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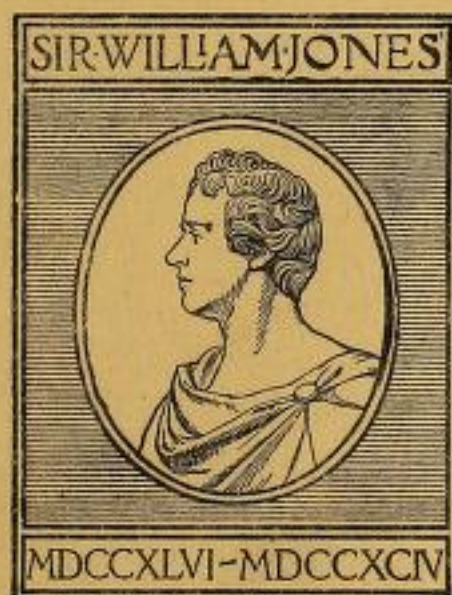
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THE JOURNALS OF MAJOR JAMES RENNELL,  
FIRST SURVEYOR-GENERAL OF INDIA.

EDITED BY

T. H. D. LA TOUCHE,  
*Geological Survey of India.*



CALCUTTA :

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THE JOURNALS  
OF  
MAJOR JAMES RENNELL

FIRST SURVEYOR-GENERAL OF INDIA.

WRITTEN FOR THE INFORMATION OF THE GOVERNORS OF BENGAL  
DURING HIS SURVEYS OF  
THE GANGES AND BRAHMAPUTRA RIVERS  
1764 TO 1767.

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Major James Rennell, F.R.S.,

'The first great English Geographer'.



Reproduced from a Medallion  
in the possession of the Asiatic  
Society of Bengal.

*James Rennell*



## PREFACE.

The Journal of Major James Rennell now published is contained in a small quarto volume bound in parchment, and is written throughout by his own hand. Inside the cover is the book-plate, dated 1840, of his daughter Lady Rodd, who in 1809 was married to Admiral Sir J. Tremayne Rodd. The book was presented by her grandson, the Rt. Hon. Sir James Rennell Rodd, G.C.V.O., British Ambassador at Rome, to the Victoria Memorial Collection accumulated under the auspices of Lord Curzon in 1906, and came into my hands through Sir T. H. Holland, Director of the Geological Survey, who asked me to discover whether it contained any matter of geological interest. This I found not to be the case, except as regards the striking and important changes that have taken place, and are still in progress, in the courses of the rivers of Bengal since the Journal was written. But it is so different in many respects from the other contemporary records of that most interesting period of the British occupation of India that have been preserved, concerning itself not with the political and social events of the time, but with the physical aspects of the country, its climate, crops, and communications, that it seemed to me to possess a quite unique interest; and I am greatly indebted to the Council of the Asiatic Society of Bengal for their permission, freely accorded, to edit the Journal as one of the Memoirs of that Society.

In many respects the picture of Bengal, as given in the Journal, differs very slightly from its aspect of the present day, in spite of the advance of Western civilisation, of our railways and our steam-boats. The first journey that I myself made in India was from Dacca to Maimensingh by way of the 'Luckya' river in a 'budgarow,' which might have been the very one, so far as appearance and construction went, in which Rennell made the passage. Since then I have travelled many a mile in the same unwieldy craft, which still remain the chief means of transport on the waterways of the delta. Still, on either side of the rivers, 'padda' fields stretch to the horizon; and the mat-built villages, with their groves of bamboos and betel trees, remain as they were. Notwithstanding the uniform flatness of the ground, the scenery is often charming; as Rennell more than once remarks in some such phrase as this:—"There is a very pleasant Prospect, the River being transparent and serpentine, and flowing through a Countrey made up of pleasant Meadows interspersed with Groves and Villages." The only innovations worth mentioning are perhaps the growing of jute, which now almost overshadows that of rice, and the nearly complete extermination of the 'Tygers,' which were so frequent a cause of apprehension to Rennell and his men.



I felt much hesitation in deciding how to deal with the mass of miscellaneous notes which follow the Journal; whether to arrange them under separate heads or to omit some that did not appear to possess much interest. But the topics dealt with are so varied that what seemed to myself to be superfluous might be the very subjects to which others might wish to devote particular attention. For this reason, and because I think that the notes, as they stand, give us some insight into Rennell's attitude of mind, testifying to his ardour in collecting every item of information that might assist him in the preparation of his 'Memoir' and other works, I have thought it better to make no alteration in the text.

In conclusion, I must express my gratitude to Mr. F. D. Ascoli, I.C.S., who as Assistant Settlement Officer in Faridpur has acquired an intimate knowledge of the vagaries of the great rivers in that neighbourhood since Rennell's time, and has kindly corrected many of the notes I had compiled from information which, though not many years old, is now quite out of date; to the Revd. W. K. Firminger, Editor of "Bengal, Past and Present," who has given me many valuable suggestions; and to Mr. J. T. Rankin, I.C.S., who has kindly identified several of the villages in the Dacca District mentioned by Rennell.

T. H. D. L.

CALCUTTA,  
*June 1910.*



OCTOBER 1765.

JOURNAL of the fourth Expedition for making a general Map of the Bengall Provinces, beginning with that of Bengall, & continuing the Survey of the Baramputrey & the Countries bordering on it.

The 10th. of October whilst at Dacca I received Lord Clive's Orders to set about forming a general Map of Bengall with all Expedition; & as it appeared to be a very tedious Work should all the Distances be exactly ascertained, his Lordship gave Directions that they should be taken in a cursory Manner only, correcting them by Latitudes or any other eligible Means.<sup>1</sup>

As his Lordship was pleased to leave it to my Discretion where to begin my Surveys, I judged it most proper to proceed with the Survey of the River Baramputrey, & the Countries that lie contiguous to it.

Sunday 13th. set out from Dacca. The Rainy Season not broke up but expected to break<sup>2</sup> at the new Moon which was to happen y<sup>e</sup> next day. Being to go by way of Naranda Creek<sup>3</sup> I judged that no ill Consequences could happen to the Boats by the Monsoons breaking, whilst they continued in so narrow a Creek: the Weather also appeared to be settled.

In the afternoon we had a slight Squall from the NNE, & at 5 perceiving that the Clouds began to rise very quick from that Quarter, we returned back to Diagunge & secured the Boats near the Bridge.<sup>4</sup> Very heavy Rain from 5 till Midnight, the Wind in moderate Gales from the Northward.

The 14th. at  $\frac{1}{2}$  an hour past Midnight the Wind increased, and at one blew a stiff Gale: from that Time till 6 in the Morning several heavy Squalls, with much Rain, the Wind veering gradually from N<sup>d</sup>. to ENE. At 9 the Wind came at East & blew much stronger than before, & from 9 to 5 PM it veered gradually to SWBW, its violence increasing till it had settled in that Quarter near two Hours. The Rain continued without Intermission. At 7 PM the Wind veered to West, & grew<sup>3</sup> moderate, the remainder of the Night moderate Gales from WNW to West, with flying Showers. The Moon changed at 11 at this Night.

The 15th. moderate Gales from WSW to NNW, the Weather cloudy & threatening, but before Night it cleared up. The Water of the River rose a Cubit & half during the Storm, but fell again this Day.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The historian Orme had written to Lord Clive (21<sup>st</sup> Nov<sup>r</sup>. 1764), imploring him to "make a vast map of Bengal, in which not only the outlines of the province, but also the different subdivisions of Burdwan, Beerboom etc. may be justly marked. \* \* \* \* \* Take astronomical observations of longitude, if you have anybody capable of doing it \* \* \* \* \*". These instructions to Rennell were no doubt the outcome of this appeal (Malcolm, *Life of Clive*, Vol. II, p. 253). On the 29<sup>th</sup> Sept<sup>r</sup> 1765 Clive wrote to Orme promising to let him have the maps (*Ibid.*, Vol. III, p. 132).

<sup>2</sup> The expression "break of the monsoon" is now generally used to denote its beginning; *ante* p. 27.

<sup>3</sup> The Dolai or Naranda creek is a branch of the Balu, a tributary of the Lakhmia (Luckya) river, and intersects the city of Dacca.

<sup>4</sup> The Narandia bridge, built (together with a mosque) in the year 1664 A.D. The creek is now crossed by an iron suspension bridge (Rankin).

<sup>5</sup> These cyclones often occur during October in the Bay of Bengal and the surrounding countries, and frequently



runs by y<sup>e</sup> side of the Road for near 4 miles to the Westward of the place where we crossed it.

Rungpour is situated with respect to Olyapour W<sup>t</sup>. 12°-20' North, distant 22½ British Miles,\* tho' by the Road it is upwards of 24 Miles. The Goggot Creek<sup>1</sup> comes within ¾ of a mile of the west part of the Town: it is navigable for Boats of 150 Maund tili the Month of January. This Creek is said to be a Branch of the Purnabubah River,<sup>2</sup> which has its Source in the Kingdom of Boutan,<sup>3</sup> & runs by way of Raajgunge, 10 Denospour<sup>4</sup> & Bulloa; afterwards joining the Ganges by several Branches, the chief of which are those of Mahanada, Surda, & Jaffiergunge.

There is but little worth remarking about Rungpour, it being only a principal Gunge,<sup>5</sup> & like most of the others, the Houses are built of Matts & Bamboos, there being but one Brick house in the Town.

The British Factory is now at Nabobgunge, a Bazar Village lying about 3 miles NWBW from Rungpour.

We arrived at Rungpour the 14th. & the two following Days were employed in collecting some particulars concerning the Situation of the neighbouring Countries, the Course of the Rivers, &c.

From the 16th. to the 19th. employed in tracing the Roads from Rungpour to Gurygong.<sup>6</sup> This is a middling Village belonging to Baharbund, situated on the South Bank of the Dherla or Durla River & about 12 miles N 37°-30' West from the Place of its Conflux with the Baramputrey. The Dherla is from 350 yards to a ¼ of a mile broad & is navigable all the Year for Boats of 2000 Maund between Gurygong & y<sup>e</sup> great River. This River has likewise its Source from Boutan, & in the wet 11 Season has a communication with the Purnabubah. It separates the Purgannahs of Baharbund & Vittrebund.<sup>7</sup>

The Roads between Rungpour & Gurygong are in general very rough & Jungly, especially in the neighbourhood of the latter. In our Route we crossed the Monaash & Teesta Creeks, besides several Jeels which render the Roads impassable 6 months of the Year.

The 20th. & 21st. employed in tracing the Dherla River from Gurygong to Baggooa (the place of its Conflux with the Baramputrey): the distance by the River is near 18 miles; the Current is in general excessive rapid.

From the 21st. November to y<sup>e</sup> 2d. December employed in laying down the Western Bank of the Baramputrey from the Mouth of the Dherla River to Jugygupa:<sup>8</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The Ghagat, formerly a branch of the Teesta, but now silted up at its head. It is a very sluggish and tortuous river. In the lower part of its course it receives the name of the Alai, and afterwards of the Bengali River.

<sup>2</sup> The Purnabhaba R. lies considerably to the West in Dinajpur District, and was at that time one of the main branches of the Teesta.

<sup>3</sup> Bhutan.

<sup>4</sup> Dinajpur.

<sup>5</sup> A Bazar village or Market. There were 42 brick houses in Buchanan Hamilton's time (1809).

<sup>6</sup> Kuriganj or Kurigram.

<sup>7</sup> Bhitiband. Bittrebund in Rennell's Bengal Atlas, No. V.

<sup>8</sup> Jogighopa, a village on the north bank of the Brahmaputra opposite Goalpara, Yogighopa of Buchanan Hamilton. The Ahoms had a fort here, taken by Mir Jumla in 1662 (Gait, Hist. of Assam, p. 127). The name appears to be



the distance is 71 miles, & the Courses various. Between Baggoa & Rangamatty the Course of the River is in general S 31°-30' W<sup>t</sup>. 36½ miles; the Countrey within this space is quite flat & destitute of Trees, & the Soil sandy & barren near the River; there are very few Villages & no Bazars or Haats.<sup>1</sup>

- 12 The Rangamatty Countrey begins about 10 miles above Baggoa, & continues to the Frontiers of Boutan & Assam. Ten miles below Rangamatty the Sunecoss<sup>2</sup> River from Boutan falls into the Baramputrey at Dubarye.<sup>3</sup> The Sunecoss River is about 200 yards broad & 12 or 14 Cubits deep for upwards of 40 miles above the Conflux.

Rangamatty is at present a small illbuilt Village situated on a Range of small Hills which form the Western Bank of the Sunecoss River, & about 2½ miles NW from the Baramputrey, with which it has a communication by means of the Sunecoss. It has a small mud Fort with some few Guns mounted in it, & I observed about 50 Guns from 2 to 4 pounders lying without.<sup>4</sup> The Latitude of this Place is 26°-6' North & Longitude from Dacca 0°-20' West.

The Course of the Baramputrey between Rangamatty & Gwalpara is from EBN to WBS 35 miles, the breadth irregular, & a great number of Islands in it. Between these Places four Rivers from Boutan empty themselves into the Baramputrey on the North side; Three of them (v<sup>t</sup>.) the Gowrong, Champomattey, & Hāārypaany are fordable; but however serve to float down Timbers from Boutan & the Forests of

- 13 Bisnee.<sup>5</sup> The fourth of these Rivers is named the Bonaash,<sup>6</sup> whose Course is from the Boutan Mountains, to the SW, first separating the Low Countries of Assam & Boutan, & afterwards those of Bengall & Assam; emptying itself into the Baram-

derived from that of a Garo princess, Jugé Silché, who was hidden by her people in a cave here to protect her from a rapacious chief of Assam (Playfair, *The Garos*, p. 9).

<sup>1</sup> Hind. Hāt, a market held on certain days.

<sup>2</sup> The Sankos, formerly the boundary between Bengal and Assam.

<sup>3</sup> Dhubri, for many years the terminus of the Railway on the Brahmaputra, and the head-quarters station of Goalpara district.

<sup>4</sup> Rangamati, signifying 'Red earth,' is a common village name in Bengal and Assam, such villages being built on patches of the older alluvium, which is usually of a red colour. This particular village is not shown in the Atlas of India, but is marked conspicuously on Rennell's maps (Bengal Atlas Nos. V and XVIII) on the bank of the Sunecoss (Sankos) near the Brahmaputra. It is also marked in the same position, on the north bank of the Brahmaputra, not far beyond Dhubri, in the map attached to M<sup>r</sup>. Gait's *History of Assam*. But in Hunter's *Imp. Gazetteer of India* (Vol. XI, p. 470) and in the latest edition of the same work the position is given as in Lat. 26°-19' N., Long 90°-48' E.; that is to say, the site of a small village of the same name on the Manas, 38 miles further to the east. It is also stated that the village was an important outpost of the Muhammadans at the beginning of the 18th century. As, however, the Rangamati of the Gazetteer lies on the eastern bank of the Manas, which was then the boundary, and therefore within the dominions of the king of Assam, it is not likely to have been in Muhammadan hands. Moreover Rennell's description shows that his Rangamati had not long before been a fort of importance, and it is much more likely therefore to have been the Muhammadan outpost in that direction. It was one of the places visited by Bishop Laynez in 1714, as recorded in the *Lettres Édiifiantes et Curieuses* (Tom. XIII, p. 288), and was considered to be very unhealthy, as Père Barbier says:—"Ou nous faisoit appréhender ce voyage, car c'est un proverbe commun à Bengale, que de deux personnes qui vont à Rangamati, il y en a toujours une qui y reste. Mais le courage de notre Prêlat étoit à toute épreuve."

<sup>5</sup> Bijni, an estate in the Goalpara district.

<sup>6</sup> The Manas R., called the Banas in the Muhammadan records (Gait, *History of Assam*, p. 113 note). It joins the Brahmaputra opposite Goalpara.



putrey at Jugygupa, a few miles below Gwalpara. The Bed of this River is in general 200 yards broad, but its Waters are not navigable even for Pulwars during the driest part of the Year. As this River affords so short a Passage to the Boutan Mountains (it being less than 60 miles on a streight Line from the foot of the Mountains to Jugygupa), there is no doubt but that any Number of Firr Trees may be brought down by it, if a right understanding subsisted between our People & the Assamers; as I have myself seen a large Firr Tree which floated down the River, after being washed down the Mountains by the Land Floods.<sup>1</sup>

Between Rangamatty & Gwalpara the Countrey is Hilly on both sides the River, & so full of Woods & Jungles that it is scarce penetrable, & I could see but two or three Villages the whole way.

Gwalpara<sup>2</sup> is a small Village belonging to Measpara Purgana, & is situated on the South side of the great River in Latitude  $26^{\circ}-7'$  North & Longitude from Dacca  $0^{\circ}-16'$  East. The Factory lies on the side of a small woody Hill immediately to the **14** Eastward of which the Keestrey, a small River from the Garrow Provinces, falls into the Baramputrey.

The Assam Countrey begins from the Bonaash River on the North side the Baramputrey & one of their Chokeys<sup>3</sup> is placed directly opposite Gwalpara; but on the South side the Bengall Provinces continue for upwards of 21 miles. The Countrey is very little cultivated in the neighbourhood of Gwalpara and Jugygupa.<sup>4</sup> The Woods abound with several kinds of wild Animals, as Tygers, Rhinoceros, Buffalos, Elephants, &c., the tracks of which may be seen everywhere.

I could not perceive that the Current of the Baramputrey was more rapid near Gwalpara &c. than it was 200 miles farther down, altho' it is commonly reported otherwise: it is indeed rocky in some places, particularly between Rangamatty & Gwalpara; but in other respects the Navigation of this River appears to me to be full as easy as that of the Ganges.

From the 2nd. to y<sup>e</sup> 6th. December employed in tracing the Baramputrey from **15** Gwalpara to the Frontier of Assam on the Southern side. The distance by y<sup>e</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The timber trade has assumed large proportions since the Eastern Duars were taken over by the Government of India in 1866.

<sup>2</sup> Goalpara. Formerly one of the frontier outposts of the Muhammadans in Assam. The true latitude is  $26^{\circ}-11'$ . A French Factory was established here in 1754 or 1755 by M. Chevalier, and on the fall of Chandernagore in 1757 he remained in the employ of some English gentlemen. In 1767 a M<sup>r</sup> Laval was appointed agent of the English in partnership with M. Chevalier (*Bengal Past & Present*, Vol. III, No. 2, p. 366). Buchanan Hamilton describes 'Goyalpara' in 1809 as containing "some good thatched houses, and a street of shops, which in such a country is considered as a kind of miracle, and the place is looked upon as a city of the utmost elegance. It is only, however, in its containing many distressed objects, and many profligate and vicious persons, that it resembles an European city; and, in proportion to its size, in these points it probably far excels any place west from the Cape of Good Hope" (*Martin, History*, Vol. III, p. 477).

<sup>3</sup> Chokey. Hind. Chauki, a police station. Assam was an independent kingdom until 1825, when it was conquered by the British.

<sup>4</sup> One of the duties of the Muhammadan military officers in charge of the posts of Rangamati and Goalpara was to encourage the growth of jungle and reeds as a protection against the inroads of the Assamese (*Hunter, Imp. Gaz.*, Vol. V, p. 113).



River is 22 miles,<sup>1</sup> the Course of which is from West to WNW, very different from the description given of it in the Maps.<sup>2</sup> We were not permitted to land on the Northern or Assam side, all the way, there being several Chokeys placed; however we found means to lay down about 10 miles beyond the Bengall Frontiers, & in returning we coasted the Assam side near enough to inform ourselves of all the particulars which we wanted.

This River must needs have a very long Course before it enters the Bengall Provinces, since 400 miles from the sea it is twice as big as the Thames. By measuring the Banks &c. I find that the Rains swell this River 32 or 33 foot.

The Bengall Country extends 18 or 20 miles to the Eastward of Commerputa (the Frontier Town on the River) & afterwards as I am informed the Boundary runs in a Southerly direction towards Silet & Bermās.<sup>3</sup> However, that must be the Object of a future Survey, as we are now surveying the Countries to the Westw<sup>d</sup>. of the Baramputrey.

- 16 The Garrow Provinces begin about 12 miles south of the Baramputrey, & are bounded by the Rungjulee & Sosong Mountains<sup>4</sup>; some of them are independent of Bengall.

The 6th. returned to Gwalpara; the next day employed in reducing & compiling the Surveys, & procuring Pilots & Hircaras for the Bisnee Countrey.

From the 8th. to the 11th. employed in tracing the Bonaash & Birally Rivers from Jugygupa to the Frontiers of Assam & Boutan. I have mentioned some particulars concerning the Bonaash in page 12 & 13; the Birally or Barrally is a small River from Boutan which joins the Bonaash 12 miles above Jugygupa & has a Course from NW to SE.

<sup>1</sup> To the present boundary with the Kamrup district. The northern side is now part of the latter district, Kamrup marking the western extension of the Assam kingdom in the 18th century

<sup>2</sup> In his 'Memoir of Hindoostan' (p. 356) Rennell says:—"On tracing this river in 1765, I was no less surprised at finding it rather larger than the Ganges, than at its course previous to its entering Bengal. This I found to be from the east; although all the former accounts represented it as from the north; and this unexpected discovery soon led to inquiries, which furnished me with an account of its general course, to within 100 miles of the place where Du Halde left the Sanpoo. I could no longer doubt, that the Burrampooter and the Sanpoo were one and the same river; and to this was added the positive assurance of the Assamers, 'That *their* river came from the north-west, through the Bootan mountains.' And to place it beyond a doubt, that the Sanpoo river is not the same with the river of Ava, but that this last is the great *Nou Kian* of Yunan; I have in my possession a manuscript draught of the Ava river, to within 150 miles of the place where Du Halde leaves the *Nou Kian*, in its course towards Ava; together with very authentic information that this river (named *Irabatty* by the people of Ava) is navigable from the city of Ava into the province of Yunan in China."

I have quoted this passage at length, because it shows the acuteness of Rennell's reasoning, and that he was the first to recognise the identity of the Brahmaputra with the Tsan-po of Tibet. The controversy has not even yet been settled by actual exploration, but Mr. Needham in 1855-6 proved that the river that flows past Sama, in the Zayul valley, is not a tributary of the Tsan-po as had been supposed, but is continuous with the Brahmaputra at Sudiya, and as it had already been shown that the Tsanpo does not flow to the east of Sama, there is no doubt that it breaks through the Himalayas by the channel of the Dihang, the largest river falling into the Brahmaputra from the north. This passage, however, shows that even Rennell was liable to be misled by hearsay information, for the *Nou Kian* or *Lu Kiang* of Yunnan is the Salween, and not the Irrawaddy or 'river of Ava.'

For an account of the changes in the course of the river between the time of Rennell's Survey and 1809 see Buchanan Hamilton (Martin, History, Vol. III, p. 387 seq.).

<sup>3</sup> Burma. This boundary coincides with the eastern limits of the Garo Hills district.

<sup>4</sup> *i.e.* on the north and south sides respectively. The Garo Hills were not entirely brought under control till 1873.