

William Fairlie of Fairlie, MP (1754 - 1825)

East India Company Merchant, Financier and Ship Owner

Died January 18, 1825 in Park Crescent, Portland Place and buried in St Marylebone Parish Church



William Fairlie, John Young, after Sir Martin Archer Shee, mezzotint, 1817, National Portrait Gallery

William Fairlie was one of a succession of Scottish traders who made their fortune in the British Empire. He began his agency in Calcutta (where a 'Fairlie Place' was first recorded in 1794), in partnership with John Fergusson, a fellow-Ayrshireman. By the turn of the century his firm was involved in a wide range of businesses extending well beyond India. In 1798 he was described in terms of high praise to the then Governor General of India, Richard Wellesley:

'...Mr Fairlie you would find the best informed in commercial matters in Bengal. I suppose no English house in India has such extensive concerns as Mr Fairlie's, but what I look to is that you may depend upon his giving opinions perfectly unbiased by self-interest. His fortune is very large and his credit seems almost unbounded.' [David Scott, Fairlie's London partner]

Wellesley certainly needed Fairlie's wealth for his wars of aggression against the Marathas and Tipu Sultan of Mysore, which were both expensive and unauthorised. Fairlie played a major role in supplying the Company's Bengal army with elephants, bullocks, camels and victuals.



William Fairlie, his wife Margaret and their Three Children, Robert Home, February 1802, painted in Calcutta.

Robert Home. It is one of Home's most ambitious and successful works, and is thus one of the most important paintings made in the Raj in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Home's sitter books record that Fairlie paid the high sum of 3000 rupees. Fairlie is shown with his wife Margaret and their three eldest children William, John, and Agnes Maria. In 1814 Robert Home (who was now in his sixties) left Calcutta for Lucknow, and became court painter to the Nawab (later King) Ghazi-ud-din Haidar of Oudh. Here he was employed not only in portraiture but in designing furniture, regalia and howdahs. He received an annual salary of £2,000. When the King died in 1827 Home retired with his married daughter to a 'handsome establishment' at Cawnpore (Kanpur), where he died at the age of 82, having spent most of his long life in India.

In the early nineteenth century Fairlie's agency house was the largest ship owner in Calcutta, and transported rice, indigo and cotton, as well as carrying opium to the China coast. The ship FAIRLIE, was

built on the Hooghly River in 1811-12, and subsequently carried emigrants and convicts to Australia for many years. The larger ship WILLIAM FAIRLIE traded regularly between London and Canton for the East India Company between 1821 and 1832 carrying rice, indigo, cotton and opium.

Fairlie was also involved in financing trade in Danish ships between India, Java and Europe, and through his partners and connections established a trading network which encompassed Canton, Batavia, Manila, Penang and New South Wales. Many of Fairlie's connections with the China coast developed in conjunction with the Reid brothers. 'Fairlie, Reid' became 'Reid and Beale' in Canton, thereby leading through Beale and Magniac to Jardine, Matheson in 1832.

In 1798, Fairlie married Margaret Ogilvy, daughter of John Ogilvy of Murtle, in Calcutta. Fairlie had already employed the services of Robert Home, and indeed was one of Home's first sitters in Calcutta, commissioning a 'head' in July 1795, and ordering three copies of it subsequently, as his 'sitters' book' reveals. Two further entries appear in the 'sitters' book' in 1802: 'Mrs Fairlie and Two Children H.L [price] 1500', and 'Mr Fairlie and Child [price] 1500'. Then an entry for 'monies received' in October 1802 reads 'Mr Fairlie and family - 3000'. The two entries for February 1802, as well as the note of receipt, must refer to the present picture, and suggests that the family may have sat for Home in two separate groups, brought together in the final work.

The Fairlies had two more children who survived to adulthood, James Ogilvy and Margaret Elizabeth; they were portrayed in England, with their mother, by Sir Martin Archer Shee. Having returned from India the Fairlies settled in Park Crescent, London, and William became a Member of Parliament. After his death in 1825, his widow Margaret bought the estate of Coodham in south Ayrshire, Scotland, and built a substantial house there; she died in 1845. The estate was inherited by her son (Colonel) James Ogilvy Fairlie, who with the Earl of Eglinton founded the Open Golf tournament in 1860. William and Margaret's eldest daughter Agnes Maria, who appears as a small child in this picture, was married in 1821 to her cousin, (Colonel) James Fairlie of Holms, by whom she had nine sons and five daughters.

The ships FAIRLIE and WILLIAM FAIRLIE

WILLIAM FAIRLIE, a ship of 1348 tons, was built by Bayley at Ipswich and regularly traded between London and Canton for the East India Company between 1821 and 1832.

FAIRLIE, a ship of 756 tons, was built on the Hooghly River in 1811 - 12 and regularly transported emigrants and convicts to Australia. As a convict ship, she could carry 376 men in voyage lasting 111 days.

The FAIRLIE was one of hundreds of convict ships sailed to Australia from the UK between 1787 and 1867 carrying over 160,000 convicts sentenced to transportation. Two convict voyages are recorded;

- to New South Wales, Australia, leaving England on 27th October 1833 with 376 'passengers'.
- to Van Diemen's Land, Australia, arriving on 3rd July 1852 with 306 'passengers'.

An article written in London in 1834 was later published in the *Sydney Monitor*:

On Saturday morning the ship Lloyds, Thomas Ward, Esq., owner, left Woolwich for Sydney with 200 male convicts on board, who are under sentence of transportation for life and for 14 years. Among them are a number of the most desperate thieves, housebreakers, and swell-mob men who have, during their career, levied heavy contributions on the inhabitants of this great metropolis. A large ship called the Fairlie belonging to Mr. Ward, has been hired by Government, for the purpose of sending out 376 male convicts to the same colony - a larger number than has yet been sent away in a single vessel. She will sail in a few days; and, we understand, that his Majesty's Government do not intend to employ many convicts at the hulks and about the dock yards in future; but, in lieu thereof, those who may be hereafter convicted and sentence to transportation, will be sent to our penal settlements and be compelled to labour hard on the public works in the Colonies.

Alick Osborne kept a Medical Journal from 17 September 1833 to 8 March 1834:

In November on approaching the equator, the fever made its appearance to a considerable extent exhibiting a different type according to constitution and habit in the patient; with soldiers inflammatory and prisoners low fever. It may be necessary for me to state in accounting for medical comforts, that it was my uniform practice to have a bottle of broth prepared every day, two or three pounds of barley and a canister of meat; and what was not actually required for patients in the hospital distributed in portions among the aged and infirm.

Two women belonging to the Guard were confined on board and another suckling an infant. They were liberally supplied with every comfort at my disposal. On Christmas day and twelfth day, that the prisoners might partake of the exhilaration of the season, a few canisters of preserved meat were added to the pea soup. I beg here further to add the circumstance of landing so many convicts in good health; 372 without a symptom of scurvy.

The Military Guard for the Fairlie consisted of 29 rank and file of 17th, 21st, 39th and 50th regiments including soldiers Thomas Burgen, Joseph Crowden, Michael Murphy, Patrick Conlon and Michael Scanlan; as well as 4 women, 12 children and 3 female servants. [Select here](#) to find convict ships bringing detachments of the 21st regiment.

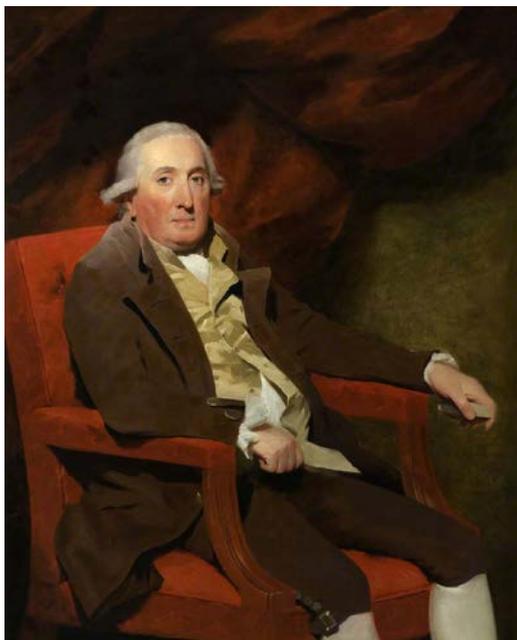
The Fairlie arrived in Port Jackson on 15 February 1834, a voyage of 111 days.

Prisoners were mustered on board by the Colonial Secretary on 24th February 1834 - 367 men mustered; sick on shore - 3; committed for trial - 2; died at sea - 4 (Francis Long and Francis Scaling + two others).

The convict indents include information such as name, age, religion, education, marital status, family, native place, occupation, offence, date and place of trial, sentence, prior convictions and physical description. There is also occasional information regarding colonial crimes and deaths and tickets of leave and pardons. Twenty six of the prisoners were under the age of 16. Two, - William Adams and Edward Johnson were only 13 years old.

Distribution of 372 male convicts who arrived on the Fairlie:

- 319 were assigned to private service;
- 3 in hospital;
- 9 unfit for assignment;
- 24 placed in an iron gang;
- 4 sent to Norfolk Island;
- 3 sent to Port Macquarie (specials);
- 8 sent to Carter's Barracks; and
- 2 in gaol committed for trial.



William Fairlie of Fairlie, Henry Raeburn 1756 - 1823, in the collection of Wolverhampton Art Gallery



William Fairlie's monument in St Marylebone Parish Church