

The Louisa Parlby Album  
Watercolours from Murshidabad  
1795–1803

Francesca Galloway



## Foreword

The mid to late eighteenth century saw a burgeoning of the British community in and around Murshidabad, the former capital of Bengal on the Bhagarathi river. In this catalogue, we are delighted to be able to present a group of fine and hitherto unknown paintings which give a fascinating insight into this historical moment, and the way in which the British saw and interacted with their Indian surroundings and with Indian artists.

We recently acquired a late 18th century album from Bengal, reflecting the tastes and interests of this British community. Like the Hyde Collection now in the British Library, the album included topographical scenes, Hindu and Muslim festivals, studies of flora and fauna and in particular a series of Palladian mansions and the Nawab's palace at Murshidabad (Agra Mahal). In June we published twelve Murshidabad watercolours from this group. The identity of the album's collector, however, was at this point unclear, though it was evidently made for a British patron.

In an exciting development, further investigation has now uncovered inscriptions and the signature of the collector, Louisa Parlby. Louisa was a resident of the exclusive English enclave of Maidapur, and was the wife of Col. James Templer Parlby, an engineer and employee of the East India Company whom she married in 1795. The renowned Indian specialist Rosie Llewellyn-Jones has uncovered the story of Louisa and her family, as well as that of the community of

Maidapur, the seat of the enigmatic Palladian mansions in our paintings. We now believe that all the mansions depicted in the album were connected with James Templer Parlby, his friends and his associates, and thus present a rare opportunity to learn about this intimate group of wealthy Englishmen and women choosing to live away from the bustle of the city.

Llewellyn-Jones's research shines a new light on Company School painting and the possible motives of Europeans for collecting these works of art. We suspect that this was a period when many albums were being assembled in Bengal, few of which now remain. The atmospheric group we present here, painted in a mixture of gouache and watercolour, includes vibrant depictions of festive and religious events, as well as dream-like representations of the Maidapur houses, set in the lush Bengal scenery.

Francesca Galloway



**The Louisa Parlbay Album**  
**Watercolours from Murshidabad**  
**1795–1803**

Towards the end of the eighteenth century it became fashionable among Europeans living in India to commission or collect watercolour paintings by local artists. A number of subjects were popular, including topographical studies as well as colourful events like religious processions, festivals and entertainments. There were sub-categories of botanical, bird, fish and animal paintings, often exquisitely detailed and the rather sketchier sets of tradespeople, characters and costumes.

These watercolours, often generous in size, were not designed to be hung on the walls of European houses in India, but were carefully mounted into albums or stored in portfolios which were kept in libraries or drawing rooms and shown to favoured friends. Wealthy householders had oil-paintings on their walls by Company School artists, men like Tilly Kettle, Johann Zoffany, William Hodges, and the Daniells, who had travelled to India to seek their fortunes and who charged accordingly. But Indian watercolours were within the reach of moderately prosperous East India Company officers and their ladies. The paintings were skilfully executed, pleasing to look at during a rainy afternoon or after a convivial supper and more importantly, were easily portable. An album could accompany its owner if he was ordered to a different part of India, as officers frequently were. If he or his lady lived long enough to return home to Britain, the album went with them too, to be shown off as a rather splendid souvenir of the

Cat. 2, detail



Cat. 1 detail

'when I was out in India' kind. It was the forerunner of the postcard album and later the photograph album, themselves only recently replaced by the digital image. Indian watercolours also signified the owner's good taste and his nod towards similar compilations being made at home of 'Gentleman's Seats' in England, Scotland and Wales.

The album under discussion, named the Parlby Album, for reasons which we will discuss later, is a large, hardbacked bound volume measuring 79 x 52 cm (31" x 20 1/4") originally containing over 84 folios of varying quality and by different hands. 22 watercolours have been selected for the exhibition. This essay will concentrate on those paintings of topographical views in Bengal, executed between 1795 and 1803. The artists are considered part of the Murshidabad School, named after the former capital of Bengal which lies on the banks of the Bhagarathi river. The city flourished between 1717 to around 1782, when the East India Company moved its administrative and judicial functions to Calcutta, 150 miles downstream. It was the transition of power from the old Indian capital to the burgeoning English city that was to provide a number of jobs for the men living at Maidapur whose houses are shown in the Parlby Album.

**1.**

The Taj Mahal seen from across the river with mosque and assembly hall in perspective view with a ferryboat putting out in manner of Sita Ram.

31.9 x 56.5 cm

Signed on verso *L. P...(?)*, bottom right  
(Indicating it was signed L.Parlby, however paper loss has removed the end of the signature)



### The Maidapur Set

Captions on most of the paintings, including versions held in other collections, are rather vague. 'Near Moorshedabad' is the usual description, but it has been possible, by working through old gazetteers and local histories to pinpoint, for the first time, where this select enclave was. Part of the problem of identification has been the differing nomenclatures – Maidapur was the official spelling, but the same place also appears as Moidapore and Moydapore. This is because the soft Bengali accent transmutes an 'a' to an 'o'. It is shown on today's maps as both Madapur and Madhupur. (We will continue to refer to it as Maidapur, to avoid confusion.)

Maidapur was described as a village three miles east of Berhampore, the cantonment established by Robert Clive (Clive of India) to protect the important East India Company possessions in the area. These included the silk filatures, or factories, where cocoons were processed and their threads carefully wound off and spun into delicate, expensive fabrics. It was Clive's victory over the Nawab of Bengal on the battlefield of Plassey in June 1757 that allowed the Company to consolidate its holdings here. Almost a century earlier, a tenuous foothold had been gained at nearby Cossimbazaar, when the English built a Residency and a warehouse here so that goods, including silk, could be collected for shipment downriver and eventually on to Europe. Trade was the initial purpose of the East India Company, long

### 2.

Although entitled Lucknow *Nautch*, this scene probably took place in Bengal as the style of painting and dress resembles a Murshidabad artist. A senior officer from the East India Company, seated smoking a *hookah*, is being shown a *chobdar* and *soontar-buridar* (a silver stick and mace), both signs of a man of great importance. Behind him stands a servant blowing smoke from an incense burner whilst girls dance to music with a Bengal cavalry sepoy watching on.

45.8 × 57.4 cm

Inscribed on verso *Lucknow Nautch* and signed *L. Parlby*, top right



before it became, almost by default, the ruling power. And trading places had to be protected by soldiers, so it made sense to set up an army base, which is what a cantonment is, on the east bank of the Bhagarathi river which runs down to the port of Calcutta.

Maidapur predated the foundation of the Berhampore cantonment (cat. 8). There were already European-occupied houses here before the battle of Plassey. The houses were grouped on either side of the high road that ran between Murshidabad and Calcutta, and were thus strategically placed between the old Indian capital and the new trading centre of the Company. It was at Maidapur that Robert Clive set up his camp two days after his victory at Plassey. Clive was on his way to Murshidabad, with an open invitation from the new Nawab Nizam of Bengal, Mir Jafar, to help himself to the contents of the treasury as a reward for putting the Nawab on the throne. While the victorious soldiers would have been poorly accommodated in monsoon-damp tents Clive himself was warm and dry in one of the early brick-built houses here. Thirty-five years later 'Moidapore House' was being described as 'the East India Company's principal house in Bengal' near Murshidabad.

What kind of people lived here? All the men were British and all were employees of the East India Company in various roles. They were soldiers serving in the Bengal Army and civilians 'on the Bengal Establishment' – judges, revenue collectors, surgeons, engineers and

### 3.

Two caparisoned elephants, in a hilly landscape. It is possible that the 'B' might refer to Judge Edward Eyre Burgess who was appointed judge at the Murshidabad *adawlat* in 1772. There is no scenery like this around Murshdidabad/ Maidapur, but if he later became a circuit judge, then he would have travelled to and from court houses across Bengal, with its Chittagong hills (see cat 7.) This would be fitting for an official such as Judge Burgess to travel with a certain amount of pomp and ceremony such as shown in the costume of the elephants.

47.4 × 60 cm

Signed on verso *L. Parlbby*, bottom right





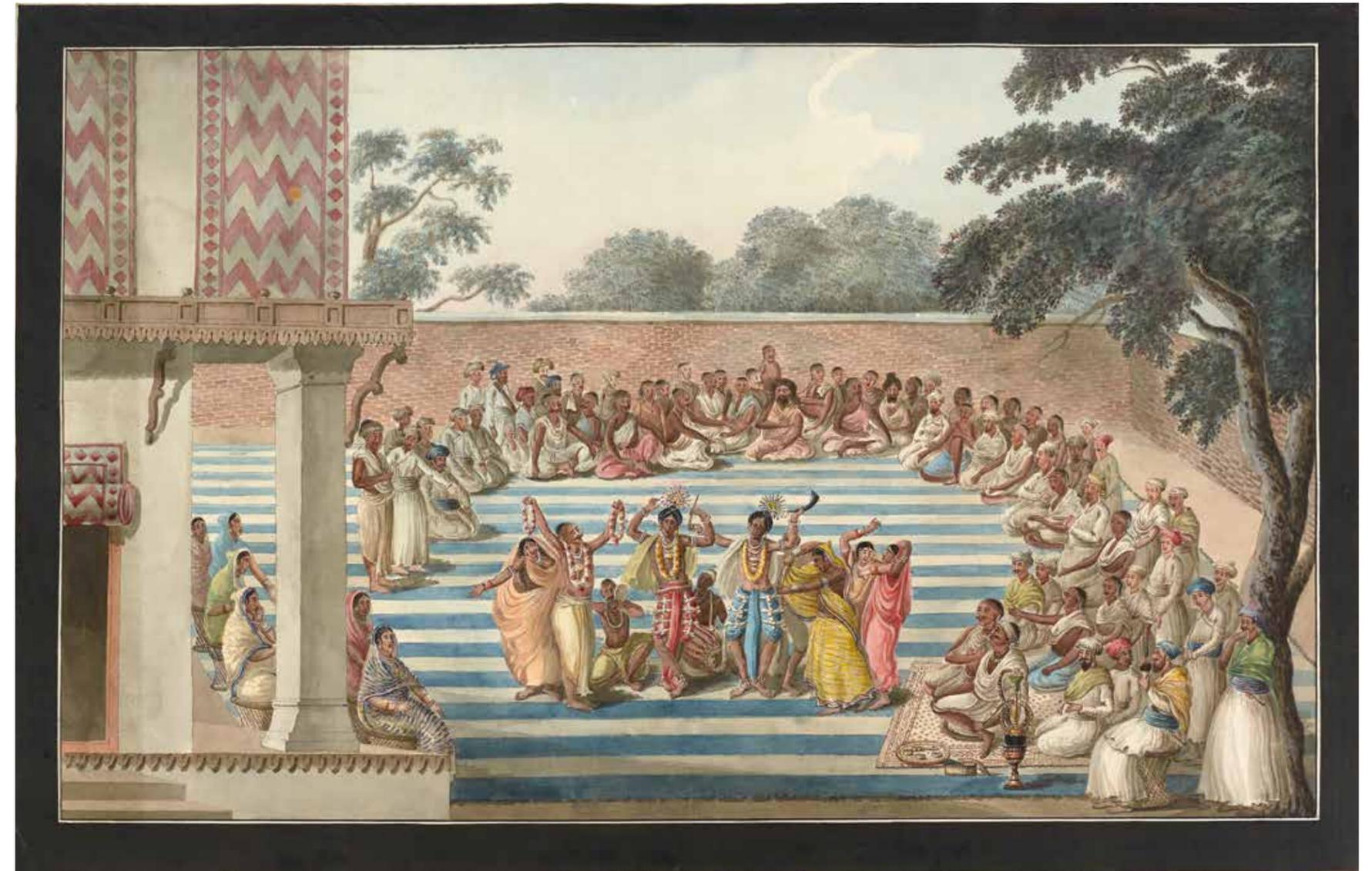
senior officials including Residents at the *darbar*, or Court of Murshidabad. None of them were top-ranking officials and their names do not appear in general histories of the colonial period in India. But they were solid, respectable men, mainly middle class, with a couple of exceptions at both ends of the social scale (a baronet, for example rubbing shoulders with the grandson of a stone-mason). What makes this album interesting is that these men were all near neighbours. They would have known each other, visited each others' houses, borrowed each others' horses, and attended dinners and balls together, for the British were never so sociable as when greatly out-numbered in a foreign country. We will meet these men (and a couple of their ladies) when we look more closely at their houses, but let us first survey the Bengal countryside in which they found themselves.

Cantonments like that at Berhampore were built to a standard pattern – the parade ground (cat. 8) where Indian troops were drilled and exercised; the British officers' bungalows; the barracks for British soldiers, and the lines of thatched huts for the Indian sepoy. Well away from these military quarters were the 'civil lines' where non-military personnel lived, men who did not serve directly with the army, but who needed to be within Company-controlled reach. So

4.

Hindu *Nautch* scene with representations of Krishna and Balarama dancing in a courtyard with the gopis. For another version see the British Library (Hyde Collection Add.Or.3229, publ. Archer 1979, fig. 78).  
49.5 × 75 cm

Inscribed on verso *Hindu Nautch* and signed *L. Parlbj*, top right



Maidapur became the civil lines for the Berhampore cantonment – older than its military neighbour, well situated on the high road, healthier, and definitely more up-market. High-ranking officials working nearby soon set the tone. Samuel Middleton, Resident at the Nawabi Court and Chief of Cossimbazaar was an early householder here and John Shore, later to become Governor General spent his first Indian years here in the Murshidabad revenue department as secretary and Persian translator.

Before medical science had established the causes of epidemic diseases like malaria, cholera and typhoid, the only defence against them was that of ‘pure air’ - indeed the very word ‘malaria’ means impure air. Calcutta was considered particularly unhealthy because of its marshy ground to the east of the city, its many pools of stagnant water and the year long damp and humid climate. Rudyard Kipling was to sum up both the lure and danger of the city when he wrote: ‘I am Asia – Power on silt, Death in my hands, but Gold!’ People who fell ill in late 18th century Calcutta were often advised by their doctors to seek ‘a change of air’, either with a sea voyage or by travelling up-country, away from the noisome atmosphere of the city. Maidapur was a good place to live, a couple of days journey from Calcutta by road or boat, and near enough Murshidabad to transact a day’s business there and be home in time for dinner. It was, and still is, a pleasant, verdant area, surrounded by trees and fields, with a straggle of houses along the old

5.

Procession of the *taziyas* beside the river at Murshidabad during the *Muharram*. Part missing to the right hand side and repainted on to the original album page. For another version see the British Library (Hyde Collection Add.Or.3233, publ. Archer 1979, fig. 80).  
35.5 × 71 cm

Inscribed on verso *The ceremony of the Muhamedan festival Muharram*



high road and a large tank to the east. Not everyone who lived here can be identified, but research has uncovered the most likely candidates.

**The Hon. David Anstruther (1750–1825)** had his own house built at Maidapur, which he named Felicity Hall (cats. 10 & 11). Anstruther was a professional soldier who served in the Bengal Cavalry for sixteen years (1778–94), before resigning to take up the post of Commander of the Bodyguard for the ruler of Awadh, the Nawab Asaf-ud-daula.

**Mr Brown** is probably J.T. Brown who was superintendent of the Company's 'cloth investment', a highly important post when so much depended on the export of fine fabrics to Europe. His house was at Cossimbazaar, a short distance away from Maidapur (cat. 12).

**Mr Edward Eyre Burgess (c. 1743–1801)** was Judge at the Adaulat, or judicial court at Murshidabad, having been appointed in 1772, before the court moved to Calcutta. He was also a Senior Merchant, the highest ranking to which an officer could reach in the Company's civilian hierarchy. Burgess lived in the Maidapur house which had formerly belonged to Colonel James Parlbey (see below) (cats. 3 & 16). He is buried in South Park Street cemetery, Calcutta.

## 6.

View from the opposite side of the Bhagirathi of the old palace at Murshidabad (Agra Mahal). To the left are the backs of the Tripoli gate and Munny Begum's mosque and to the right the European style 'breakfast room' and a small riverside mosque. Four of the Nawab's state boats are on the river (a *morpunkhi* with peacock prow, a *filchera* with elephant prow and others with horse- and *Makara* prows), while a ferry boat is putting out from this side to cross the river. All of these boats with their relative positions are reproduced in Sita Ram's *The mootee jurna and the Nawab of Murshidabad's State Boats* from vol.1 of the Hasting's album now in the San Diego Museum of Art (Welch 1987, no5a). Wide tan and thin black frames. A similar view with fireworks by night is in the British Library (Hyde Collection Add.Or.3234, publ. Archer 1979, fig. 81).  
45 × 66 cm





**Sir John Hadley D'Oyly (1754–1818)** the 6th Baronet, came from a Norfolk family. He began his career as a writer in the East India Company in 1769 and worked his way up. He was a Persian translator for the Bengal army in 1775, a factor (someone in charge of a factory, or warehouse where goods awaiting export were kept) the following year, a sheriff of Calcutta in 1779 and was appointed Collector of government customs and revenue for Murshidabad in 1781. This was a lucrative post because the Collector got a commission of 10% on revenue raised in the local markets. D'Oyly was in charge of a staff of sixty. At the same time, he became British Resident at the Court of Murshidabad, where he is pictured in conversation with the Nawab Mubarak al-Daula. He was the first recorded owner/tenant of Afzalbagh, a palatial house near Maidapur (cat. 9). He resigned his post and retired to England in 1785, but his wife's death in 1803 affected him badly and he returned to India where Lord Wellesley, the governor general, reinstated him as Collector, this time in Calcutta. Considered a man of education, taste and refinement, as well as a philanthropist, he died suffering from religious melancholia. He too is interred in South Park Street cemetery.

**The Hon. John Fendall (1762–1825)** started his Indian career as a Junior Merchant in 1778 before becoming First Assistant to the Collector of Murshidabad, Sir John D'Oyly (see above). He became Judge of the Sadar Diwani Adaulat, the civil court, Chief Judge in 1819, and Member

7.

View of the hills at Chittagong with a hut in front on stilts by the river (Chittagong). The whole painting shows a Murshidabad artist's willingness to experiment with a purely landscape painting. The hills are still slightly perfunctory versions of what was to become Sita Ram's manner.

44.7 × 57 cm

Inscribed on verso *Chittagong* and signed  
*L. Parlby*, top right



of the Supreme Council of Bengal the following year. He married Mary Farquharson in 1790 and three daughters, Mary, Louisa and Sophia were born during the next decade, all at Maidapur. John Fendall was an almost exact contemporary of James Parlby, and like him, became a widower, when his wife Mary died in 1818. The Fendalls lived in another house (cat. 16) formerly owned by James Parlby, and the closeness of the Maidapur set was shown again when the Fendall's daughter married the son of Sir John D'Oyly, her father's former boss. A nearby area, where the courthouse (*adaulat*) stood was named Findalbagh, after him.

**Mr Hampton (–1786)** This is possibly Colonel Samuel Hampton, the wealthy Commander of the new Fort William, who died at Berhampore in 1786, leaving a substantial number of houses in Calcutta to his large family. His son, **Samuel Hampton 1767–1828**, who was an indigo planter is another candidate. He died at Serampore, the Danish settlement downriver from Berhampore (cat. 19).

**Christopher Oldfield (–1808)** Collector of Murshidabad (1793–98), and later became a Judge of the circuit court for the division of Murshidabad. He was also the magistrate for the 'Zillah of Nuddeah' (Nadia, in northern Bengal) and died while on tour. He is buried in the compound of the Barakuthi, the old Dutch factory at Rajshahi, now in Bangladesh (cats. 17 & 18).

## 8.

The new Berhampore cantonment was described as 'well laid out and handsomely built. The grand square, a spacious quadrangle, enclosing an excellent parade ground is particularly striking.' While the perspective and shadows in this bird's eye view are correct, the surrounding buildings appear as roofless facades.

43.5 × 75 cm

Inscribed on verso *Berhamphore Cantonment* and signed *L. Parlby*, top right



**Thomas Pattle (1742–1818)** arrived in India in 1762 and married his first wife, Sarah Haselby in 1770 at Cossimbazaar. Two children were born in Bengal, Richard in 1773 and James in 1775. Other children were born in London in 1782 and 1783. He was Judge and Magistrate at Burdwan in 1796 and Senior Judge of the Court of Appeal in Murshidabad. His grand house at Champapoka appears to be the same as that of Felicity Hall (cats. 10 & 11), built by David Anstruther (q.v.) Pattle married, for the second time, Susannah Wilson in 1817. His burial place is unknown, and he has been confused with another Thomas Pattle, junior, who was a Director of the East India Company (1787–90; 1792–94, disq. April 1795). A watercolour of another grand house at Champapoka entitled ‘South Front of Mr. Pattle’s House, Champapoka Moorshed’ is in the British Library (Hyde Collection Add.Or. 3197).

**Robert Percival Pott (Bob Pott) 1756–1795** was appointed to the ‘Bengal Establishment’ in 1773 as Collector of government customs at Murshidabad, a profitable post, as we have seen. In 1785 he became British Resident at the Court of Murshidabad which was considered the most lucrative office in the Company’s service, although he had to pay very handsomely for the privilege to the former Resident, Sir John D’Oyly. Pott took over D’Oyly’s house at Afzalbagh, which was in effect, the British Residency at Murshidabad (cat. 9). His friend William Hickey, the advocate and gossip diarist wrote: ‘Magnificent as this mansion

9.

A view of Afzalbagh House, the British Residency at Maidapur, overlooking the Bansbari Jheel (lake). This house was occupied by Sir John Hadley D’Oyly from 1781-1785 and then by Robert Pott, who considerably enlarged the building as shown here. This was undoubtedly the grandest mansion at Maidapur.

41 × 71.5 cm

Inscribed on verso *Afzalbagh House Mr. B...(?)* The inscription is written on paper backing mainly removed now from the rest of the painting. There are two watermarks. One has fleur de lys crest above LVG. The other watermark has other initials and the date 1795





undoubtedly was, it did not come up to the still more magnificent ideas of my friend Robert who forthwith began to alter the whole plan, laying two rooms into one, building several additional apartments and erecting an entire new staircase, making it altogether by far the most splendid thing in India.’ Pott married his cousin Sarah Cruttenden in 1788 at Berhampore. In his Will, drawn up at Murshidabad a year before his death, he bequeaths to his brother, the Revd. Joseph Pott ‘all my drawings and portfolios’. He died in India but his burial place is not known.

**Mr Royle (–1806).** The best candidate is Captain William Henry Royle, who was commissioned in 1782, and who died in Bengal in 1806. He occupied the house at Nishatbagh (cat. 20), which was approached through ‘a magnificent avenue of deodar trees’ shown in the painting of John Fendall’s house at Maidapur.

**Dr James Wilson (–1803)** was the Company surgeon who worked as assistant at the garrison in Fort William, Calcutta in 1781 before moving to Murshidabad as full surgeon in 1793. He died in Murshidabad in 1803. Dr Wilson’s neat one-storeyed bungalow stood in the grounds of Christopher Oldfield’s larger house at Maidapur (cat. 18).

#### The Parlby Family

A tombstone in the old English cemetery at Berhampore bore the

#### 10.

The front view of Thomas Pattle’s house, known as Champapoka House. The house was built by the Hon. David Anstruther and named by him as Felicity Hall. Pattle took the house over after the Hon. David Anstruther left Maidapur in 1794 to work in Awadh (see cat. 11 for the rear view). An identical view is in the British Library (Hyde Collection Add.Or.3195).

38.5 × 54.5 cm

Inscribed on verso *The front view of Thomas Pattle’s Esq.* 30 and signed *L. Parlby*, bottom right

#### 11.

The rear view of Champapoka House, near the old Bahramganj dak stables. Thomas Pattle also built or rented an equally grand house also at Champapoka (see the British Library Add. Or. 3197).

38.5 × 54 cm

Inscribed on verso *Champopokah, now occupied by Thomas Pattle Esq. Backview 31 back view* and signed *L. Parlby*, bottom right

following inscription: ‘Sacred to the memory of Lieutenant-Colonel Commandant James Templer Parlby, of the Corps of Engineers, who died on the 1<sup>st</sup> December 1826, during a very long residence at Berhampore. He displayed the virtues which characterise and adorn the English gentleman, and this Monument is erected by his friends at the station as a memorial of their attachment, aged 64 years.’ From this slightly ungrammatical tribute we can trace the antecedents of Colonel James Parlby, engineer and son of Thomas Parlby ‘Master Mason of His Majesty’s Docks’ at Plymouth. The Parlby family name seems to have originated in the north of England, but by the 17<sup>th</sup> century there were a number of Parlbys settled in Devonshire, and particularly around the Plymouth area.

Born about 1762, James was christened with the names of his father’s partner and brother-in-law, James Templer. At the age of nineteen, James Parlby enlisted and was ‘commissioned into the military’ of the East India Company’s Army as a cadet. He rose through the ranks of ensign, lieutenant and major to become a colonel but his skills lay not on the battlefield, but as an engineer (cats. 14 & 16). His working life was spent in Bengal and at the age of twenty-three he was in charge of building a new road towards the Company’s factory at Lakhipur to the north of the province. Later he was appointed Superintendent of Embankments for the Division of Murshidabad and he was also ‘in charge of palace buildings’ in the old Nawabi capital.



Controlling the embankments may not sound like much of a job, but in fact it was vital to communications in Bengal, Bihar and further west.

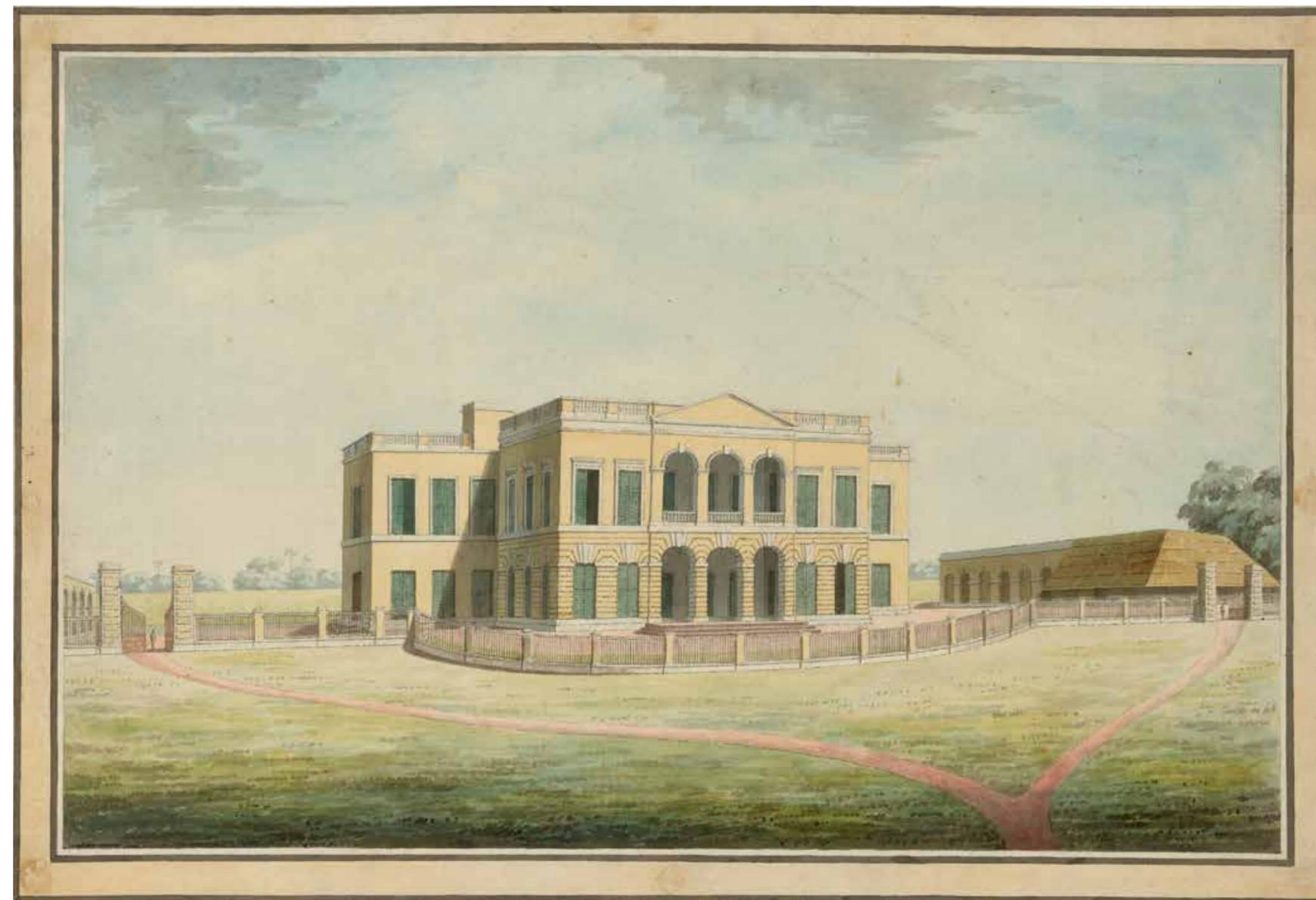
River travel was by far the safest and quickest way of travelling in the late 18th century and well into the 1800s. William Hickey thought nothing of commuting by boat from his lodgings in Calcutta to his second home at Chinsurah, a distance of 22 miles, every weekend and reckoned it took him about four hours door to door. The Ganges river and its tributaries undergo several name changes as they meander through Bengal – it is called the Hughly at Calcutta and the Bhagarathi at Murshidabad. Here the river is shallow and hidden sandbanks can still trap ships today. It is an annual task to keep the sandy river banks together and this is done by shoring them up with boulders, bags filled with cement and netting. At one point, in 1814, James Parlbby proposed a new cut, or channel of communication between the Ganges and the Bhagarathi rivers near Berhampore and the Revenue Department agreed to this the following year.

We know little of James Parlbby's personal life. He left no diary nor papers that we have found, so family details have been put together from the Ecclesiastical Returns that were submitted regularly to the India Office by East India Company chaplains. On Wednesday 2 December 1795 James married Louisa Munt in the new church of St John's, Calcutta, which had been completed eleven years earlier and was the only Anglican church in existence at the time. Louisa was

## 12.

Often referred to as the Factory House, this is the front view of Cossimbazar House which was separate from the factory. The house was occupied by Mr J.T. Brown, Superintendent of the East India Company's 'cloth investment'. Two similar versions appear in the British Library (Add.Or.3192 and Add.Or.3193) (see cat. 13).  
35.6 × 52.5 cm

Inscribed on verso The front view of Cossimbazar House occupied by Mr. Brown 32 and signed *L. Parlbby*, bottom right



twenty-three years old at the time of her marriage, a decade younger than her husband. Her parents, John and Sarah were Londoners and Louisa had seven siblings, born at regular intervals in the 1770s. There were Munt connections in India and Louisa is shown as living at Maidapur at the time of her marriage, which explains how she met James Parlby. Louisa may have been an early member of the 'fishing fleet', the rather unkind term for single ladies who sailed to India in search of a husband. (Ladies who didn't manage to find one during the first season ashore were even more unkindly referred to as 'returned empties' when they went home.)

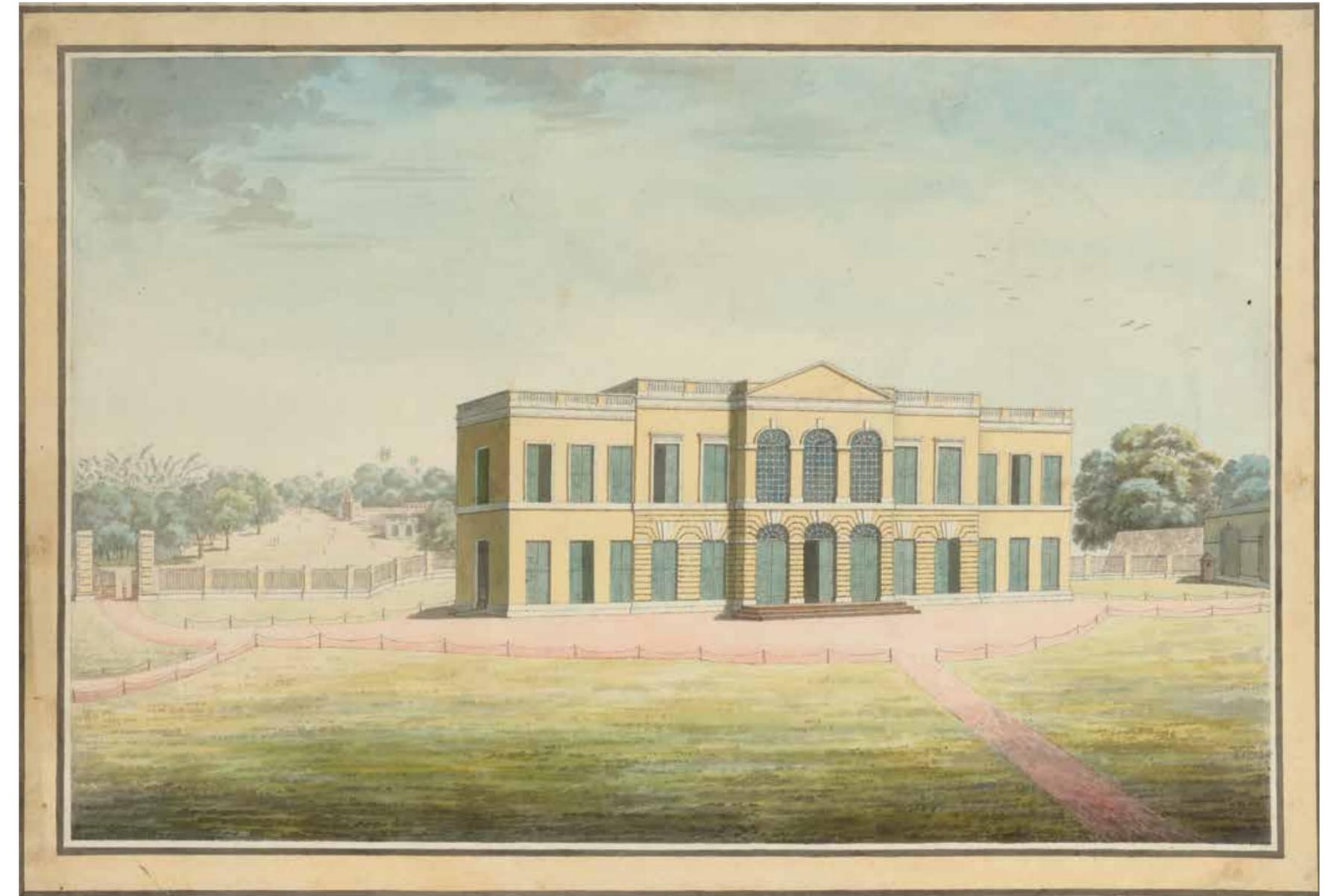
Five children were born to Louisa and James and their baptisms were registered at Berhampore, which at the time did not have its own church. A visiting bishop or clergyman on tour would have carried out an informal ceremony in one of the officer's houses. The date of baptism doesn't always reflect the date of birth and parents upcountry, as Maidapur was, would have to wait for a visit from a suitable cleric. The couple's eldest daughter, named after her mother as Louisa Marianne, was born in 1796, although not baptised until 20 April the following year. Louisa Marianne was the only girl in the family and she was followed by four brothers, Edward, born June 1797, George, born 1799, Thomas, who is recorded only at his burial in Calcutta in March 1800 and William, born May 1801.

Some time after the birth of her last child, Louisa Parlby returned to England, with her children. It may have been the death of little Thomas

### 13.

The back view of Cossimbazar House, occupied by Mr. J. T. Brown, Superintendent of the East India Company's 'cloth investment'. The same view in the British Library (Hyde Collection Add. Or.3193) is inscribed *North view of the Cossimbazar Factory House*.  
35.9 × 52.4 cm

Inscribed on verso *The back view of this Cossimbazar house 33* and signed *L. Parlby*, bottom right



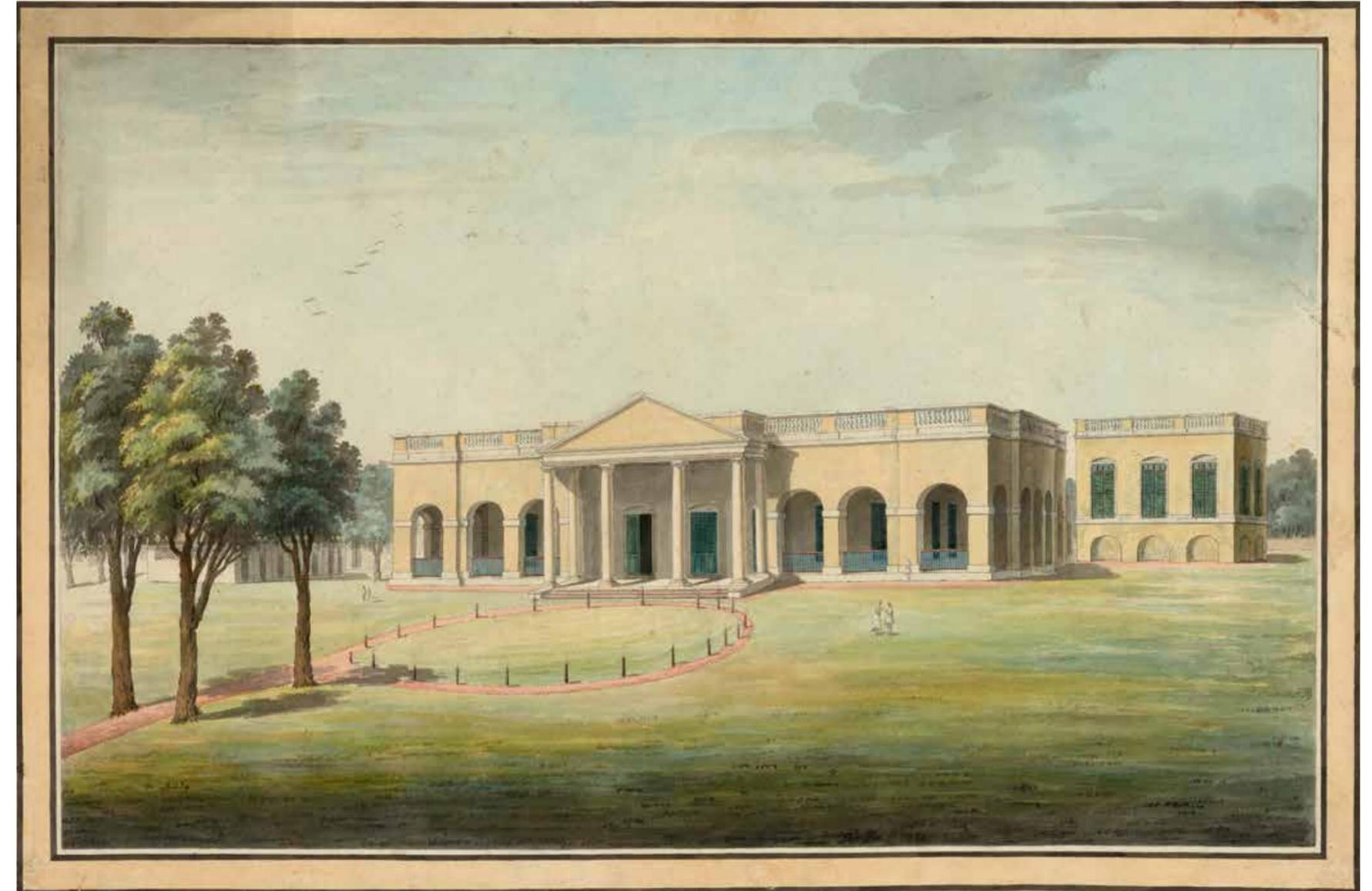
that made her decide the four surviving children would be safer in an English climate. It was certainly not an uncommon belief and there are accounts well into the 1930s of the agonising choice that married women had to make between leaving their husbands working in India, and taking their children home to be educated in an English environment. Louisa Parlby, whom we believe to be the owner of the Parlby Album, chose to return home and she went to live with her father-in-law, Thomas Parlby, at Stone Hall in Plymouth. It was here that Louisa died in 1808, the care of her young children probably passing to her husband's siblings, Priscilla and John Parlby. Sadly St. George's Church, East Stonehouse, where Louisa was buried, was destroyed by enemy action during the second world war, so there is now no tombstone to commemorate her.

In 1816 the Parlby's eldest child Louisa Marianne, now aged twenty and her brother George, seventeen, return to India. Louisa Marianne goes to live with her father James at Maidapur, and remains with him until his death on 1 December 1826. Within three weeks of her father's death, Louisa Marianne is married at Berhampore on 27 December 1826 to Thomas Marquis, a Scottish commander in the East India Company's maritime service. We can speculate on whether it was a sense of duty that kept Louisa Marianne at her father's side during his declining years, or whether James Parlby was so opposed to her marriage, that it could only take place after his death. By the time

#### 14.

The house occupied by Captain (later Colonel) James Templer Parlby. The grandest and probably the last house of Colonel Parlby. See also Add.Or.3194 in the British Library. 35.2 × 53 cm

Inscribed on verso *The House occupied by Capt Parlby* 38 and signed *L. Parlby*, bottom right



Louisa Marianne did marry, she would have been regarded as an old woman of thirty in a country where the average life expectancy for Europeans was around twenty-nine years of age.

#### **James Parlby's Estate**

On his death, James Parlby's estate at Maidapur was inventoried before being auctioned. If he made a Will, it has not been found, but it is clear that he left instructions about paying off his debts. His livestock went a week after his death – the horses for his buggy and carriage, 'young pigs', fowls, ducks and rabbits with their hutches. More interestingly is a note to the Governor General's agent at Murshidabad about cash that was due to 'various Workmen' who were engaged 'on account of Certain Buildings erect'd for the family of the Nawab Nazim'. This was the Nawab Humayun Jah, whose kingdom had shrunk as the former rulers of Bengal were forced to cede power to the East India Company. The Nawabs had retained, however, large sums of money which they put into extravagant new buildings, now that they no longer had to pay for an army or for civil administration. A year after James Parlby's death, the foundations were laid for the largest domestic building in Bengal, the magnificent Hazarduari palace which today stands boldly in all its Palladian glory next to the Bhagarathi river.

Another Bengal engineer had been appointed to oversee its construction, one Major Duncan McLeod, who had successfully

#### **15.**

We do not have a name, nor an occupant for this pleasant one-storeyed bungalow but the avenue of deodar trees shown to the extreme left may place it near Champapoka, a summer residence of the Murshidabad Nawabs. The tree avenue is shown in more detail in cat. 16.

36.2 x 52.5 cm



completed the Kurshid Manzil palace at Lucknow for the wealthy Nawab of Awadh, Saadat Ali Khan. McLeod is already planning the Hazarduari Palace, with the help of James Parlbby, who has ordered 'a lot of pick axes' to begin digging out the foundations for the new palace. Because it was to be erected alongside the river, it was particularly important that its embankment was secure. This was James Parlbby's speciality and he would have advised McLeod on what to do. It was also necessary to dig extraordinarily deep foundations, below the level of the water table. This is what all the pick axes were for. Sadly James was not to see the palace rising on the river bank, for it took ten years to complete, being finished only in 1837.

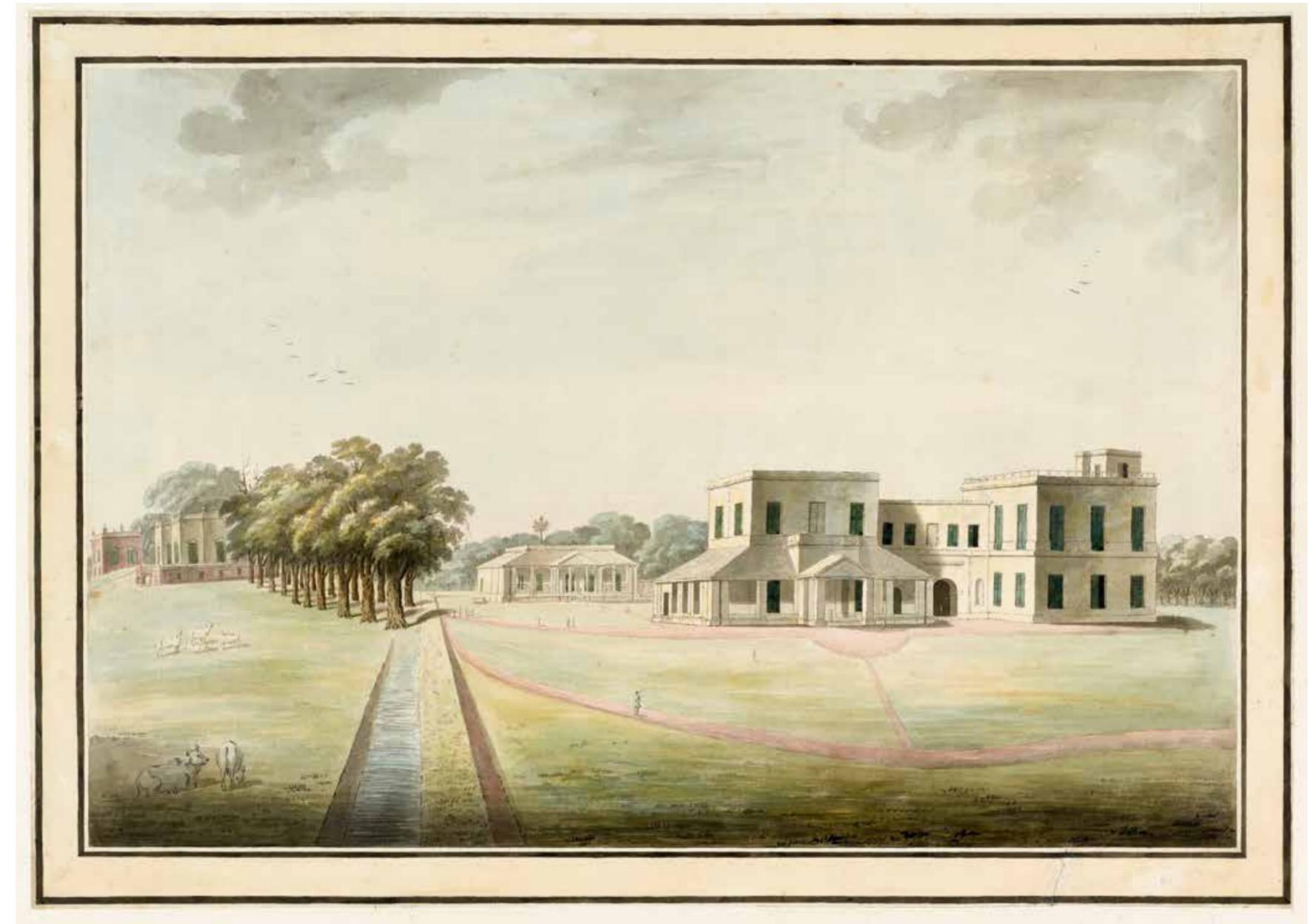
What the inventory of James's estate also shows us is that his library contained a number of architectural books, including an odd volume on the 'Palladian', *Plans, Elevations and Sections, of Buildings, public and private, executed in various parts of England...* by David Laing (London, 1818), two volumes of *The British Architect, Instructions for Civil and Military Surveyors in Topographical Plan-Drawing* by William Siborne (London 1822), *Elementary Principles of Carpentry, a treatise on the pressure of beams, the resistance of timber, and the construction of floors...* by Thomas Tredgold (Oxford 1820) and *A Series of Designs for Villas and Country Houses...with plans and explanations to each.* (London 1808). There was also 'A Lot of Drawing Paper', a 'second-hand Colour box' that is, a box of commercially produced blocks of water colours,

## 16.

Mr Fendall's house formerly Parlbby's as indicated on the verso of the painting. An identical watercolour in the British Library (BL Hyde Collection Add.Or.3191) refers to this house as 'Mr. Burgess's House at Moidapore near Moorshedd. rented formerly by Captn. Parlbby'; in pencil: 'East part of Moidapore House and Mrs. Motford in the near ground.' This is the east view of Maidapur House, which may have been the first British Residency. A long avenue of deodar trees (left) said to be a mile in length and planted by Thomas Amplett, indicate the path. Also here is the house of Mrs Elizabeth Mitford, daughter of Thomas Pattle, who married Robert Mitford, the Collector of Dacca District. It was an unhappy marriage, which is why Elizabeth was living in her own house.

39 × 54 cm

Inscribed on verso *Mr Fendall's house, formerly Parlbby's* and signed *L. Parlbby*, bottom right



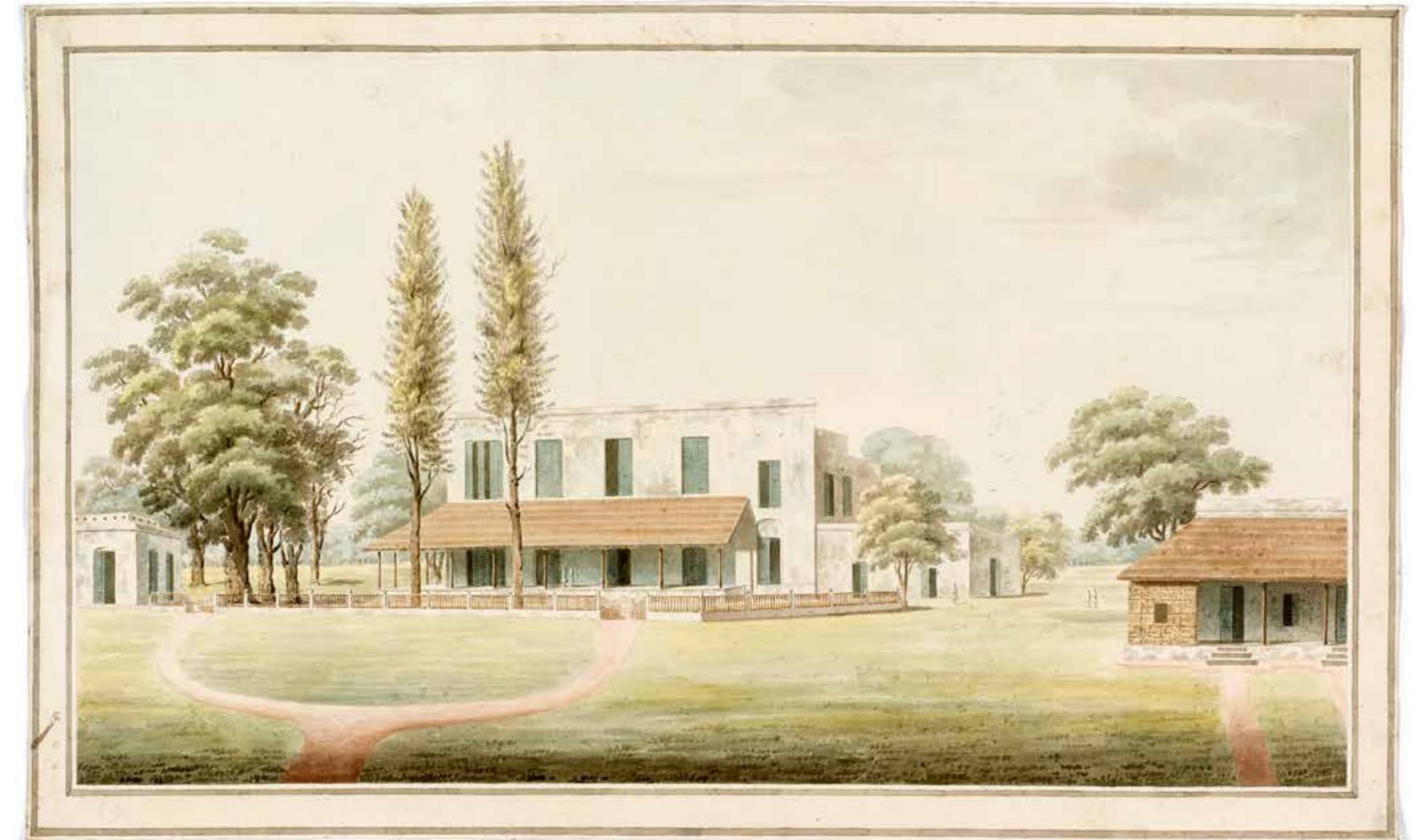
and eight polygraphic prints - reproductions of paintings. There is however, no Album nor portfolio listed among his effects.

There is little doubt that James Parlby was responsible for many of the grand houses that graced Maidapur at the turn of the 18th century. From captions on the paintings, we know that he moved house here at least twice – acting much like a present-day developer who builds or does up a house, lives in it for a while, and then moves on to a new project (cats. 14 & 16). It was natural that he would want a record of his work, a portfolio that he could show to potential clients. This is where the Parlby Album comes in. Because the owner's name is inscribed on the paintings simply as L. Parlby, we are not sure whether this refers to his wife, Louisa Parlby, or his eldest daughter, Louisa Marianne. I am inclined to think the Album belonged to his wife who was collecting paintings of houses at Maidapur, some of which her husband had built, as well as events at Murshidabad and the parade ground at Berhampore, all places she would have been familiar with. It was not unusual for English women to purchase paintings by local artists. Lady Impey's collection is well known, and two fine drawings that belonged to Thomas Pattle's daughter-in-law, Lydia, are now in the British Museum. Louisa probably took the Album with her when she went home with her children and it would have remained in family hands for generations. At some point explanatory captions have been added in French by someone unfamiliar with Indian names, although aware of the inhabitants of the Maidapur houses.

**17.**

The front view of Christopher Oldfield's house at Maidapur. Additions and alterations were frequently made to houses as building materials and labour were cheap by English standards. (see cat. 18 for rear view). An identical view is in the British Library (Hyde Collection Add.Or.3189). 34.5 × 57 cm

Inscribed on verso, *Front view of Mr Oldfield*, 35 and signed on verso *L. Parlby*, bottom right



### The Murshidabad artists

The majority of the 22 paintings in the Parlby Album are already known to us from two different sources – the collections of Lieutenant Colonel James Chicheley Hyde (1787-1867) and Richard, Marquess Wellesley (1760-1842). Both collections are now in the British Library. None of the Indian artists in the three collections, Parlby, Hyde and Wellesley are named, neither have they named their own paintings. All of the titles that we have, written in pencil or ink on the backs of the paintings, are by the purchasers, not the artists. There are no dates either, so these have been estimated from internal evidence. It is clear that at this period, the turn of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, these watercolours were bought more for what they depicted, than for the person who painted them. (The star of Sita Ram, the only Murshidabad School artist we can identify with confidence, had not yet risen.) The rather derogatory term 'bazaar painters' has been coined to describe these anonymous men, but it is not such a misnomer. These painters were working, like the *baniyas* (traders), to make a living. The idea of the starving European artist in a garret, convinced of his own genius, would have seemed ludicrous to them.

It has been argued that with the collapse of autonomous native rule in Bengal, the role of the court artist, or the artist with a wealthy patron, was at an end. Painters had to look for new patrons and found them among the officers of the East India Company. This is only

### 18.

The rear or south east view of Christopher Oldfield's house at Maidapur (left) with Dr James Wilson's modest bungalow (centre) partially obscured by a tree. An identical view is in the British Library (Hyde Collection Add.Or.3190). 33.5 × 57 cm

Inscribed on verso *back view of Mr Oldfield & Doctor Wilson's bungalow*,<sup>36</sup> and signed *L. Parlby*, bottom right



partially true. Although the centre of power had shifted to Calcutta and the former rulers of Bengal, the Nawabs, had become politically emasculated by the East India Company, there was still a lot of wealth around as their new palaces at Murshidabad clearly demonstrate. Money had also been found for a new Court artist, the Englishman George Farrington, whose oil paintings, now lost, were copied in watercolours by the bazaar painters. And the idea that Company officials with a bit of spare cash became the new patrons has not been proven. To be a patron in the old, Mughal sense of the word, was to provide an atelier where a group of artists could work, to furnish them with materials, including expensive gold leaf, and to give them a 'pension' of so much per month. In return the artists were on call to capture significant scenes in their patron's life; to record important visitors; to paint miniatures of their master to present to honoured guests; to illustrate manuscripts; to liaise with the bookbinder making the albums and to get the paintings properly pasted down, if necessary hiding the joins with a concealing design.

This intimate and often long-lasting relationship between wealthy patron and artist could not be duplicated by the East India officers stationed in Bengal. We can speculate, in the absence of much hard evidence, that transactions between the Murshidabad painters and Company officers were of a commercial nature. The artists may not even have sold their paintings direct to their clients, but through a

## 19.

Mr Hampton's House. This house once belonging to Colonel Samuel Hampton who owned a large number of properties in and around Calcutta and who died in Berhampore in 1786. It is likely that his son Mr Samuel Hampton, an indigo planter inherited this house, which would match the description referring to it as Mr Hamptons House and not Colonel Hampton.

37 × 69 cm

Inscribed on verso *Mr Hamptons House*



middleman, a *gomastah*, who could speak English and who would visit likely purchasers either by arrangement or on the off-chance of a sale. We can imagine him sitting cross-legged on the verandah of one of the fine houses pictured in the large portfolio he is displaying. Within living memory, tradespeople with something to sell went to the houses of potential clients with their goods. Europeans would not have been found rooting around in the bazaar for artworks. A good painting of your own house, or at least the house you were renting, as most Company officers did, was always a desirable purchase. No-one has attempted to guess what these paintings would have sold for initially. Further research into European account books of the period may reveal more information. My guess is that each watercolour sold for less than Rs 100 and it is likely that the artist got only a proportion of the price.

#### **Building the Maidapur mansions**

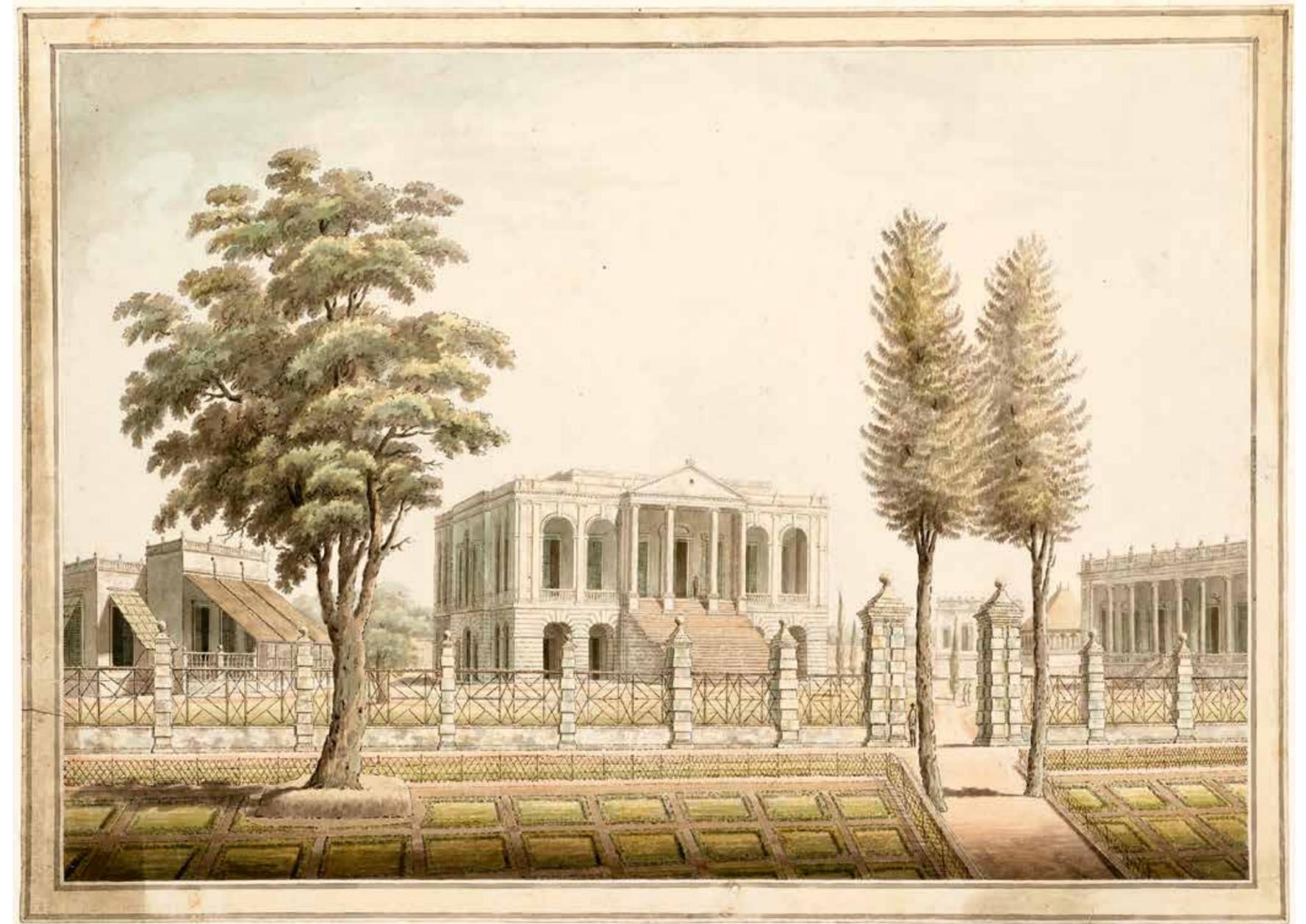
Despite their appearance of solid stone masonry, the European-style buildings were in fact constructed from thousands of locally made small bricks, known as lakhori, because lakhs of them were needed for a single house. The baked bricks were so small they could be used to imitate features found in stone-built houses like voussoir arches and bevelled blocks. Balustrades were often ingeniously constructed using hundreds of wheel-made clay vases with elongated necks. Although

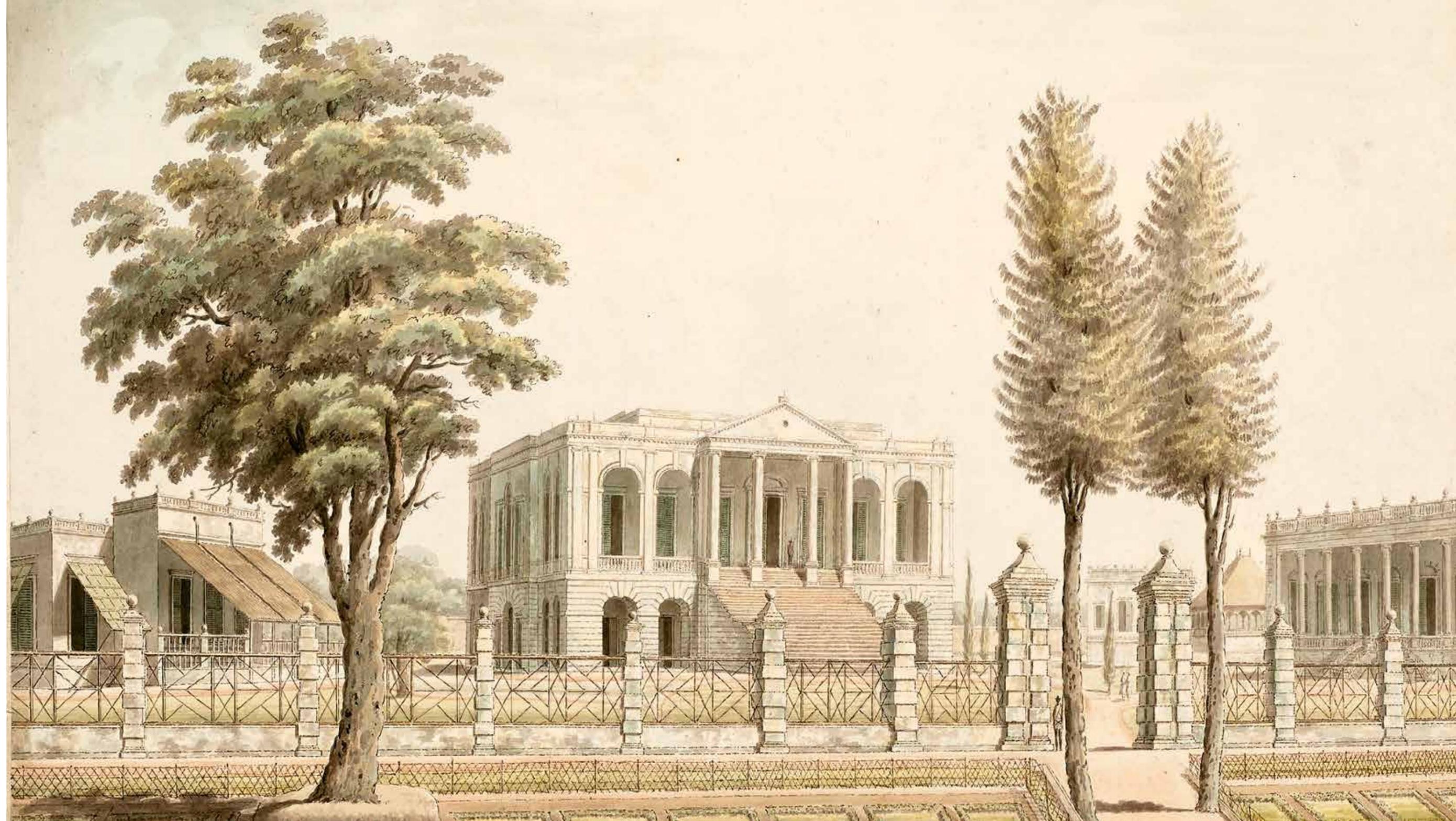
#### **20.**

Probably the house occupied by Captain William Royle, who died in Bengal in 1806. It was named Nishatganj, which translates as the Garden of Pleasure and was approached through 'a magnificent avenue of deodar trees', the last pair appearing in front of the handsome gate pillars of the house. Other houses in this exclusive enclosed compound include the Murshidabad nawabs' summer residence, pictured extreme right. 40.5 x 57.7 cm

Signed on verso *L. Parlby*

Private collection





stone was obtainable from the Rajmahal Hills, it was easier and cheaper to build with brick. The dozens of kiln chimneys that line the banks of the Bhagarathi today show that brick is still the most popular material, just as it was two hundred years ago. The grandest houses at Maidapur, like that of Felicity Hall, made sensible concessions to the climate while retaining a Palladian elegance. Deep verandahs on two storeys at the front, and a double height verandah at the rear allowed air to circulate through the rooms whose doors were aligned. Using the *piano nobile* device of a raised ground floor also cooled the living quarters.

There were variations, depending on one's pocket and taste. Christopher Oldfield's house (cats. 17 & 18) has adopted the Bengali bungalow with a protruding tiled verandah all around the ground floor, although the first floor has only venetian shutters to protect it from the sun. Dr James Wilson's adjoining one-storeyed bungalow has a similar tiled verandah. (The word 'bungalow' comes from the Bengali and is used for both a single or a double storeyed house.) In contrast, the Cossimbazar house (cats. 12 & 13) is not well considered, with no visible shading devices like verandahs or simple exterior blinds.

The mansions or bungalows are set in pleasant, open surroundings. Afzalbagh (cat. 9), the grandest of them all, stood beside the Bansbari Jheel or lake. Trees are pictured at a discreet distance because there must be no hint of the surrounding jungle with its awe-inducing tigers and other wildlife. There is a calm, dream-like quality about these

## 21.

This irregularly-shaped house was probably the home of a merchant with divided compartments at ground level used for storage of goods. The gable over the entrance portico is an eccentric feature, conforming neither to English nor Bengali style.

35.8 × 53.5 cm

Private collection





Maidapur mansions. They sit in the afternoon sun with cattle drowsing on the lawns and the occasional Indian figure passing by to give them scale. Their English owners are drowsing too – laid out indoors on their day beds, their shoes kicked off, their stays and waistcoats loosened and the venetians closed. As the day cools, they will get up, put on fresh clothes and prepare for the evening's entertainment. It is a discrete moment in time and place – a glimpse of English life in India that we are privileged to share today through these lovely paintings.

*Rosie Llewellyn-Jones*

## 22.

The house, whose owner is at present unknown, stands in its own grounds which lead down to a tank (a man-made stretch of water) which is neatly fenced with iron railings, completed at considerable cost. The building arrangement suggests this complex was used both residentially and for commercial purposes. The thatched huts indicate that workers lived on site and possibly processed fabrics for export.

38.5 × 57.2 cm

Collection of Yale Center of British Art, Paul Mellon Fund



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