence, and Dexterity;
That by Express order
He was appointed
President;
And so continued Five Years, to the great Satisfaction
Of his Honourable Employers,
And the abundant content
Of those of his own Nation whom he Governed,
And others among whom he lived.
Then, returning to England,

¹ This should be 19th: he was 18 in the previous October.

God was pleased to deliver him
From as imminent Danger of shipwreck
As ever any Man escaped;

That he arrived in Safety,
After the Expiration
Of nineteen Years, three Months, and twenty-one Days,
To find a Grave
In the Land and Parish, of his Nativity.
For now, Alas! he begun to languish;
And upon the 13th of March 1645²,
Heaven
Put a Period to his Pilgrimage
In the 38th³ Year of his Age,
Having, by his last Will and Testament
Bequeathed to Charitable Uses £870⁴;
And, more particularly to the Poor of this Parish, £200.

"Rest weary traveller ! A quiet repose,
Suits well with active men;
But chiefly those of whose unwearied works,
We truly say, they bear the brunt and burden of the day."
Such days in such a climate so well spent,
As made the Precedent, a President.
Aprez travaille, repos.

On a flat stone: "Venimus, Vidimus, Redivimus, Resurgemus" ⁵

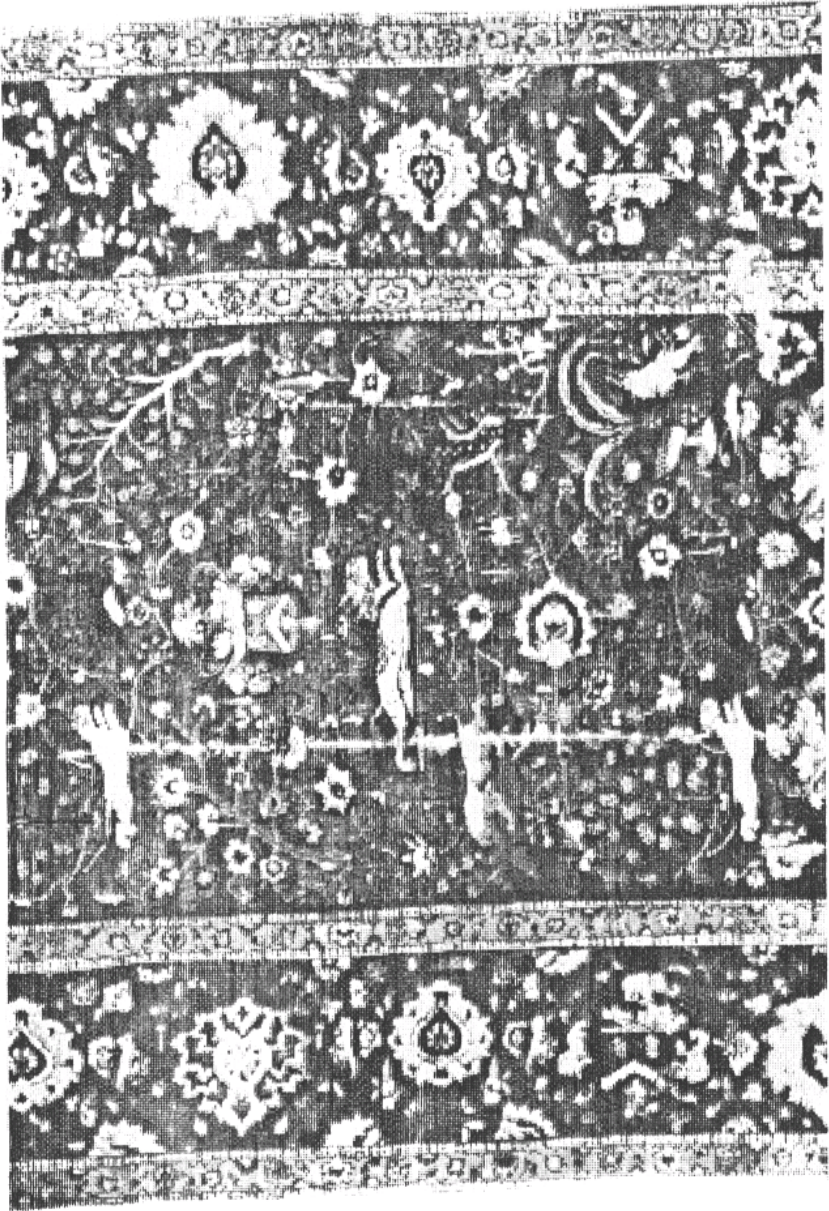
His tomb and this monument (a spacious marble one of the Ionic order) were on the South side of the altar in the old church of St. Leonards, Shoreditch and were unfortunately lost with several others when it was pulled down prior to rebuilding, which was completed in 1736. There is some mystery, however, since an Order of Vestry dated 6th March 1760 resolves that the Monument to the memory of W. Fremlin should be taken up from the place where he was buried and placed in some convenient part of the church. Whatever happened, it is certainly not there now.

² This is the old dating and would be 1646 in modern terms.

³ This should be 39th: he was 38 in the previous October.

⁴ The actual amount to all charities was £1200.

⁵ Translates - We came, We saw, We returned, We will rise again"





THE CARPET

Although armorial bearings had been carried since early in the 12th century by royalty and knights, the range and quality of those using them had widened considerably over the years, before some regulations were decided upon, mainly to prevent duplication. The responsibility for this was laid upon the heralds in the 14th century and, from 1530 onwards, the Kings of Arms toured the country examining gentlemen's claims to bear arms.

Thus it was that, in 1640, Mr. Philpott (Somerset Herald) visited James Fremlen, checked his genealogy, noted that they were "mentioned about 400 years since" and confirmed that the family "owned large possessions at Kemsing in the County of Kent". The news of this visitation, with its confirmation and description of their arms and the elephant crest would no doubt have been circulated to other members of the family, including those living in London and Maidstone - and to William in India. It is possible that this produced the idea in his mind of a carpet incorporating those same arms and crest; alternatively, it may have been requested specially by a member of the family. It would have been no problem for one in his position to make arrangements with the royal carpet makers, either at Agra or Lahore, to put the matter in hand.

Once made, he may have shipped it immediately to England, either to be delivered to the head of the family (or some other member) or to await his return. In October 1640 he had despatched a quantity of calico in the *Discovery*, to be held by Methwold until he himself came home and was able to use it. This was declared free of freight charges because of the good services he had rendered the Company as President. Alternatively, he may have put it to use himself, though the President's rooms at Surat would already have a full complement of carpets. In the latter case, he would probably have brought it back to England with him but that would have meant it travelling in the hold and surviving the "near shipwreck" unscathed and there appears to be no evidence of salt water damage.

As to the carpet itself, it measures 19ft x 8ft and has a centre panel with 5 instances of the arms and crest on a red ground and showing beasts of prey hunting and at the kill on a background of flowers and trees. Between the narrow edging to this panel and the repeated edging as an outer border, the ground colour changes to blue and, in this wide area, the arms and crest are repeated a further twelve times, interspersed with palmettes and flowers.

Various influences are evident in the designs and colours, which tell their own story of trade and movement in the East. Persian weavers had moved into

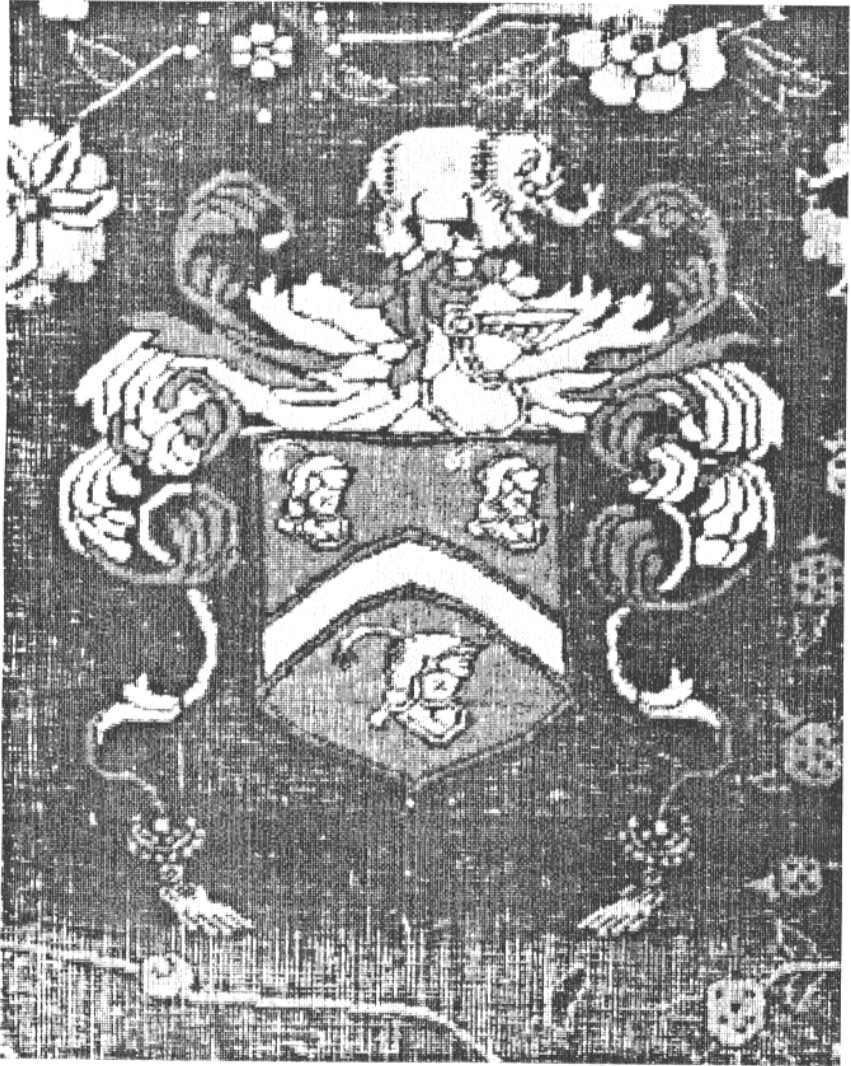
India in the previous century, taking with them the designs of the typical hunting carpets of their homeland. Similarly, Chinese art forms had infiltrated the countries with whom they traded and this is particularly noticeable in the mythical animals in the centre panel, familiar even now in London when the Chinese Lion heads the procession celebrating their New Year.

The narrow borders, however, are of essentially Indian design and though the shades of brown and green are not attributable to any particular country, the special mustard yellow colouring of the palmettes is again distinctly Indian. Whatever moved Gylbert Fremlen to choose the elephant as the family crest nearly eighty years earlier, the Indian weavers would have been very much at home incorporating it into their overall design which brought together the traditions of the Eastern and Western world.

At the time it was made, such carpets were being used in England not on the floor but as table covers and this would have graced a Jacobean oak table measuring approximately 5ft x 15ft 6ins. Since such a carpet, especially incorporating one's own arms, would have been a prized possession it is remarkable that it has not, so far, been found as a particular item in any Fremlen will. A carpet made for Sir Thomas Roe, who was also at the Mogul's court but some twenty years earlier than William, features in his will but has not survived. In the case of the Fremlen carpet, it was "lost" for two centuries until mention of it was made in the book "Eastern Carpets" in 1882 - and it was then thought to be of Spanish origin. In 1913, it had found its way to America, perhaps in an exhibition, and it was not until 1935 when it appeared in a Paris auction that the opportunity to return it to William's homeland occurred. Contributions by the National Art Collections Fund and Frank Fremlin towards the purchase price of £3,000 brought it eventually to its present home, the Victoria and Albert museum, where it is now awaiting restoration prior to becoming a permanent exhibit in the Indian & South-East Asian Section.

When it was made, it was just another carpet - an expression of wealth and success - and its importance now is very largely due to the rarity of its design, there being only one other known incorporating a family coat of arms - that of Robert Bell, master of the Girdlers' Company, which was made about the same time and hangs in the hall of the Company in London.

Were William to come alive today, he would be surprised to hear himself referred to affectionately as "Carpet William". Surprised and annoyed perhaps at the subtle irony that the great stone monument telling of his life, achievements and charity exists no more, yet the work of humble native weavers in a much less durable medium has become his lasting memorial.



Detail from the Fremlin carpet

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