Figure 1. 1754 Engraving, showing ship off Philadelphia flying striped ensign. New York Public Library, image 53921 (Detail – see Figure 5 for full citation).
A Striped Ensign in Philadelphia in 1754?

Peter Ansoff

“Isn’t it astonishing that all these secrets have been preserved for so many years just so that we could discover them.”

– Orville Wright¹

Introduction

Historians of the American flag have long been puzzled by an image, engraved in 1754, of two ships anchored in the Delaware River off Philadelphia (Figure 1). The larger ship is flying an ensign, with stripes and the British union crosses in the canton, that strongly resembles the ensign used by the Continental Navy during the Revolutionary War (Figure 2). It seems highly unlikely, however, that this flag would have been displayed in Philadelphia in 1754, because the “Continental Colors” was not created until the Revolution began in 1775.²

Its presence in an image created 21 years earlier poses a significant problem. If this flag were really in use in the colonies in 1754, our ideas about the origins of the American flag would require significant revision.

A flag like this did of course exist in 1754—the flag of the British East India Company (EIC). Could this be the EIC flag? Probably not, for two reasons. First, the East India Company did not trade with the American colonies. Second, even

Figure 2. Detail of the striped ensign in the 1754 engraving. New York Public Library, image 53921 (See Figure 5 for full citation).

if an EIC ship had somehow found its way to Philadelphia (blown off course, perhaps), she would not have flown the EIC flag. East India Company ships were not permitted to fly the company ensign in the Atlantic north of St. Helena; if such a ship had ever found herself in American waters she would have flown the plain British red ensign.  

Edward Richardson included an image of this engraving in his well-known book *Standards and Colors of the American Revolution*. In his discussion of the image, Richardson commented: “The ship is heavily armed for its size, and must have belonged to the Royal Navy or, possibly, some provincial navy.” As we will see, Richardson was right—in fact, he was more right than he knew. It also turns out that the flag in this engraving is related to the flag of the East India Company, albeit in a rather surprising way.
“Prettily Done”—The Heap and Scull “Prospect” of Philadelphia

The Philadelphia engraving, of which the mysterious flag was a detail, was the brainchild of Thomas Penn (Figure 3). Thomas was one of the sons of William Penn, the founder and proprietor of Pennsylvania. After his father’s death in 1718, Thomas and two of his brothers took over as co-proprietors of the colony. Thomas Penn moved to the colony in 1732 and lived there until 1741, when he returned to England. Apparently he did not get along well with some of the people in Philadelphia.\(^5\)

In the early 18th century, the artist William Burgis made large panoramic sketches of the waterfronts of Boston and New York, which were subsequently engraved. Both showed their respective cities as bustling colonial ports. Thomas Penn decided in 1750 that a similar “prospect” should be created of the Philadelphia waterfront. He asked his agent in Philadelphia, Richard Peters, to find an artist who could make a painting or sketch as a basis for an engraving. Peters contacted several local artists, but was unsatisfied with their work. However, an artist named George Heap\(^6\) heard about Penn’s project, and decided to make a drawing of his own. Heap had previously collaborated with a surveyor, Nicholas Scull\(^7\), on a well-regarded map of Philadelphia, and Heap used some of Scull’s data to create his drawing. The finished product was credited to both of them.\(^8\)

Peters offered to buy the drawing from Heap, but Heap would not sell it. After much negotiation, it was agreed that Heap would take the drawing to England and have it engraved. Through Peters, Penn put up the money for the trip and the engraving, in exchange for which Penn was promised 50 prints of the engraving.\(^9\)

Heap, with his drawing, boarded a ship bound for England in early December of 1752, and the ship headed down the Delaware. Before it reached the mouth of the river, however, Heap suddenly became ill and died. His body and his baggage containing the drawing were shipped back to Philadelphia, where he was buried in the Christ Church burying ground. Meanwhile, his collaborator Nicholas Scull quickly bought the drawing from Heap’s widow, which infuriated Peters because he had hoped to do the same thing. After much further negotiation, the drawing (actually a copy, because the original had been damaged at some point), was shipped to Thomas Penn in England.\(^10\)
Penn thought that the drawing was “prettily done”, and engaged Gerard Van der Gucht to engrave it. Van der Gucht (Figure 4) was a well-known London engraver who had illustrated everything from scientific books to the works of Shakespeare and Cervantes. His obituary in the London *Daily Advertiser* in March 1776 referred to him as a “very eminent engraver”. Among Van der Gucht’s other achievements, he is said to have fathered 32 children.

Van der Gucht completed the engraving in June of 1754. The finished image was approximately 7 feet long (Figure 5). It was much too large to fit on one engraving plate, so the final work consisted of four plates that fit together to make the panoramic scene. The ship flying the striped ensign appeared in the second panel from the left.

Thomas Penn sent the first print of the engraving to His Majesty the King. He wrote proudly to Peters that the King “is pleased with it, and has hung it in his own private apartment.” The engraving was very popular, and sold well at print shops in both London and Philadelphia.

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Figure 4. Gerard Van der Gucht. National Portrait Gallery, London, image D18989 (see endnote 12).

Figure 5. An East Prospect of the City of Philadelphia, taken by George Heap from the Jersey Shore, under the Direction of Nicholas Skull Surveyor General of the Province of Pennsylvania by George Heap. Engraved by Gerard Van der Gucht, 1754. I. N. Phelps Stokes Collection, Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Division of Art, Prints and Photographs, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations, image 53921 (see endnote 13).
A Striped Ensign in Philadelphia in 1754?

Two years later, another London engraver named Jefferys created a smaller engraving of the Philadelphia waterfront from the same Heap and Scull drawing (Figure 6). Jefferys shrank the waterfront scene down to half the image, and added a map and an elevation of the state house. Although the depiction of the Philadelphia waterfront is substantially the same as in the Van der Gucht rendering, the images of the ships in the foreground are completely different, and do not include the ship with the striped ensign. It appears that Jefferys provided his own ship images.

The Heap and Scull image of Philadelphia was re-engraved several times over the following years. One version, by an unknown engraver, was sold in London by Carington Bowles as late as 1778, during the American Revolution (Figure 7). The ship images in this version are completely different from either the Van der Gucht or the Jefferys versions. Furthermore, the margin of the 1778 print contained the following note:

“Engraved from the original drawing sent over from Philadelphia, in the possession of Carington Bowles”

Each of these three engravers of the Philadelphia prospect (Van der Gucht in 1754, Jefferys in 1756, and the unknown engraver in 1778) all...
worked from the same original drawing. However, each one included a completely different set of ship images in his version of the scene. Of the three, only Van der Gucht included the ship with the mysterious striped flag. This suggests that the ships did not appear in the original drawing, and that each engraver added his own ship images. It should be noted that the purpose of the engraving was to depict the city. The presence of the ships in the image reinforced the message that Philadelphia was a busy river port, but their specific appearance was not a significant concern. However, the question still remains: assuming that Van der Gucht added the ship images in his version of the engraving, why did he include a ship flying a flag that almost certainly did not exist in Philadelphia at that time?

The Bombay Painting

A clue to the solution came in a detail of the “Wikipedia” entry for the so-called “Grand Union” flag (Figure 8). A small image on the page shows an image of a ship, captioned “Painting of Flag of East India Company in 1732”. The image appears to be strikingly similar to the one in the “Pros-
pect” engraving. Investigation of the source of the “Wikipedia” image led to the original painting, which depicts a harbor scene in Bombay, India, with the ship in question in the center flying what is obviously the East India Company ensign (Figures 9 and 10). A comparison of the ship images from the Bombay painting and the Philadelphia engraving (Figure 11) indicated that they were obviously related: either one was copied from the other, or they were both copied from an earlier source.¹⁷

There are, however, some significant differences between these two pictures. First, they are mirror images. Second, and more interesting, the flags on the ships are not mirror images—they are flying from left to right in both

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Figure 8. Screen shot from Wikipedia, “Grand Union Flag”. March 2006. (Detail)

Figure 9. Bombay. Painting by Lambert & Scott, 1732. British Library Record number 18915. ©The British Library Board. All rights reserved.
cases. The painting also shows the anchor rode of the larger ship, while the engraving does not. These differences actually support the historical relationship between these two images.

The Bombay painting was created in 1732, and was one of a series of six paintings that were commissioned by the East India Company itself. The Company had just finished construction of its new headquarters building on Leadenhall Street, in London, and wanted the paintings to decorate the Directors’ Court meeting room.¹⁸

The Company commissioned an artist named George Lambert to make the paintings, and paid him a total of 90 guineas for all six. Lambert was a landscape painter¹⁹ who was not familiar with maritime matters, so he paid a well-known maritime artist, Samuel Scott, to paint in the ships. The ship images were thus painted by Samuel Scott in 1732.²⁰

A close examination shows that Scott’s depiction of the ship in question has a rather unusual feature. The bow tapers to a sharp point, and the cutwater is heavily raked. This is not typical of 18th century ships’

Figure 10. The East India Company Flag, from the Lambert & Scott painting (detail).

Figure 11. Ship images from the Lambert & Scott Bombay painting (left) and the Van der Gucht Philadelphia engraving (right).
bows; they were typically round and bluff, not sharp and pointed. The first suspicion is that the artist was not familiar with the subject, and painted it in according to his inclinations. However, that is probably not the case here, for two reasons. First, Samuel Scott was an experienced maritime artist, and he knew what ships’ bows looked like. Second, an examination of other paintings in the series shows that the ships in those paintings had normal, typical 18th-century bow shapes. Evidently, Mr. Scott painted the Bombay ship that way on purpose.

The pointed bow was actually characteristic of a particular type of 18th-century warship specifically associated with the “Bombay Marine”, which was, in effect, a private navy established by the East India Company to defend its commerce against pirates and local enemies on the west coast of India. The type was called a “grab” (from the Arabic word “ghorab”, meaning “galley”). “Ghorab” also means “raven” in Arabic, and the term may have been related to the fact that the ship’s bow resembled a raven’s beak. Another contemporary painting of one of the grabs of the Bombay Marine (Figure 12) also shows the distinctive bow shape. The vessel flying the striped ensign in Samuel Scott’s painting, therefore, is not a generic ship. It is a particular type of ship specifically associated with the East India Company and with Bombay.

The Connection

The ship images in the 1732 painting and the 1754 engraving both appear to be supported by solid historical documentation. The painting was made by Samuel Scott in 1732, and shows a grab in Bombay. The engraving was made by Gerard Van der Gucht in 1754, from a drawing by George Heap and Nicholas Scull. The 1732 ship image is more likely the original, since it depicts a ship-type specifically associated with 18th-century
Bombay. There is also a strong likelihood that the Philadelphia ship image was not in Heap’s original drawing, but was added by the engraver, Van der Gucht. The remaining problem is to establish a connection between Van der Gucht and the Bombay painting.

It was normal business practice in the 18th century to make engravings “after” paintings. An artist who was commissioned to create a painting would make an agreement with a print seller to have his work engraved. The print seller would then contract with an engraver and a printer. The print seller would sell the prints and the painter would receive a royalty. Did this happen with the paintings that Lambert and Scott did for the East India Company?

There were actually two sets of engravings made of the EIC paintings. One, in 1735, was engraved by Elisha Kirkall. The other, in 1736, was engraved by none other than Gerard Van der Gucht, who also made the Philadelphia engraving in 1754. Figure 13 is Van der Gucht’s engraving after the Lambert and Scott Bombay painting. Figure 14 shows his signatures on the Bombay and Philadelphia engravings.
We can now trace the likely pedigree of the mysterious striped ensign.
In 1736, Van der Gucht engraved the Scott image of the grab in Bombay, flying the East India Company flag. Nearly 20 years later, he needed a ship image to illustrate his engraving of the Scull and Heap drawing of Philadelphia. He referred back to some of his own previous work, and performed the 18th-century equivalent of “photoshopping”. The Philadelphia ship is a mirror image of the Bombay one. This seems quite logical when we realize that the actual engraving of a plate is done “backwards,” so that it will be the right way around when it is printed on paper. Van der Gucht probably referred to a printed copy of his previous work, and it was easier to trace it and engrave as it was than to reverse it again.

As previously noted, the flags on the Philadelphia engraving are not reversed with respect to the Bombay original. A logical reason for this is that, when Van der Gucht inserted the ship image in the Philadelphia engraving, he had already established the overall direction of the wind in the picture. He therefore had to re-engrave the flags so that they would blow in the proper direction. He was not terribly concerned with reproducing the details of the ensign, because the image was only a decorative addition to the Philadelphia port image. He therefore put in a simpler, and somewhat cruder, version of the flag, with fewer stripes.

It was also previously noted that the anchor rode is absent in the Philadelphia version. This probably had the same cause as the flag change. When a ship is at anchor, the bow points into the wind, and the rode is stretched out in front of the ship, as shown in the Bombay image. However, in the Philadelphia image the wind is in the other direction. In reality, the ship’s bow would be pointed to the left in this case, with the rode stretched out toward the left of the image. Rather than deal with that complication, Van der Gucht simply left the rode out altogether, probably reasoning that it would be on the other side and hidden by the bow of the ship itself.
Conclusion

The striped flag image shown in Van der Gucht’s 1754 engraving of the Heap and Scull drawing of Philadelphia was based on a painting of an East India Company flag in Bombay in 1732. The image was a decorative addition to the Philadelphia engraving, copied by Van der Gucht from his earlier engraving after the Bombay painting. The Philadelphia engraving does not provide any evidence that a striped flag was actually flown in Philadelphia before the creation of the “Continental Colors” in 1775.

When evaluating evidence such as an old engraving, it is vital to understand the history and context of the image itself, as well as the actual content. This is particularly true when the detail of interest (the striped flag, in this case) was peripheral to the original purpose of the image.

Appendix A
The Bombay Grab: A Symbol Lives On

The solution to the problem of the striped ensign in Philadelphia hinged in part on the identification of the ship in question as a “grab” warship of the 18th-century Bombay Marine. The grabs of Bombay are long gone, but their name and image live on in a curious way.

When the East India Company began stationing its personnel in India, one of the many things that it had to provide for its people there was beer. The company quickly discovered that it was difficult to brew beer in coastal India, because the high temperatures did not allow the fermentation process to work properly. As a result, it had to ship beer to India from Britain. This was a problem, because the voyage around the African cape was long, and the beer did not “travel” well in the cold, heat, and tossing and turning of the voyage.

Sometime in the late 18th century, a London brewer named George Hodgson discovered that a particular formulation of “pale ale” seemed to travel well. In fact, some even said that the long voyage improved the taste of his beer. It became known as “India Pale Ale” or “IPA”. In 1805 Hodgson opened a pub on Bow Street in London, near the East India Company docks, and served his IPA to the public. He named his pub the “Bombay Grab” in honor of the ships of the Bombay Marine.28
The “Bombay Grab” no longer exists; its location is now, oddly enough, the site of a Muslim Cultural Center.\textsuperscript{29} However, the name lives on, because an American brewer now bottles an IPA under the label of “Bombay Grab”. (Figure 15). Anyone visiting Burlington, Vermont, can stop at the Vermont Brewing Company and enjoy a glass of Bombay Grab—and will probably be the only person present who knows what a “Bombay Grab” really is.\textsuperscript{30}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{fig15}
\caption{“Bombay Grab” IPA label. Image courtesy Greg Noonan, Vermont Brewing Company, Burlington, Vermont.}
\end{figure}
End Notes


2. There is no official record of when, or by whom, the Continental Colors was created; however, the earliest known description is believed to have been written in early December 1775. See Ansoff, p. 98.

3. Cotton, pp. 105-106. It is frequently stated that the American Continental Colors might have been based on the EIC flag because the latter would have been widely known to the American colonists. Fawcett is often cited in support of this, but the evidence he presents is unconvincing. In fact, he decisively refutes the idea (pp. 466-471) that the ships involved in the Boston Tea Party might have flown the EIC flag. On the history of the EIC flag, see also Hastings, pp. 54-60.

4. Richardson, p. 16 and 18.

5. Fell-Smith, and Jenkins, pp. 145-166. The painting is in the collection of the Philadelphia Museum of Art, reference number 2004-201-1; according to the Museum catalog data it was painted by Arthur Devis in 1752. It is probably the one referred to in Jenkins, p. 168.

6. George Heap is believed to have been born around 1715, and he died in 1752 as discussed in this paper. He was one of the first members of the United Library Company, and was elected Coroner of Philadelphia in 1749. Apparently the 1752 Philadelphia map and the “Prospect” are his only known significant artistic efforts. The few known details of his personal life are summarized in Wainwright, pp. 16-17.

7. Nicholas Scull, Jr. (1687-1761) was the son of an Irish emigrant and had a highly respected career as a surveyor. He was a member of Benjamin Franklin’s “Junto,” and is favorably mentioned in Franklin’s autobiography. His wife, Abigail Heap, was apparently a relative of George Heap, so their collaboration on the 1752 map and the Prospect may have been something of a family venture. See “History Corner: The Scull Dynasty” in Professional Surveyor, May 2001, Vol. 21 No. 5, online at www.prosurv.com/archive/, visited 7 May 2007, and “Sculls in the USA” on the Scull genealogical website at http://homepage.ntlworld.com/gret.long1/research.html, visited 7 May 2007.

8. Wainwright, pp. 16-19, Snyder, pp. 41-42. Peters was rather pessimistic about the project; he wrote to Penn that “Philadelphia will make a most miserable Perspective for want of steeples.” Penn “admitted that Philadelphia would look better if it had some steeples, but added that he would be glad to have it as it was.” For the story of the Heap and Scull map of 1752, see Snyder, pp. 36-41 and Wainwright, “Heap and Scull’s Map of Philadelphia”, PMHB Vol. LXXXI (1957) pp. 69-75.
9. Wainwright, pp. 19-20, Snyder p. 42. Richard Peters’ letter to Linford Lardner, authorizing payment to George Heap, is printed in the “Notes and Queries” section of the *PMHB*, Vol. XII (1888) p. 379:

Mr. Lardner,

Having Mr. Penn’s Order to Employ an Artist to take a Perspective of the City of Philadelphia in wh we have met wth Several Disappointments and Mr Heap Having on his own Motion taken the Perspective in Order to go to London to get it Engraved we have agreed wth Mr. Heap that he make the first Offer to Mr Penn in what Manner he wou’d Choose to have it done at his Mr. Penn’s Expense Paying Mr. Heap to his Satisfaction—or if on Subscription then Mr. Penn to take Fifty we do Desire you to pay to Mr Heap Fifty Pounds and for so doing this shall be your Voucher

Richd Peters

Richd Hockley

30th Novr 1752

30th Novr 1752

Recd of Mr. Linford Lardner

Fifty Pounds

Geo Heap.

10. Wainwright, pp. 20-21, Snyder, p. 43.


12. Maxted, “Book Trade Personnel—Newspaper References 1745-1825”, and Clayton. The portrait was engraved by J. Caldwell after a painting made by Van der Gucht’s youngest son, Benjamin.

13. Wainwright, pp. 22-22, Snyder p. 43-44. The dimensions of the full image are 82.12 inches by 20.13 inches. The first state of the engraving, of which 500 copies are known to have been printed, had Nicholas Scull’s name misspelled as “Skull” in the title. The second state, with 250 known copies, had the spelling corrected. The image shown here is the first state, and is from the collection of the New York Public Library (image number 53921). The cataloging information given for this image in the Digital Gallery on the library’s website confuses it with the Jefferys “Contracted” version of the Prospect discussed below (image 53922). An image of the second state is at the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, and is reproduced as a large foldout in Wainwright, between pp. 22 and 23. After the second printing was completed, the plates were shipped from London back
to Nicholas Scull in Philadelphia, as he was the owner of the original drawing that he had purchased from Heap’s widow. It would be interesting to know the ultimate fate of the plates.

14. Wainwright, 21 and 23-24, Snyder, 45-47. Dimensions 35.14 inches by 18.10 inches. There is also an image of this engraving at the New York Public Library, image number 53922, which is not correctly cataloged; see the previous endnote. There were two states of this “Contracted” version of the Prospect; the first one had Nicholas Scull’s name misspelled as “Skull” in the same way as happened with the Van der Gucht version; it was similarly corrected in the second state. The Jefferys version was reproduced in several books and magazines in London, sometimes without the map and statehouse elevation. Thomas Penn liked the “Contracted” version better than the full-sized Van der Gucht version; however, the former did not sell nearly as well. Only 100 copies of the first state, and 200 of the second state, are known to have been printed. According to Wainwright, all surviving copies are from the second state.

15. Snyder, 119-121 and color plate 5. Dimensions 9.5 inches by 16.375 inches. Bowles 1790 catalog listed this as one of a collection of 271 prints “designed to be used in the Diagonal Mirror, and Optical Pillar machine or peep show.” Each copy was individually hand-colored with gouache; no non-colored examples are known to exist. See Clayton, Bowles family, for the history of the Bowles print selling business.

16. The name “Grand Union” was retroactively created by 19th-century historians to describe the “Continental Colors”. See Ansoff, p. 91.

17. There are simply too many similarities to be coincidence, and the more one studies them the more similarities one sees. For example, note the four large windows in the stern of the larger ship. One of them is half open, and a person is standing at the window. The same half-open window and person appear in the painting, although they are hard to see in this image.

18. The paintings are in the collection of the British Library, London. The Wikipedia citation for the detail of the Bombay painting states, incorrectly, that it is in the National Maritime Museum. The history and details of the paintings are described in Foster, Paintings. At the time Foster wrote this book, the paintings were displayed in the Military Committee Room on the first floor of the India Office. See the book for details of each one, keyed to the reference numbers:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Foster Ref. #</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cape of Good Hope</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Helena</td>
<td>37</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tellicherry</td>
<td>40</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fort William, Calcutta</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fort St. George, Madras</td>
<td>46</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bombay</td>
<td>48</td>
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For the history of the EIC building on Leadenhall Street, see Foster, *The East India House*.

19. George Lambert (1699/1700-1765) made his career as a painter of landscapes and theater scenery. He was elected chairman of the newly-established Society of Artists of Great Britain in 1761. Finberg.

20. Foster, *Paintings*, p. 18, Foster, *India House*, p. 134, Finberg, p. 201. Samuel Scott (1701/2-1772) painted general maritime subjects in the early part of his career, after the style of the great Dutch artist Van de Velde the Younger. After about 1740, his paintings were primarily scenes of the London riverfronts and bridges. In addition to the EIC paintings, he collaborated on at least one other commission with Lambert in 1750-55, involving views of Plymouth and Mount Edgecumbe. Finberg, p. 201 and Kingzett. See also the biographical summary of Scott on the National Maritime Museum website at [www.nmm.ac.uk](http://www.nmm.ac.uk). For a different slant on Scott, see the article “Peter Monamy and Samuel Scott” by Charles Harrison Wallace, on Wallace’s website devoted to the former artist at [www.cichw.net](http://www.cichw.net). Monamy was a rival of Scott, and the article suggests that Scott was chosen over Monamy for the East India Company commission because of the political influence of the Walpole ministry.

21. The founding of the EIC’s Bombay Marine is traditionally dated to 1612 or 1613, and some sources state that it was initially known as the “grab service.” However, a careful reading of Low, Hastings, and the note by “J.W.D.P.” suggests that the early naval efforts of the East India Company were conducted on an ad hoc basis by their armed merchant ships and crews, and that the establishment of the permanent naval force dates to around 1670, after Bombay was transferred to the EIC by the Crown (which had received it from Portugal in 1662 as part of the dowry of Infanta Catherine of Braganza when she married Charles II). The Bombay Marine was renamed as the Indian Navy in 1830, and was abolished in 1863 when the Government of India was taken over by the Crown. The modern navy of the Republic of India traces its heritage to the Bombay Marine. For the general history of the Bombay Marine in the early 18th century, see Low, Hastings, chapter 1 and Keay, pp. 255-270.

22. “The ghurab . . . had a low and sharp projecting prow and a square stern like that of a galley, two or three masts, weighed from 150 to 300 tons, and was very broad in proportion to its length . . . the British popularized its name by calling it a grab . . .” Agius, pp. 61-62.

Notes on Grabs:

The painting on the Indian Navy website appears to be a copy of an original in the British Library, Record Number 14298, and depicts the grab Bombay, built in 1739. (The Indian Navy image is reversed.) The author is unknown, but it is believed to have been painted in Bombay in about 1780 for one of the ship’s officers. Catalog information from the British Library website at www.bl.uk/catalog/indaoofficeselected/. The Bombay was apparently the last grab to serve in the Bombay Marine; she was accidentally destroyed by fire in 1789.

In addition to the British Library painting, several other images of the EIC grabs are known. Two of particular interest are an engraving of Bombay harbor by van Ryne in 1754, which shows a grab at anchor, and a colored etching by François Solvyns in 1796, which is believed to show the same ship as the British Library painting. The former is reproduced in Keay as Figure 5; it is incorrectly captioned there as being drawn by John Bellasis. The Solvyns etching is available online at http://inic.utexas.edu/asnic/hardgrave/solvynsoline/pages/Solvyns-Etchings.htm (image number 244). There are also several engravings of the battle of Gheriah in 1756 that depict grabs in both the EIC and Angria fleets.

The Solvyns, van Ryne, and British Library images differ from Samuel Scott’s depiction in that they show a raised focs’le above the pointed bow; Solvyns shows at least one gun mounted on the focs’le. Battle accounts indicate that one of the useful features of the grab was that it could fire forwards while approaching an enemy, in contrast to a conventional sailing vessel which could not train guns forward. Scott had never been to India and had never seen a grab; he probably based his depiction on verbal descriptions and did not capture the nuance of the grab’s bow configuration in his painting.

Hastings, p. 8 states that in 1716 the Bombay Marine’s forces included “four Grabs of twenty to twenty-eight guns.” Defoe, in his “History of the Pyrates,” states that “In the Year 1720, the Bombay Fleet consisting of four Grabs (Ships built in India by the Company, and have three Masts, a Prow like a Row-Galley instead of a Bolt-sprit, about 150 Tuns, are officered and armed like a Man of War, for Defense and Protection of the Trade).” The Lambert/Scott painting shows at least four grabs, and possibly as many as seven. Hastings, Chapter 1, and Low contain many references to grabs being involved in the EIC’s battles against the Angria forces and other enemies of the Company.

This image is of a copy in the collection of the National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, image number PAI0218. Both the Kirkall and Van der Gucht engravings after the EIC paintings were published by Bowles and sold in their print shop. Some hand-colored examples exist.

Interestingly, Gerard Van der Gucht was a signatory of the petition initiated by his friend William Hogarth in 1734 to extend copyright protection to engravings. (George Lambert was also a signatory and a friend of Hogarth.) The petition resulted in a Royal Act that was given assent on 25 June 1735, specifying that
engravings could not be copied “without the Consent of the proprietor”. Thereafter, English prints typically contained a statement in the margin that they were published “according to the Act”. See “William Hogarth and copyright: Notes from Jenny Uglow’s Hogarth: A Life and a World (Faber & Flaber, 1997)” online at http://www.ranadasgupta.com/notes.asp?note_id=51, visited 15 September 2007. Presumably, the proprietor of the Bombay engraving was the East India Company, which commissioned the original paintings. One wonders if the EIC ever noticed Van der Gucht’s use of the grab image in the Philadelphia engraving.

27. For another example of this technique of copying an engraving from a printed original, see Ansoff, “The First Navy Jack”, Raven 11, p. 11.

28. For the history of Hodgson and IPA, see Cornell and Tomlinson.

29. The pub was located at 49 Bow Street in 1869, which later became 246 Bow Road, E3. See http://pubsinlondon.net/LondonPubs/Bow/BombayGrab.shtml, visited 1 June 2007. This page contains an interesting photo of the building that formerly housed the pub, with the “Bow Muslim Cultural Center” sign visible on the front.

30. Very special thanks to Greg Noonan of the Vermont Brewing Company, for generously providing the image of the “Bombay Grab” label. Email, Greg Noonan to the author, 4 June 2007.
Bibliography


– *The East India House, its History and Associations*. London: John Lane, the Bodley Head Limited, 1924.


