

ROBERT LYALL: FROM SCOTTISH RADICAL TO IMPERIAL BRITISH AGENT AT THE COURT OF IMERINA

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Résumé : Cet article expose l'histoire de Robert Lyall avant qu'il devienne en 1827 le deuxième agent politique de la Grande-Bretagne à la cour de la couronne merina à Madagascar. Lyall est né à Paisley en Écosse, un foyer du radicalisme. Comme on pouvait s'y attendre, il est devenu, lui-même, un militant pour la réforme du système parlementaire britannique, une tendance renforcée par ses séjours à Manchester, autre centre radical, et en Russie. En revenant à Londres en 1823, Lyall publie des ouvrages dans lesquels il critique l'absolutisme tsariste, et préconise un programme de réforme politique, ce qui le projette comme symbole du mouvement pour l'élargissement du plébiscite au moment où, en 1826, des élections ont lieu pour le parlement britannique. Si le parti libéral gagne, il est sûr d'obtenir un poste prestigieux et payant. Mais ce sont les Tories, parti de la droite, qui gardent le pouvoir, pour la quatrième fois. Désespéré, Lyall (qui à ce stade n'a aucune chance de trouver une sinécure en Grande-Bretagne) candidate par l'intermédiaire d'amis bien placés au ministère des affaires étrangères pour un poste outre-mer. James Hastie, l'agent britannique auprès de la cour merina à Madagascar vient de mourir, et Lyall est nommé pour lui succéder. De suite, il change ses couleurs politiques, et devient défenseur de la monarchie anglaise et des Tories. Dès qu'il arrive à Tananarive, il essaie sans succès de renforcer son autorité absolue sur les résidents britanniques et de promouvoir les intérêts impériaux britanniques chez le souverain merina qui refuse de reconnaître son titre d'agent britannique et l'expulse de Madagascar.

Mots-clés : Robert Lyall, agent britannique, radicalisme, couronne merina

Abstract: *This article examines the little-known background of Robert Lyall, appointed as the second Resident British Agent to the Merina Court. It reveals that he was born in the southern Scottish city of Paisley, a political hotbed of radicalism. Unsurprisingly, he developed into a staunch supporter of political reform, a sentiment strengthened by his time in Manchester (another centre of radicalism) and Russia. When he returned to Britain from Russia in 1823, Lyall published a number of books that criticised Tsarist absolutism and advocated political reform. This projected him to the forefront of the pro-reform movement, and he was hopeful that a Liberal win in the elections of 1826 would guarantee him a prestigious and lucrative government post. His hopes were dashed when the anti-reform Tory party were returned to power with an increased majority. However, well-connected friends petitioned in his favour for an overseas post – and he was appointed to succeed James Hastie, the first British Agent to Madagascar. Thereupon, he performed a political volta-face, became a staunch defender of the English monarchy and Tory government. He further attempted unsuccessfully to enforce rigid authority over all British subjects in Madagascar and to promote British imperial policy upon the Merina crown – which refused to recognize his status and within a year expelled him from Madagascar.*

Keywords: *Robert Lyall, British Agent, radicalism, Merina crown*

On 23 October 1820, the British signed a treaty of alliance with Radama I (r. 1810-28), a prince from Imerina, a province in the highlands of Madagascar. The British recognized that, in return for stopping the export of slaves, Radama should receive an annual “equivalent” in money and goods, to the value of revenue lost because of the ban; and that to be recognized as king of the entire island.¹ However, they also insisted that Radama accept a British resident agent at his court to proffer political and military advice, and British (London Missionary Society - LMS) missionaries who, because their passages from Mauritius to Madagascar were assured by the Mauritian government which also paid them a monthly stipend, were also, in effect, British agents, representing the religious and educational wing of the British political mission to Madagascar. The missionaries thus fell under the British agent’s authority and, like him, were to enjoy extraterritorial judicial status.

Following the death in October 1826 of James Hastie (1786-1826), the first British agent to the Merina court, the British government appointed as his successor Robert Lyall (1789-1831), a doctor, naturalist and published voyager of considerable renown. Lyall and his large family reached Mauritius on 2 October 1827. However, whereas he briefly met Radama at Tamatave, Madagascar’s main port, it was not until the following year that he travelled to Antananarivo, the capital of Imerina, to establish himself at the Merina court. On 1 August 1828, Lyall arrived at the capital only to hear that Radama had died days before. In November 1828, the new sovereign, queen Ranaivalona I (r.1828-61), refused to receive Lyall as an agent of the British government, announced the rupture of the 1820 British treaty, and in late

¹ For details of the treaty see BL Add.20131 f.116, *Papers relating to the Abolition of the Slave Trade in the Mauritius : 1817-1820*, vol. 18 (House of Commons, 1821), p. 360.

March 1829, had him arrested, accused of sorcery and expelled.² For a supposedly barbarian country to rupture a treaty with the global power of the time, and to expel its official representative was a major step. Thus William Ellis (1794-1872), Foreign Secretary of the LMS, stated, in his authoritative *History of Madagascar* (1838):

*The treatment he [Lyall] received at the hand of the native government was severely censured by the secretary of state for the colonies at the time, by command of the prince regent; and the authorities in Madagascar were warned against a repetition of their conduct.*³

Although, as LMS missionary Joseph John Freeman (1794-1851) later commented “the English... took no steps to retaliate the insult offered to the British Government in the expulsion of Mr. Lyall,”⁴ the treatment of Lyall was central to British interpretations of events in Madagascar between the death of Radama I in 1828 and the alleged “expulsion” of missionaries in 1835-6. In summary, the reactionary Ranavalona I reversed the policy of her enlightened predecessor, and nullified all the beneficial impact of British political and religious agents, was widely disseminated in Britain. Thus in 1854, the London Quarterly Review noted:

*Mr. Hastie had died before the King, and was succeeded by Dr. Lyall. This gentleman was dismissed with insult; the Missionaries were silenced; and the people commanded, on pain of death, publicly to abjure Christianity.*⁵

Subsequently, the conventional historical interpretation is that Lyall’s expulsion emanated from the xenophobic character of the Merina queen, Ranavalona I (r. 1828-61)⁶ – a view that has only started to undergo revision from the mid-1970s.⁷

This contribution focuses on another, hitherto unresearched aspect of the history of Lyall – his transformation from Scottish radical and critic of the imperial and domestic policies of the Tory government in London to British political agent at the Merina court and staunch defender of Tory rule, British imperialism, and the English crown.

I) LYALL’S EARLY LIFE

Robert Lyall (1789-1831) was born in Paisley, Renfrewshire, Scotland on 26 November 1789 to William Lyall and Janet (maiden name Tassie/Tassin). It is possible that his father was the William Lyall noted in the early 1800s as a “respectable and extensive grocer” in Paisley who took in boarders,⁸ although in this case Robert would have been considerably older than the third son, William, born in 1811, who

² William ELLIS, *History of Madagascar*, vol.2 (London: Fisher, 1838), pp.417-21; Lyons McLeod, *Madagascar and Its People* (London: Longman, Green, Longman, Roberts, & Green, 1865), p.85; Samuel PASFIELD OLIVER, *Madagascar: An Historical and Descriptive Account of the Island and its Former Dependencies*, vol.1 (London: Macmillan, 1886), p. 48.

³ William ELLIS, *History of Madagascar*, op. cit., p. 421

⁴ Joseph John FREEMAN, *A Tour in South Africa with Notices of Natal, Mauritius, Madagascar, Ceylon, Egypt, and Palestine*, London, John Snow, 1851, p. 383.

⁵ “Madagascar”, *London Quarterly Review* (March and June 1854), p. 65.

⁶ See e.g., Hubert DESCHAMPS, *Histoire de Madagascar* (Paris : Berger-Levrault, 1972), pp.161-3.

⁷ Simon AYACHE, “Esquisse pour le portrait d’une reine: Ranavalona I^{ère}”, *Omaly sy Anio*, 1-2 (1975), pp.251-70; Mervyn BROWN, “Ranavalona I and the Missionaries, 1828-40”, *Omaly sy Anio*, 5-6 (1977), pp. 107-39; Gwyn CAMPBELL, “The Adoption of Autarky in Imperial Madagascar, 1820-1835”, *Journal of African History*, 28.3 (1987), pp.395-411.

⁸ James PATERSON, *The Contemporaries of Burns: and the More Recent Poets of Ayrshire, with Selections from their Writings*, (Edinburgh: Hugh Paton, Carver & Gilder, 1840), p.214.

became a Presbyterian minister who emigrated to Canada in 1848 where he became a philosophy professor and author.⁹

Paisley, 11 km West of Glasgow, and 85 km West of Edinburgh, is situated on White Cart River some 5 km upstream from its confluence with the tidal River Clyde, and was the core of an extensive wide manufacturing district in the west central Lowlands of Scotland.¹⁰ It specialized in the artisanal production lawns, silks, muslins, and in the first half of the nineteenth century became a leading producer of shawls (cotton, wool and silk), cotton thread, and starch paste (used to strengthen the warp) and a centre of cotton bleaching and dyeing.¹¹ From the late seventeenth century to the early nineteenth century, weaving was the town's chief occupation, and weaving and associated trades prospered. From 1787, the Cart River was deepened, in 1791 a connecting canal built that enabled boats of 60-80 tons to reach Paisley,¹² and in 1811 a canal was completed linking Paisley and Glasgow.¹³ The population of Paisley increased almost sevenfold between 1750 and 1850, from about 7,000 to near 48,000.¹⁴

However, the advent of mechanized looms in the late eighteenth century caused a crisis for traditional handloom weavers whose incomes fell by 50 percent between 1800 and 1808. By 1814, poverty was widespread, and at the end of the Napoleonic Wars the labour market was flooded with demobbed soldiers, evicted highlanders (a *Gaelic* church had been built as early as 1793 for the use of Highlanders in Paisley and its vicinity¹⁵), and Irish migrants, making it virtually impossible for unemployed weavers to find alternative work.¹⁶ By 1819 many were looking to emigrate, assisted from 1820 by the Paisley Townhead (Emigration) Society. Many left for Canada.¹⁷ The post-war depression ended in 1822, but the cloth industry was hit by further recessions in 1825, 1829, 1831 and 1839.¹⁸

This provided the context in which Paisley quickly earned a reputation as a hotbed of political radicalism. The weavers valued literacy and education and, as a large, independent and cohesive body of skilled artisans who worked to commission who set their own hours of work, they created time to read, and debate. As educated workers they became fully aware of debates over democratic rights, welcomed the

⁹ William B. HAMILTON, "Lyall, William (1811-1890)" in *Dictionary of Canadian Biography Online* - http://www.biographi.ca/EN/009004-119.01-e.php?&id_nbr=5666 (06/04/13).

¹⁰ "Paisley" - <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paisley> (21/04/13); Samuel LEWIS, *A Topographical Dictionary of Scotland* (1846), 337-51.

<http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=43469&strquery=paisley> (10/04/13).

¹¹ Wendy M. GORDON, *Mill Girls and Strangers: Single Women's Independent Migration in England, Scotland, and the United States, 1850-1881*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002), p.103.

¹² "Paisley" in *The Penny Cyclopædia of the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge*, vol.17, (London: Charles Knight, 1840), p.147.

¹³ LEWIS, *Topographical Dictionary of Scotland*, pp.337-51.

¹⁴ "Paisley" in *Penny Cyclopædia, op. cit.*, "The Growth of Paisley"-

<http://www.renfrewshire.gov.uk/webcontent/home/services/leisure+and+culture/heritage+and+local+history/els-jh-growthofpaisley> (17/11/13).

¹⁵ LEWIS, *Topographical Dictionary of Scotland*, 337-51.

¹⁶ "Ancestral Roots in Paisley, Scotland" -

<http://www.cccc.org/blogs/john/2011/05/05/ancestral-roots-in-paisley-scotland/> (20/04/13).

¹⁷ Michael E. VANCE, *Imperial Immigrants: Scottish Settlers in the Upper Ottawa Valley, 1815-1840* (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 2012), p. 98; Lucille H. CAMPEY, *The Scottish Pioneers of Upper Canada, 1784-1855: Glengarry and Beyond* (Toronto: Natural Heritage Books, 2005), pp. 54-55; G.R. RIGBY, *A History of Lachute* ([Lachute, Que.]: Brownsburg-Lachute Rotary Club, 1964), p. 17.

¹⁸ Richard SAVILLE, *Bank of Scotland: A History 1695-1995* (Edinburgh University Press, 1996), p. 484.

American and French Revolutions, and were influenced by Thomas Paine's *The Rights of Man* (1791). In 1792, a meeting of "Delegates for Parliamentary Reform" was organized in Paisley and soon a "Declaration of Rights and An Address to the People, Approved of by a Number of the Friends of Reform in Paisley" was circulating in the town.¹⁹ It was in this political atmosphere that Lyall grew up. The radical leaders were driven underground during the Napoleonic Wars due to government repression.²⁰ The Whig lawyer, Henry Cockburn, later commented of Scotland from 1795-1820 that,

*"Nor was the absence of a free press compensated by the freedom of public speech. Public political meetings could not arise, for the elements did not exist... Nothing was viewed with such horror as any political congregation not friendly to the existing power. No one could have taken part in the business without making up his mind to be a doomed man".*²¹

However, the authorities failed to stop respectable people such as Robert Burns (1789-1869), uncle of the celebrated poet, who in 1811 was inducted into Laigh Kirk, Paisley, from publicly advocating political reform, the evangelical cause, and relief for poor weavers.²² In 1812, Paisley weavers petitioned for a wage increase that the magistrates granted but the employers denied. A nine-week long strike ensued, supported by the "National Committee of Scottish Union Societies." In response, the authorities established a spy network targeting radicals. In July, 30,000 attended a radical meeting at Meikleriggs Muir, near Paisley; while the August 1819 Peterloo massacre in Manchester sparked a memorial rally in Paisley on 11 September that resulted in a week of rioting. Cavalry were used against some 5,000 workers, the leaders of whom were arrested and transported for trial to Greenock - only for local radicals to spring them from jail.²³ Moreover, the radical sentiment was specifically Scottish. In 1814, a total of 15,000 people marched to Bannockburn (some 10 hours' walk from Paisley) to commemorate the 500th anniversary of the battle; and in 1815, when local trade unions organised a mass rally attended by 10,000 people to celebrate the Covenanters victory in 1666 over the kings troops at Dalry (5-6 hours walk from Paisley), some then marched two miles further to the site of William Wallace's first battle with the English.²⁴

Lyall's father was wealthy enough to give his son a higher education, Lyall stating that "After serving a regular apprenticeship, I was educated in the University of Edinburgh."²⁵ This is less likely to refer to a formal craft apprenticeship (Lyall probably attended Paisley Grammar School -founded 1576-) than early practical engagement either under a physician in a medical practice²⁶, or (as is probably the case with Lyall)

¹⁹ David ROBERTS, "The "Friends of the People", *Renfrewshire Local History Forum Journal* 5 (1993), pp. 1-5.

²⁰ "Radical War" - http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Radical_War (20/04/13).

²¹ Quoted in Donnie Fraser, "The 1820 Radical Rebellion" - <http://www.scottishrepublicansocialistmovement.org/Pages/SRSM1820RadicalRebellion.aspx> (20/04/13)

²² Brian J. FRASER, *Church, College, and Clergy: A History of Theological Education at Knox College, Toronto, 1844-1994*, (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1995), p.26.

²³ "Radical War"; "The Paisley Radicals" - <http://www.paisley.org.uk/paisley-history/paisley-radicals/> (20/04/13); Fraser, "1820 Radical Rebellion."

²⁴ *Id.*

²⁵ "Dr Lyall's, "Answer to the Quarterly Review," *Edinburgh Magazine and Literary Miscellany*, 16 (Mar. 1825), p.307.

²⁶ Which was the case with James Wylie, Lyall's mentor in Russia - Yevgenia Glickman, "The Scot who served three tsars" (1995) -

<http://www.friends-partners.org/oldfriends/spbweb/lifestyl/129/scot.html> (15/03/13).

taking courses and encountering patients and their illnesses. In this sense, Lyall's "apprenticeship" started in 1801 at the age of only eleven when he enrolled at the University of Edinburgh (the usual age of entry was 14²⁷). Edinburgh Medical School, established in 1726, was the oldest such institution in Scotland and, according to Lyall, "avowedly the most celebrated medical school in the world."²⁸ There, he studied chemistry and medicine, and leaned on-site accompanying doctors at the Edinburgh Royal Infirmary, a purpose-built teaching hospital founded in 1741.²⁹ The University of Edinburgh Medical School played a central role in the establishment of "Enlightenment Edinburgh."³⁰ It focused on hospital medicine and clinical training that, from the late eighteenth century, was increasingly secularized and subject to rational thought and scientific enquiry - separated from Christian faith and ideas.³¹

In September 1808, Lyall purchased a house in Paisley, but almost immediately travelled to Manchester where from 1808-09, he served as a house-surgeon at Manchester Infirmary (founded in 1752 and from 1830 known as the Manchester Royal Infirmary or MRI),³² a voluntary hospital with twelve beds set up in the city centre for the benefit of the poor.³³ Due in part to its role in the industrial revolution, Manchester was one of the earliest centres of provincial medical education, with expertise in industry-related health issues. It was also a centre of radical politics. This shaped the development of the MRI which, due to radical Whig pressure, developed the first dispensary service in England to be directly associated with the Infirmary. In 1781, a highly successful home patient service started for patients with infectious diseases who could not be admitted to the hospital. In 1793, the Infirmary began offering teaching for medical students, who had usually completed an apprenticeship; and in 1795 John Ferriar, an MRI physician, headed the campaign to establish a Board of Health - thus associating the MRI with a public health service.³⁴

At the MRI, Lyall gained experience in, and quickly acquired a reputation for,

²⁷ W.E. SWINTON, "The remarkable accomplishments of D^r Peter Roget", *Canadian Medical Association Journal*, 123 . 9 (8 Nov. 1980), p. 917.

²⁸ "D^r. Lyall's Answer," 307.

²⁹ [Samuel] P[asfield O[liver], "Robert Lyall" in *Dictionary of National Biography* vol. 34 (London: Smith, Elder, and Co, 1893), p. 304-

http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Page:Dictionary_of_National_Biography_volume_34.djvu/310 (05/03/13); *Meehan's Monthly. A Magazine of Horticulture, Botany and kindred subjects* vol.4 (1894), p. 79.

³⁰ Helen M. DINGWALL, *A History of Scottish Medicine: Themes and Influences* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2003), p. 109.

³¹ *Ibid*, p. 109.

³² "Senior Medical Residents of the Manchester Infirmary," Appendix B in Edward Mansfield Brockbank, *Sketches of the Lives and Work of the Honorary Medical staff of the Manchester Infirmary from its foundation in 1752 to 1830, when it became the Royal Infirmary* (Manchester: The University Press, 1904), p. 283.

³³ Robert LYALL, "Facts and Observations on Burns" *The Edinburgh Medical and Surgical Journal*, vol.7 (1811), p. 313;

[http://archives.li.man.ac.uk/ead/search?operation=full&rsid=dc.title%20any%2Frelevant%2Fproxinfo%20%22William%20-](http://archives.li.man.ac.uk/ead/search?operation=full&rsid=dc.title%20any%2Frelevant%2Fproxinfo%20%22William%20-1984%20Lyall%201936%20Ford%22&firstrec=1&numreq=20&highlight=1&hitposition=16)

[1984%20Lyall%201936%20Ford%22&firstrec=1&numreq=20&highlight=1&hitposition=16](http://archives.li.man.ac.uk/ead/search?operation=full&rsid=dc.title%20any%2Frelevant%2Fproxinfo%20%22William%20Helm%20d.1930%20Alexander%22&firstrec=981&numreq=20&highlight=1&recid=gb133mmc3-mmc-9) (08/03/13); "Hospitals and related institutions in the Manchester area" -

<http://archives.li.man.ac.uk/ead/search?operation=full&rsid=dc.title%20any%2Frelevant%2Fproxinfo%20%22William%20Helm%20d.1930%20Alexander%22&firstrec=981&numreq=20&highlight=1&recid=gb133mmc3-mmc-9> (08/03/13); http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Manchester_Royal_Infirmary (28/03/13).

³⁴ The Manchester Royal Infirmary (M.R.I.) -

<http://archives.li.man.ac.uk/ead/search?operation=full&recid=gb133mmc3-mmc-9-6> (05/04/13).

the study and treatment of burns.³⁵ He also forged enduring friendships with Peter Roget (1779-1869), founder of Manchester Medical School and author of the *Thesaurus*,³⁶ surgeon Thomas Henry (1734-1816), and chemist and physicist John Dalton (1766-1844) – all prominent members of the Manchester Literary and Philosophical Society to which Lyall was elected a corresponding member in early 1810. While in Manchester, Lyall also started writing: His first publication, “Of the Irritability of Vegetables,” appeared in the *Journal of Natural Philosophy, Chemistry, and the Arts* in December 1809.³⁷ In January 1810 he returned to Scotland where on 22 March 1810 he receipted a diploma from the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh. He subsequently practised as a surgeon in Paisley, and was appointed medical practitioner to the Paisley Town Hospital in 1811 or 1812.³⁸ In August 1812, the *Scots Magazine and Edinburgh Literary Miscellany* announced the marriage on 20 July that year in Paisley of “Mr. Robert Lyall, surgeon, Paisley, to Mary, eldest daughter of Mr. John Aiton of Moscow.”³⁹

Lyall’s interests were manifold. There was obvious concern in the town at the pressure the large increase in population placed on local water sources – described in 1840 as “indifferent in quality and... very inadequate [in quantity].”⁴⁰ In 1814, a mineral spring was discovered on nearby farm called Candron, and Lyall, summoned to analyse it, recommended the water as “an aperients and corrective”⁴¹ and published a pamphlet about the spring⁴² – which led its waters to be valued by townspeople into the mid nineteenth century.⁴³

II) WHIGS AND TORIES AND POLITICAL REFORM

In 1815, Lyall travelled to St. Petersburg, Russia, where he was befriended by Alexander Crichton (1763-1856), one of many Scotsmen employed in Russia, and who was in charge of medical services in the imperial civil service.⁴⁴ In 1816, Lyall

³⁵ *The Medical and Physical Journal* 26. 154 (Dec 1811), p. 499.

³⁶ SWINTON, “Remarkable accomplishments of Dr Peter Roget,” pp. 916-921.

³⁷ John H. APPLEBY, “Lyall, Robert (1789–1831),” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004 – <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/17236> (07/03/13).

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ “Marriages-Deaths,” *The Scots Magazine and Edinburgh Literary Miscellany*, Vol. 74 (Aug 1812), 645.

⁴⁰ “Paisley” in *Penny Cyclopædia*, *op. cit.*, p. 147.

⁴¹ The Ministers of the Respective Parishes under the superintendence of a Committee of the Society for the Benefit of the Sons and Daughters of the Clergy, *The New Statistical Account of Scotland vol.7: Renfrew-Argyle* (Edinburgh: William Blackwood and Sons, 1845), p. 147.

⁴² Robert LYALL, *An Essay on the chemical and medical qualities of Candron Well, Renfrewshire, with introductory observations on Waters in general* (Paisley: J. Neilson, 1814).

⁴³ *Prize-Essays and Transactions of the Highland and Agricultural Society of Scotland* vol.12 (1839), p. 447; “Paisley” in *Penny Cyclopædia*, *op. cit.*, p. 147.

⁴⁴ E.M. TANSEY, “The Life and Works of Sir Alexander Crichton, F.R.S. (1763-1856): A Scottish Physician to the Imperial Russian Court,” *Notes and Records of the Royal Society of London* 38. 2 (Mar. 1984), p. 249; Norah H. Schuster, “English Doctors in Russia in the Early Nineteenth Century,” *Proceedings of the Royal Society of Medicine* 61 (Feb. 1968), pp. 185-9;

<http://www.baumanrarebooks.com/catalogues/July2009.pdf> (09/03/13); Glickman, “The Scot who served three tsars”; Hélène Andorre Hinson Staley and Robert Allen Devries, *Paper & Stone: A Leighton History in England & the United States* ([Bloomington, Ind.]: Xlibris Corp., 2011), p. 519; Hilary MARLAND, “Lee, Robert (1793–1877),” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (2004) – <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/16306> (29/03/13); Robert LEE, *The Last Days of Alexander and the First Days of Nicholas (emperors of Russia)* (London: R. Bentley, 1854); see also Edward Daniel CLARKE,

graduated as a doctor and surgeon from the Imperial Medico-Surgical Academy,⁴⁵ following which he served a succession of aristocrats including the progressive agriculturist Dmitry Poltoratsky,⁴⁶ Countess Orlof-Tchémskenskaja,⁴⁷ General Natschokin, Marquis Pucci, Count Salazar, and Edward Penrhyn.⁴⁸ From his arrival in Russia, he also maintained journals that became the basis for a number of volumes that, Crichton, who left Russia in 1819 and shortly afterwards settled permanently in London, helped Lyall to publish after he also returned to settle in London in 1823.⁴⁹

Lyall's books had a lasting impact, being later considered by both foreigners and Russians alike as reliable sources on early nineteenth century Russia.⁵⁰ At the time of publication, however, they generated widespread public debate. Other British travelers, notably Edward Clarke, had earlier described Russia in a generally negative light,⁵¹ but in the unsettled political climate of the time Lyall's criticisms of Russians and their rulers aroused considerable controversy. His first book, *Character of the Russians* (1823), published jointly by William Blackwood (1776-1834) of Edinburgh and Thomas Cadell [Jnr] (1773-1836) of London, portrayed the Russian nobility as an idle class accustomed to a life of conspicuous consumption and relaxed sexual mores (Henry Mayhew reproduced Lyall's description of the 'Physical Club' of Moscow in his global review of prostitution in *London Labour and the London Poor*⁵²), and he considered Tsar Alexander I's imperial policies, notably in forging the Holy Alliance of Russia, Prussia and Austria, to be major obstacles to the spread of liberty in Europe. When, tongue in cheek, Lyall dedicated *Character of the Russians* to Alexander,⁵³ the reaction was sharp. On 5 April 1824, the Russian government declared a *ukáz*, or ban, on foreign writers who dedicated their works to the Tsar without his

Travels in Russia, Tartary, and Turkey (Edinburgh: William and Robert Chambers, 1839), p. 25, fn [editorial comment].

⁴⁵ TANSEY, "Life and Works of Sir Alexander Crichton," p. 249; Schuster, "English Doctors in Russia," p. 185; <http://special.lib.gla.ac.uk/teach/slavonic/slavonic.html> (09/03/13); O[liver], "Robert Lyall," p. 304.

⁴⁶ APPLEBY, "Lyall, Robert."

⁴⁷ CLARKE, *Travels in Russia, Tartary, and Turkey*, 24, fn ; Appleby, "Lyall, Robert"; O[liver], "Robert Lyall," 304; <http://www.baumanrarebooks.com/catalogues/July2009.pdf> (09/03/13); "Orlof" - http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Orlov#Alexei_Grigoryevich_Orlov (07/04/13).

⁴⁸ O[liver], "Robert Lyall," p. 304; <http://www.baumanrarebooks.com/catalogues/July2009.pdf> (09/03/13).

⁴⁹ Francesca WILSON, *Muscovy. Russia through Foreign Eyes 1553-1900* (New York: Praeger, 1970), p. 190; TANSEY, "Life and Works of Sir Alexander Crichton," p. 251; "Crichton, Alexander" - http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Crichton,_Alexander_%28DNB00%29 (26/03/13); George Clement BOASE, "Crichton, Alexander" *Dictionary of National Biography, 1885-1900*, Vol. 13 - http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Crichton,_Alexander_%28DNB00%29 (18/11/13); Appleby, "Lyall, Robert"; O[liver], "Robert Lyall," p. 304; *Meehan's Monthly* vol.4 (1894), p. 79.

⁵⁰ See e.g. Josiah CONDER, *Russia* (London: James Duncan, 1830), 196-7; Wilson, *Muscovy. Russia through Foreign Eyes*, 190-201; Janet M. Hartley, *Alexander I* (London: Longman, 1994), 183-4; E.N. Deremedved', "Krym glazami angliiskogo puteshestvennika R. Laiella" (The Crimea through the Eyes of the English Traveller R. Lyall), *Kul'tura narodov Prichernomor'ia*, vol. 43 (2002), 163-169; G.S. KAUSHLIEV, "Vklad angliiskikh puteshestvennikov v istoriko-kul'turnoe osvoinie Kryma (konets XVIII -- nachalo XIX veka)" (The Contribution of English Travellers to the Historico-Cultural Domestication of the Crimea from the Late 18th Century to the Early 19th Century), *Uchenye zapiski Tavricheskogo natsional'nogo universiteta im. V.I. Vernadskogo*, "Istoricheskie nauki" series, 23. 1 (2010): 100-113; Anatolii TORKUNOV, "Pis'mena istorii v realiiakh sovremennosti" (The Letters of History in Modern-Day Realities), *Rossiiskaia gazeta* (16 Feb. 2009) - <http://www.rg.ru/2009/02/16/kavkaz-rossia.html> (18/04/13).

⁵¹ Edward DANIEL Clarke, *Travels in Various Countries of Europe, Asia and Africa 6 vols* (London: [Cadell and Davies], 1811-1823).

⁵² Henry MAYHEW, *London Labour and the London Poor* (London: Charles Griffin, 1861), 166.

⁵³ Dedication in Robert Lyall, *The Character of the Russians, and a detailed History of Moscow* (London: T.Cadell, 1823).

permission;⁵⁴ and on 14 April, Johann George de Benkhausen (d.1844), the Russian vice-consul in London wrote to *The Times* protesting that the dedication was unauthorized.⁵⁵ Lyall added heat to the controversy with his response, published in the *Times* on 20 April, in which he proclaimed: "It is of little importance to me, that my work is considered "hostile to Russia," if the world give me credit for impartiality, truth, and independence".⁵⁶ On confirmation of the *ukáz* (a ban also imposed by Prussia⁵⁷) Lyall commented in the *Morning Chronicle*:

*"The idea of a Tsar of Russia sending a prohibition to Englishmen, from the banks of the Neva, is so preposterous, as to have excited universal laughter, ridicule, and contempt; and I cannot but lament that his Imperial Majesty should have been so ill-advised by his Cabinet Council, as, by the publication of such a proclamation... a scroll which Liberty, the goddess of Englishmen, would trample under foot."*⁵⁸

In Britain, the issue inevitably ignited an animated debate between Whigs and Tories, who were already hotly engaged in a battle for and against parliamentary reform. *The Quarterly Review*, a journal founded in 1809 by eminent London publisher John Murray (1778-1843) to counteract the "radically bad" principles⁵⁹ of the popular Whig *Edinburgh Review*, founded in 1802, damned Lyall's *Character of the Russians* in an anonymous review that appeared in December 1824. It first cast aspersions on Lyall's ethnic origins and qualifications:

*"Dr. Lyall, we understand, is one of that numerous, and generally speaking, meritorious body of Scotch physicians (including surgeons and apothecaries), who, at a very small expense of money and study, are enabled to write M.D. after their names: he arrived at St. Petersburg penniless and friendless, in search of what Scotland could not afford him."*⁶⁰

The reviewer considered the work to be "trash" and Lyall "a prejudiced person" whose

"intellectual acquirements... have scarcely reached the point of mediocrity: the style is mean and vulgar, the facts brought forward (supposing them to be such) are selected without taste or judgment, and the arrangement of the subjects is wholly without skill. The descriptions are sometimes ridiculously

⁵⁴ From *Galignani's Messenger*, quoted in Robert Lyall, *Travels in Russia, the Crimea, the Caucasus, and Georgia* vol.2 (London: T. Cadell, 1825), 519; see also Review of Lyall's *Travels in Russia*, and Holman's *Travels*, in *Edinburgh Magazine and Literary Miscellany* (June 1825) 688.

⁵⁵ G. Benhausen to the Editor of *The Times*, 14 April 1824, *The Times* (15 Apr 1824), p. 3.

⁵⁶ Lyall to the Editor of *The Times*, London, 19 April 1824, *The Times* (20 Apr 1824), p. 3.

⁵⁷ Review of 'Holman's *Travels in Russia, &c.*' in *The Scots Magazine and Edinburgh Literary Miscellany* 16 (June 1825), p. 689.

⁵⁸ Robert Lyall to the Editor of the *Morning Chronicle*, London, 1 June 1825 quoted in Idem, *Travels in Russia, the Crimea, the Caucasus, and Georgia* vol.2 (London: T. Cadell, 1825), 521; see also Review of 'Holman's *Travels in Russia, &c.*', 688.

⁵⁹ John Murray to George Canning, 25 September 1807, quoted in John Barrow, *An Auto-Biographical Memoir of Sir John Barrow, Bart, Late of the Admiralty: Including Reflections, Observations, and Reminiscences at Home and Abroad, from Early Life to Advanced Age* (London: John Murray, 1847), 493. The founders of the *Quarterly Review* included George Canning (later a Conservative Prime Minister), Robert Southey (later Poet Laureate) and the novelist Sir Walter Scott – "The Quarterly Review" - <http://www.quarterly-review.org/> (19/04/13).

⁶⁰ ANON, "Review of The Character of the Russians, and a detailed History of Moscow, &c. By Robert Lyall," *Quarterly Review* 31 (30 Dec 1824), 146-7.

⁶¹ *Ibid*, p. 146; an abbreviated version of the Quarterly Review's notice is repeated in the review of "The Character of the Russians" by Lyall in *The London and Paris Observer* 40 (Paris, 5 Mar 1826), pp. 141-3.

inflated."⁶²

The reviewer, who also questioned Lyall's characterization of Russians as generally licentious, indolent, and unscrupulous, was particularly affronted by Lyall's denigration of Alexander and admiration of Napoleon – two former allies turned foes⁶³:

*"I differ," says our modest author, "from the Emperor Napoleon – and it is not often that I would venture to differ from so high a political authority!" – a person "who (as Doctor Lyall gravely assures us) 'had no other object at heart than the happiness of Europe!'"*⁶⁴

He continued, quoting Lyall:

*"Had Napoleon known as well how to have acted his part [as Rostopchin], we should have had no Holy Alliance, nor any occasion for such a coalition; and probably Europe would have been as happy under the sublime genius of the most extraordinary man that ever drew breath, as she is, fettered by the limited, depressive, degenerating policy of repeated congresses."*⁶⁵

The reviewer ended with a broadside against radicals and the democratic impulse in general:

"Dr. Lyall, and persons of his liberal way of thinking, are so accustomed to dabble in idle speculations on revolutions, and representative governments, and the sovereign will of the people, that we are not in the least surprised at his contradictory opinions with regard to Russia; but if he for a moment supposes that Russia is arrived at that state of general knowledge, which fits her for a deliberative assembly of her people chosen to represent the several interests of her widely extended empire, his residence in that empire must have tended little to the sanity of his political views. What possible good, we would ask, could be expected from the delegates of the various nations and clans of different manners, feelings, language, religions, and customs – of Cossacks – Calmucs – Kirgisses – Monguls – Muscovites, &c! Such an assembly, in attempting to make laws, and administer justice, to meet the views of their respective constituents, would create a confusion equal to that at the building of Babel.

The Emperor Alexander, who is unquestionably one of the best informed and most intelligent personages in his empire, is said to be fully impressed with the happy state of that monarch, the responsibility of whose acts rests solely on the heads of his advisers; but, at the same time, he is also aware that his forty-five millions of subjects are by no means in a condition to receive the great boon of representative government. Whatever his views may be, his measures are evidently preparatory to that desirable end. Those indeed who have attended to the change which has been gradually operating since the expulsion of the French from Russia are sanguine in their hope of such a regeneration in the government of that mighty empire, as must ultimately give freedom to all classes of her subjects, not by violently "tearing in pieces the political hydra," as Dr. Lyall in one of his fits of splenetic and inconsistent philanthropy wildly

⁶² ANON, "Review of The Character of the Russians," pp. 147-8.

⁶³ HARTLEY, *Alexander I*, 62-136; Conder, *Russia*, 11.

⁶⁴ ANON, "Review of The Character of the Russians," p. 146.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 147.

*recommends, but by those sure and quiet measures, which revolutionary enthusiasm cannot or will not see, but which are contemplated with pleasure by the wise and the good.”*⁶⁶

By contrast, the staunchly Liberal *Edinburgh Review* supported Lyall, later in the debate declaring the *Quarterly Review* assessment of his first book a “pitiful tirade”⁶⁷ that summoned

*“the whole tribe of sleek, pampered, over-fed sinecurists and place-men, to rally round their oracle, and to make a firm stand against the innovating spirit of the age. Marches there out some sturdy defender of the principles of public liberty, who has the audacity to teach, that kings were made for the people, not the people for kings? The Quarterly straightway fastens on him with its envenomed tooth, and if it can detect no flaw in his logic, no assailable point in his doctrine, it forthwith impugns his motives, insinuates obliquely against his character, dissects his style, fixes on him some odious nickname, and labours to hold him up to ridicule and contempt... It flatters Austria and Prussia, palters to Russia, and only vilifies and traduces the United States of America! In short, it is the advocate and defender of all that is rotten, corrupt, oppressive, and galling in the old and legitimate despotisms, while it misrepresents, abuses, and affects to treat with derision, whatever is most healthful, vigorous, and beneficial in popular government.”*⁶⁸

The *Edinburgh Review* also allowed Lyall the space to respond to the *Quarterly Review*. Lyall was quick to emphasise the reputation of Scotland in general and Edinburgh medical training in particular:

*“I was not aware that it was a degradation to be a Scotchman – to belong to that nation, which, in proportion to its population, has produced more men of great talents – a greater quantum of mind, if I may so speak, than any other under heaven. Neither did I know that it was a disgrace to be a Scotch-made Physician. If I were so, I should glory in the title. After serving a regular apprenticeship, I was educated in the University of Edinburgh, avowedly the most celebrated medical school in the world.”*⁶⁹

He also recognized the attack from the *Quarterly* reviewer to be chiefly political:

*“his object is evidently to make out that I am a Radical, because I every where show myself the friend of liberty, and the enemy of despotism. This only demonstrates his ignorance of my principles of moderation, and my complete determination to avoid political party.”*⁷⁰

Further, he wrote in January 1826 that:

“His Majesty Alexander was the originator, and is the grand pillar, of the Holy Alliance, is known to all Europe. Had that confederacy of sovereigns performs the promised duty of “becoming the guardians of the welfare of Europe,” it would have received general approbation. But it has become the very Demon of illiberality and oppression; it has defeated itself, and will sink into merited

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 166.

⁶⁷ *Edinburgh Magazine and Literary Miscellany* 95 (Jun 1825), p. 687.

⁶⁸ *Edinburgh Magazine and Literary Miscellany* 16 (Mar. 1825), pp. 305-306.

⁶⁹ “Dr Lyall’s Answer,” p. 307.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

oblivion.”⁷¹

And when news of the Tsar’s death in December 1825 reached Britain, Lyall issued (anonymously) what was tantamount to an appeal for a revolution in Russia:

*“The late insurrection [on the ascent of Nicholas to the throne], however long prepared, and however well organized, was taken by surprise, and hurried into action by extraordinary events, and has been defeated for a time; but the Tsar and the Russians should recollect that the spark of revolution is not extinguished: on the contrary, the spirit of reform has extended from the borders of Poland to the walls of China, and from the Neva to the Araxes.”*⁷²

Events subsequently took on a bizarre twist. In March 1825, Lyall had issued a challenge to the reviewer of his first book that has appeared in the *Quarterly Review*:

*“I now publicly call upon the writer of the misnamed reviewal of my work... to come forward openly, and verify his statements respecting them and myself, or to make an apology for his conduct. Unless this is done, he must allow me to brand him with the name of LITERARY DEFAMER.”*⁷³

After a hiatus of almost a year, Lyall took up the issue again. In early February 1826, possibly intoxicated by his reputation as the symbol of reform, Lyall challenged John Murray, editor of the *Quarterly Review*, to a duel for failing to reveal the name of the reviewer of his *Character of the Russians*.⁷⁴ As the publisher, Murray certainly had the right to keep the identity of his reviewer secret. He and William Gifford (1756 -1826), his dwarf-like chief editor, had decided from the outset that all articles appearing in the *Quarterly Review* would be anonymous, both on the principle that they were the property of the journal, and to protect the author from attack. Most articles appearing in the *Quarterly* were directed to Gifford, its editor, who on his deathbed in 1826 tried to ensure the continued anonymity of authors by ordering that all correspondence in his possession relating to the *Quarterly* be destroyed.⁷⁵ Thus Murray informed Lyall

*“that he was only responsible as publisher for the contents of the Quarterly Review – that if D^r Lyall felt himself aggrieved by that periodical, he had his remedy by bringing an action at law – that the giving up the name of the writer of the Reviewal in question, would be to sacrifice his professional character; and twice he repeated, that if he heard any further about a challenge, he would answer it by a Bow-street officer.”*⁷⁶

In this instance, the secret reviewer was none other than John Barrow (1764-1848), a highly gifted man of humble origins who accompanied the first British embassy to China (1792-94), served as Second Secretary to the Admiralty (1804-45),

⁷¹ [Robert Lyall], “The Late Russian Autocrat,” *New Monthly Magazine and Literary Journal* 16. 61 (Jan. 1826), 87; see also Wilson, *Muscovy. Russia through Foreign Eyes*, p. 190.

⁷² “Nicolas, Emperor of Russia,” *New Monthly Magazine and Literary Journal* 16. 63 (Mar. 1826), p. 295.

⁷³ “Dr. Lyall’s Answer,” p. 312.

⁷⁴ “Dr. Lyall and Mr. Murray the Bookseller,” *London and Paris Observer* 40 (5 Mar 1826), pp. 149-50; “Dr. Lyall and Murray the Bookseller, of Albemarle Street, Piccadilly” in *John Bull* 271 (20 Feb 1826), p. 60.

⁷⁵ Samuel SMILES, *John Murray a Publisher and His Friends. Memoir and Correspondence of John Murray with an Account of the Origin and Progress of the House, 1768-1843* (London: John Murray, 1891), vol.2, p. 176; Karl G., PFEIFFER, “The Authorship of Certain Articles in the Quarterly Review” *Philological Quarterly* 11 (1932), pp. 98-100; Hill SHINE and Helen CHADWICK-SHINE, *The Quarterly Review Under Gifford. Identification of Contributors 1809-1824* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1949), XVII-XVIII.

⁷⁶ “D^r Lyall and Mr. Murray the Bookseller,” p. 150; “D^r Lyall and Murray the Bookseller, of Albemarle Street, Piccadilly” in *John Bull* 271 (20 Feb 1826), p. 60.

and with fellow naval officers John Franklin (1786-1847) and Francis Beaufort (1774-1857) founded the Royal Geographical Society (1830), and wrote the *Mutiny of the Bounty* (1831).⁷⁷ Murray considered Barrow who, over his entire career as reviewer wrote over 190 pieces,⁷⁸ to be “one of the pillars of the Review.”⁷⁹ In his turn, and despite his later avowal that “In all my critical labours, I avoided touching upon politics as much as possible,”⁸⁰ Barrow was a devotee of the ideals of the *Quarterly Review* which, he noted, “were adopted from its commencement, are founded on religion and morality, on loyalty to the throne, and patriotism to the country”⁸¹ and fundamental in “counteracting the more than Jacobinical poison scattered most industriously through the pages of the ‘Edinburgh Review.’”⁸² At the same time, Barrow, who had served in high office in the navy, was an inveterate opponent of Napoleon. Indeed, it was he who in 1815 suggested that Napoleon be exiled to St. Helena.⁸³

Lyall gained further renown and considerable notoriety for his intervention in the the *Gardner Peerage case*, which came before the House of Lords in 1825, and which hinged on Lyall’s “expert” medical evidence about the duration of human pregnancy.⁸⁴ Seizing the opportunity created by the publicity surrounding the case, Lyall published a book in 1826 which gained a considerable academic reputation,⁸⁵ but which also contained a highly controversial passage:

“We see only one speedy and sure method of determining satisfactorily the knotty point in question [i.e. the duration of pregnancy], and we do not doubt that generations yet unborn will reverence our memory for our ingenuity in devising it. We recommend that a spacious building shall be immediately erected, in a healthy site, in the environs of this metropolis, which shall be surrounded by walls at least 100 feet in height; - that all aeronauts shall be forbidden from approaching the same edifice upon pain of death; that no males, except the privileged, shall have admission; that it shall be put under the care of a proper number of virtuous matrons selected from nunneries; and that the whole shall be governed by monastic regulations. This superb establishment shall be denominated, *THE EXPERIMENTAL CONCEPTION HOSPITAL*, in coincidence with its destination. Besides apartments for matrons, offices, &c., this institution shall contain separate rooms for fifty virgins, between the age of fourteen and forty-five, and for fifty unmarried women, who may have borne children, between the age of fifteen and forty-

⁷⁷ BARROW, *Auto-Biographical Memoir*; Christopher LLOYD, *Mr. Barrow of the Admiralty* (London, Collins, 1970); “Royal Geographical Society” – http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Royal_Geographical_Society (19/04/13).

⁷⁸ BARROW, *Auto-Biographical Memoir*, p. 502; Shine and Chadwick-Shine, *Quarterly Review Under Gifford*, XIII-XVII.

⁷⁹ John Murray to John Barrow, 10 January 1840, quoted in Barrow, *Auto-Biographical Memoir*, p. 502.

⁸⁰ BARROW, *Auto-Biographical Memoir*, p. 504.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 492.

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 494.

⁸³ Liverpool to Castlereagh, 15 July 1815, quoted in Lloyd, *Mr. Barrow*, p. 90.

⁸⁴ Alfred Swaine TAYLOR, *A Manual of Medical Jurisprudence* (Philadelphia : Hemry C. Lea’s Son & Co., 1880), p. 699.

⁸⁵ See e.g. RYAN, “Lectures on Obstetricry, and Diseases of Women and Children,” *London Medical and Surgical Journal* 1.8 (19 Mar 1836), 231; Samuel Merriman, *A synopsis of the various kinds of difficult parturition : with practical remarks on the management of labours* (London: John Churchill, 1838) XXVI; M.A. CROWTHER and Brenda M. WHITE, “Medicine, Property and the Law in Britain 1800-1914” *The Historical Journal* 31. 4 (1988), pp. 860-1.

five. The directors of the hospital shall appoint ten of the most distinguished healthy physician-accoucheurs of London, between the age of twenty and fifty, each of whom shall be destined to administer physic and consolation to a certain number of these females, during a single nocturnal visit. The clerk of the hospital (one of the matrons of course) shall keep an exact register of all operations, and the results of the experiments shall be freely communicated to the world for the advantage of society, and especially for the purpose of affording our good British Parliament sure data upon which they shall be able to construct precise and just laws with regard to the legitimacy or illegitimacy of all children born in these realms, after the year 1830.”⁸⁶

The *Lancet* commented of this:

“Fifty virgins, and fifty unmarried women, in all 100 souls, - just five virgins and five women for each accoucheur’s “operations,” during a single nocturnal visit!” Labor ipse voluptas, may be truly said; but we are apt to believe that few practitioners carry about with them enough of the “physic and consolation” to the dispense the Doctor’s prescription, at least we should prefer “private practice” to the laborious “privileges” of the Hospital staff!”⁸⁷.

Thus, by 1826, Lyall had acquired considerable fame as a medical expert and symbol of mounting liberal pressure for political reform. In a society where patronage rather than merit decided all positions of influence, he was very aware that his future, and that of his large family, depended on the outcome of the General Elections to be held in mid-1826. Should the Liberals push the Tories from power, he stood to be appointed to a high salaried and influential position. Should the Tories maintain power, his prospects were bleak. Clerk of the Privy Council, Charles Greville (1794-1865) commented: “The elections have been particularly violent and the contests very numerous.”⁸⁸ The elections, which lasted over a month, from 7 June to 12 July 1826, saw the Tories under Robert Banks Jenkinson (1770-1828), 2nd Earl of Liverpool, notch up their fourth successive win over the Whigs with an increased majority. This marked a turning point for Lyall. On 8 November 1826, he wrote to George Canning (1770-1827), the Foreign Secretary, announcing that “being baffled in my plans at home, an application will be immediately made in my favour to Earl Bathurst by some kind friends, as I wish to fix myself and my family in one of our colonies.”⁸⁹ The “friends” referred to probably included Richard Butler, 2nd Earl of Glengall (1794-1858), and possibly Peter Roget (1779-1869). Henry Bathurst, third *Earl Bathurst* (1762-1834), *Secretary of State for War and the Colonies from 1812-27, was a friend of Gifford and supporter of the Quarterly Review*.⁹⁰ He was thus quite aware of the controversy surrounding Lyall. However, he was also a Tory of the old school and broadly sympathetic to Wilberforce

⁸⁶ Robert LYALL, *Introduction to The Medical Evidence Relative to the Duration of Human Pregnancy: As Given in the Gardner Peerage Cause, Before the Committee for Privileges of the House* (London: [printed for Burgess and Hill], 1826), XVII.

⁸⁷ Review of “Medical Evidence relative to the duration of Human Pregnancy, as given in the Gardner Peerage Cause, before the Committee for Privileges of the House of Lords in 1825-6, with introductory remarks and notes” (London: Burgess and Hill, 1826), by Robert Lyall in *The Lancet* 10.144 (June 1826), pp. 289-300.

⁸⁸ Entry, 2 July 1826, in Charles C. F. Greville, *The Greville Memoirs. A Journal of the Reigns of King George IV and William IV*, vol.1 (New York, D. Appleton, 1875), p. 83.

⁸⁹ Quoted in Edward J. Stapleton (ed.), *Some Official Correspondence of George Canning*, Vol. 2 (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1887), p. 22.

⁹⁰ BARROW, *Auto-Biographical Memoir*, p. 507.

and the evangelicals.⁹¹ He treated the request favourably and appointed Lyall to assume the post of British Resident Agent in Madagascar left vacant by the death of Hastie. In early January 1827, the *Literary Gazette* announced:

*“Dr Lyall, whose work on Russia will be the more valued the more information we have from that country, has, we are glad to see it mentioned in the newspapers, been appointed to a situation at the court of Radamah, king of Madagascar where the talents of the resident will find ample scope for their exercise in investigating the natural history of the country, as well as in investigating such other matters as attract a literary and inquiring mind.”*⁹²

In March 1827, the *Times* specified the objectives of his mission:

*“Dr Lyall is appointed to proceed to the Court of Radama, King of Madagascar, in the double capacity of successor to the late Agent of Government, and Physician. The Doctor’s chief duty will be to see that the treaty respecting the abolition of the slave trade, between England and his sable Majesty, shall be duly maintained; but he means to devote his leisure to the natural history of the island.”*⁹³

And in 1828, it was announced in the House of Commons under the heading “Outfit and Equipage of Ministers, &c. at Foreign Courts”:

*“Dr. Lyall; to provide for the expense of his outfit on proceeding to undertake his mission as British Agent to Madagascar, and to enable him to provide himself with such scientific instruments and other articles which he might require while employed upon this mission. £200.”*⁹⁴

III) THE BRITISH AGENT IN MADAGASCAR

His new appointment transformed Lyall from Scottish beacon of political radicalism to a British Agent promoting the imperial policy of the Tory Party. Thereafter, he rejected any concept of liberal rights in favour of strict adherence to the established hierarchy in which he, as the representative of the English monarch in Madagascar, governed all British policy and personnel in the island. On 23 June 1827, Lyall sailed with his family from London, and on 2 October reached Mauritius, the base for his mission to Madagascar. This occurred in two distinct phases: from mid-1827 to mid-1828 during which time he met Radama I at Tamatave, the chief east coast port of Madagascar, and forged close relations with the government authorities on Mauritius; and from August 1828 to April 1829 when he tried to establish his mission at the Merina court.

Prior to Lyall’s arrival, Lowry Cole (1772-1842), Governor of Mauritius, sent his nephew, Lieutenant Henry Cole (1800-1827), to Tamatave where, in July 1827 he unsuccessfully attempted to persuade Radama I to break a monopolistic trade agreement he had reached with the Mauritian (and thus “British”) firm of Blancard &

⁹¹ Keith WINDSCHUTTLE, “Abolition of the Slave Trade: the Australian Connection” *Quadrant* (April 2007) - <http://www.sydneyle.com/Abolition%20of%20slave%20trade.htm> (19/04/13).

⁹² “Varieties” in *The Literary Gazette, and Journal of the Belles Lettres, Arts, Sciences, &c.* 520 (6 Jan. 1827), 173; see also the *Morning Chronicle* 17938 (14 Mar. 1827).

⁹³ *The Times* (14 Mar 1827), 3; repeated in “Mission to Madagascar,” *The Asiatic Journal* (1 Apr. 1827), p. 587.

⁹⁴ “Sum expended under the head of Civil Contingencies, in 1827” in *Journals of the House of Commons* vol.83 (1828) ([London]: House of Commons, 1828), 683.

Cie., in contravention of the free trade spirit of the 1820 Britanno-Merina treaty. Cole died suddenly, probably of malaria, on 28 July 1827 and was buried at Tamatave. From the start, Lyall sought to assert his status. He sailed to Madagascar aboard the British warship HMS *Erin* and, on reaching Tamatave, which Radama was visiting, insisted that the Malagasy authorities provide horses for his use.⁹⁵ He then made preparations for his first encounter with the Merina sovereign. The details are recorded in his diary:

“Having heard a great many reports at the Mauritius, and also numerous details of affairs from Mr. Campbell, which gave me the idea that the British Government had already done too much for Radama, and that the sycophants by whom he was said to be surrounded, by their fulsome praises, well-tuned flattery, and detestable deceit, had actually made the King forget himself, I determined to make my landing in Madagascar as imposing as possible. Well aware that parade and show – Gold and silver, brilliant uniforms and gaudy colours – generally speaking, have a great effect upon the minds of men, and an extraordinary influence over the opinions of savages and semi-barbarians; and bearing in mind, how much depends upon first impressions, I now was happy that I had expended a good deal of money for my equipment, and had it in my power to appear in a respectable manner at the Court of Radama.

*Having also learned that Radama had now assumed a haughty, independent, and authoritative tone and demeanour – that he imagined himself the greatest Monarch upon earth – that he seemed quite intoxicated with his power at home, and his renown [sic] abroad – and that he had treated the British Envoys, the late Mr. Cole and Mr. Campbell, with much indifference, neglect, and indignity, I had taken the resolution, from the moment of my arrival, to act with great caution, dignity, and independence, but at the same time, with every becoming deference and politeness, to treat at first with nobody but the King himself and, as Representative of His Majesty, the King of England, to claim precedence of every one at the King of Madagascar’s Court.”*⁹⁶

Shortly after his meeting with Radama, Lyall sailed for Mauritius. He returned to Madagascar in July 1828, intent upon establishing his post at the Merina court, as resident British Agent but on reaching Antananarivo on 1 August 1828 learned that Radama had died a few days earlier (on either 27 or 28 July).⁹⁷ Radama was succeeded by Ranavalona who kept Lyall at a distance. She had still not granted him an audience by mid-October when, in her first major address as monarch to the European residents of Antananarivo, Ranavalona chose to communicate through David Jones and David Griffiths, the veteran Welsh founders of the LMS mission to Imerina, rather than through Lyall. This constituted a major snub to Lyall’s claim as British Agent to represent all British subjects in the island. He was, predictably, greatly offended.⁹⁸ On 29 November, Ranavalona sent Lyall a message indicating her formal rejection of the British treaty, prompting Lyall to write “My position is upon the whole disagreeable. I am not officially recognized by the Sovereign.”⁹⁹ In mid-January 1829, Lyall noted

⁹⁵ “Journal of Mr. Lyall’s Mission to Radama, King of Madagascar, in 1827,” 4-5, 8b –British Library, Add ms 3408.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 9b-10a.

⁹⁷ Gwyn CAMPBELL, *David Griffiths and the Missionary “History of Madagascar”* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), p. 712.

⁹⁸ Entry for 13 Oct 1828, Lyall, “Diary 1828-1829” – National Archives, Kew (henceforth NAK), CO167-116.

⁹⁹ Entry for 29 Nov 1828, Lyall, “Diary 1828-1829” – NAK, CO167-116.

that “Different ruses have been employed to know ‘when I was going to Mauritius;’ but I perceived their drift and, in a very easy way, gave evasive answers to all questions, adding ‘I am not my own master; I must be guided by the orders of Government.’”¹⁰⁰ A few days later, he informed the English missionary Joseph Freeman, a close friend and supporter of Lyall, that his missionary colleagues (a reference to Jones and Griffiths) needed to submit to his authority as British Agent that the “English name may not be sullied.”¹⁰¹ In mid-February, in reference to what Lyall perceived to be the political interference of Jones and Griffiths, he wrote to the Governor of Mauritius:

“My situation here is most disagreeable, at a barbarous Court, and among European intrigues. The Skid [i.e. sikidy] governs the former, and the latter are totally destitute of principle. I should be glad to act with the Malagashes alone; but, I perceive, the tricks of those who call themselves Europeans in some of the measures of Government. I have, however, baffled many of their plans, by patience, watchfulness, anticipation, determination, and spirit; and by the same weapons it is probable that I have even neutralized some of the decrees of the Gods.

*The want of knowledge of etiquette here has made me sometimes assume high ground in order to maintain my own dignity and respectability, and that I might neither compromise the character of our King, of our Government, nor of our Country.”*¹⁰²

On 1 March 1829, Lyall again wrote to Mauritius with reference to both the Merina court, and Jones and Griffiths whom he accused of “interference” and “insolence”:

“I find it absolutely necessary to stand upon high ground with the Malagashes in respect of rank, conduct, correspondence, &c. for, with even greater ignorance they, especially the officers of the army, demonstrate all the pride and consequence of the Turks...

*I propose for Your Excellency’s approbation that in future I shall be called simply “British Resident”; a name more dignified than either British Agent or British Resident Agent... The announcement of this change, as a higher rank, granted me by Government, through Your Excellency, to the Queen, I am confident would have a good effect in future affairs, and therefore I hope that my proposition may merit approval.”*¹⁰³

On 9 March, Lyall noted in his diary: “I am quite certain that the Government here is wishing, and seeking a pretext to give me notice, that ‘I may return to Mauritius.’”¹⁰⁴ The same day, he wrote to Ranavalona:

“By a letter addressed by the Right Honorable the Earl of Bathurst to His late Majesty, Radama, of Glorious Memory; by a 2nd letter addressed by His Excellency, Sir. G.L. Cole, late Governor of the Mauritius (dated the 29th of September 1827); and by a 3rd communication from the same, to His Majesty; Radama was informed of my appointment by King George the Fourth, as British Resident Agent at the Court of Tananarivou; and, as such, I was duly received,

¹⁰⁰ Entry, 15 Jan 1829, Lyall, “Diary 1828-1829” - NAK, CO 167-116.

¹⁰¹ Lyall to J.J. Freeman, 20 Jan 1829, Lyall, “Diary 1828-1829” - NAK, CO167-116.

¹⁰² Lyall to Colville, Tananarivou 10 Feb 1829, Lyall, “Diary 1828-1829” - NAK, CO167-116.

¹⁰³ Lyall to Colville, Tananarivou 1 Mar 1829, Lyall, “Diary 1828-1829” - NAK, CO167-116.

¹⁰⁴ Entry, 9 Mar 1829, Lyall, “Diary 1828-1829” - NAK, CO167-116.

recognized, and treated in the most distinguished manner by the late Monarch at Tamatave in the months of October and November of the year 1827...

I find it necessary here to add that, as I was appointed to fill the high Station of Resident at the Court of Madagascar, my Sovereign and Master alone can deprive me of that title, and so long as I continue faithfully to perform the functions of my Situation, I hope to merit general approbation. For this reason, I use my title in all official transactions, and not with a view to excite any uneasy or improper feelings in Your Majesty...

I have also to solicit that while here alone, representing a Mighty Nation and a most powerful Monarch in connexion with Sir Charles Colville G.C.B., Governor of Mauritius &c. &c. &c., that Your Majesty will cause all due distinction to be rendered to me, so long as I remain in Madagascar – By submitting to indignity, I should render myself unworthy the place I hold in His Britannic Majesty's Service and of the confidence of Government.”¹⁰⁵

Finally, on 25 March 1829, Ranavalona had Lyall arrested for sorcery, and in April she ordered him to leave the island. In June 1829, Lyall sailed to Mauritius where, until his death of malaria on 23 May 1831, he forlornly continued to use his title of “British Resident Agent to Madagascar.”¹⁰⁶

CONCLUSION

Hitherto, all published accounts of Robert Lyall have focussed on his short-lived role as British Agent to Madagascar, and have been used chiefly to highlight the conventional Eurocentric interpretation of Ranavalona I as a highly superstitious and xenophobic ruler. By contrast, this paper examines the upbringing, training and early career of Lyall. It reveals that from an early age he imbibed a singularly Scottish tradition of political radicalism, which was further developed during his time in Manchester and in Russia. Indeed, in a series of books published from 1823, Lyall's condemnation of tsarist autocracy and calls for political reform, led him to become a highly public symbol of radicalism in the lead up to the 1826 General Elections in Britain. A Tory win in those elections doomed the hopes he had of obtaining a lucrative sinecure under the Liberals, but he did appeal successfully for a government post overseas, being appointed British Resident Agent to the court of Radama I of Madagascar. Thereafter, Lyall shed his radical beliefs, embraced his new role as representative of the English monarchy and the imperial interests of an unreformed Tory government. However, upon reaching Antananarivo, the seat of Merina power, he discovered that the Radama I had died, that Welsh missionaries Jones and Griffiths refused to submit to his authority, and that Ranavalona I, the new monarch, rejected the 1820 British treaty, and with it Lyall's position as Resident British Agent. In 1829 he was expelled from the island, and in 1831 died on Mauritius of “Malagasy fever” (malaria).

¹⁰⁵ Memorial of Robert Lyall Esqre., British Resident Agent, addressed to Her Majesty Ranavalona, Queen of Madagascar, Tananarivou, 9 Mar 1829 - NAK, CO167-116.

¹⁰⁶ Lyall to Colville, Ambouhiainou, 31 Mar 1829, Lyall, “Diary 1828-1829” – NAK, CO167-116.