Bengal, 1773. A party of officers of the Honourable East India Company’s army are on a hunting expedition. One of their number has become detached from the main body. A startled tiger charges towards him. The small shot in his musket simply enrages the animal. He fends it off with increasing desperation using the bayonet on the end of the musket, but he is weak from loss of blood and the tiger is powerful. With a last effort he manages to wrest the bayonet off the gun and plunge it into the tiger’s chest.

Rolling clear of the dying animal, he is covered in blood from the wounds the tiger’s claws have inflicted. His companions are nowhere to be seen, having abandoned him for dead and fled from the tiger. He staggers back to camp and the legend of Tiger Duff is born. Many years later, when he has returned to his native Scotland, children in Banff stare and talk in hushed tones about the six-foot four-inches tall military man with the scar on his cheek.

Patrick Duff (1742–1803), who was to reach the rank of major-general from comparatively humble beginnings, had an eventful life which is not only a good story in its own right but tells us a good deal about Scotland in the eighteenth century. Patrick had an uncle who escaped from Culloden into exile in France after fighting for Bonnie Prince Charlie. Another uncle built one of the finest Adam–designed mansions in Scotland spending the fortune he made in the Madeira wine trade, filled with Chinese silk wallpaper and doors of Spanish mahogany. Patrick completed five voyages to India and back at a time when many travellers to the east didn’t survive one. He was sent home in disgrace after taking a leading role in a mutiny of officers, but was able by dint of his practical ability and stubborn persistence in getting what he felt was his due to rise to senior rank. He made a fortune serving the ruler of Oudh, which he was able to translate into a landed estate in Banffshire. Not content with the life of a country gentleman, he fought a parliamentary election against the influence of the powerful Earl Fife. Unwilling to accept defeat engineered, as he saw it, by electoral fraud, he fought and lost
a court case which may well have influenced Walter Scott when he wrote *Guy Mannering*. In the meantime, he had been involved in a major battle to take the Seringapatam fortress of the Indian ruler Tipu Sultan and had finished his military career with the rank of major-general. His comfortable retirement was disrupted by the bankruptcy of his brother, whose debts he was struggling to clear when he and his wife died in Edinburgh in 1802.

In the introduction to the collection of essays on Scotland and the British Empire they edited, John Mackenzie and T. M. Devine assert that, to understand the distinctive role of Scots in empire, ‘we need histories of specific families and areas of the country. Even the grandest theories must be built upon such basic and particularist information.’ This book presents one such history, that of the extended Duff and Gordon families. Their story has particular interest in that it spans the histories of the empire of conquest and the empire of commerce. Patrick Duff, later joined by his brothers William and John, was one of many Scottish officers of the East India Company’s army, an army which was a crucial factor in the transmutation of British activities in India from relationships based on trade to territorial expansion and control. The massive expansion in territory in the second half of the eighteenth century laid the foundations for our classic image of the Raj, control of enormous numbers of people and large areas of land based on, ultimately, military might. However, there is another form of imperialism, that based on the unequal distribution of economic resources and opportunities. To the wine growers of Madeira and Portugal in the eighteenth century, the dominance of the distribution of their wine by British merchants must have seemed a good deal like imperialism by trade. The Gordon bothers, James and Alexander, later joined by their nephews James and Robert Duff, were key members of the British merchant elite who controlled the majority of trade in madeira wine. The connection in one family between two different forms of empire reveals the place of Madeira as a key geographical node in the networks of trade that underpinned both and that of madeira wine in lubricating and sustaining imperial rule.

The influential account of the formation of British state and identity presented by Linda Colley in *Britons* places considerable emphasis on a shared protestant distrust and fear of a catholic ‘other’, largely in the shape of France,

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in knitting together the different nations that constituted Britain.\textsuperscript{2} However, granted a shared anti-Catholicism, there were still significant differences between different visions of the protestant tradition. The Scots had tried, unsuccessfully, to impose their presbyterian model of church governance on England in the civil war that wracked the islands in the mid-seventeenth century. In revenge, High Church Tories were successful in re-imposing lay patronage on the Church of Scotland soon after the Treaty of Union in 1707. The Act of 1712 created lasting popular resentment in Scotland, leading to many local conflicts, conflicts which indicate major fault lines between English and Scottish conceptions of Protestantism.\textsuperscript{3} Not only are these fault lines of some importance in forging a distinctive Scottish identity in the empire, but the extended Duff and Gordon network spanned another, still greater fault line. For while the Duffs came from a presbyterian background, the Gordons of Letterfourie were one of the staunchest Roman Catholic families in Scotland. How empire supplied niches for them to prosper and to join the enterprise that was Britain is a further dimension of this story.

This eventful life is chronicled in the many letters generated by the commercial, military and political networks that linked Scotland, London, Madeira and India. Although most of them concerned the business of the day, collectively, and supported by other sources, they give us insight into the character of this extended family network that seized the opportunities offered by the expansion of empire. This was neither the experience of the aristocratic and political elite, nor of the rank and file of empire, still less of the subjects of that empire. Rather it is the story of those in the middle, men (and the story is mostly about men, because that is where the sources lead us) who spotted gaps in the market that their existing connections and abilities could enable them to exploit. Others have used such sources to explore the ‘inner life of Empire’.\textsuperscript{4} However, these sources don’t lead us that way. They are largely silent about emotional issues, being concerned either with the details of trade or with striving for rank. Although they give us clues to the inner life, most of the story they enable us to tell is concerned with external exploits. They are also written from the vantage point of the survivor and the victor, so they tell us little about the peoples, either in India or Madeira,

\textsuperscript{2} Linda Colley, Britons: Forging the Nation 1707–1837 (New Haven, CT, 2005).
amongst whom our central characters made their living. So this can only be a partial story of empire, but I hope it is both a fascinating one within these limitations and a contribution to our understanding of Scotland in the eighteenth century.

I tell the story largely as a chronological narrative, saving my thoughts about contributions to the broader historiography for a summary chapter. However, my task is complicated by seeking to weave together two narratives, that of Patrick Duff in India and James and Alexander Gordon in Madeira. At points this requires me to leave a strict chronological structure to explore themes across the period, such as the nature and structure of military practice in Bengal. At times, too, I have to tack backwards and forwards between India, Madeira, London and Scotland. The timeline that follows this chapter might help as an aide memoire for some of the key events and dates. These themes tend to coalesce from chapter eleven onwards, where the connections between events in India and Madeira become clearer. Throughout, I have supplied detailed footnotes to the sources I have used. Following Indian independence in 1947, many place names were changed; to avoid anachronistic and confusing changes of names I have used the eighteenth–century British versions throughout, as deployed in contemporary material. I use ‘Madeira’ with an initial capital letter to refer to the island, ‘madeira’ to refer to the wine produced on and named after the island.

The story begins with the alliance through marriage of the staunchly Roman Catholic family of Gordon of Letterfourie and the presbyterian Duffs. The wealth that the Gordons were able to accumulate in Madeira enabled them to support their Duff nephews, preparing them for careers in the wine trade or Indian military service. We first follow James Gordon to London and Madeira to understand the sources of this wealth, before turning to the Jacobite activities of his brother Alexander. This forms one part of the background to Patrick Duff’s experiences in India, possibly shaping his participation in a mutiny of European officers in Bengal in 1766. Lucky to escape death and sent home in disgrace, we leave Patrick to explore in more detail the nature of the Madeira wine business, drawing on the extensive business correspondence of the Gordons. Understanding how the Gordons made their money, although it might appear something of a diversion from Patrick’s story, is important to locate the connections and resources he could draw upon in his successful struggle to return to India. After an explanation of the evolution of the Bengal artillery in which he was to serve, we come to the episode outlined above which gave Patrick his enduring nickname of
‘Tiger’. The permutations of this story form an interesting example of imperial myth making.

After another brief return to Britain and the tragic early death of his new bride, we follow Patrick to Oudh, where he appears to have made his initial fortune. Having established himself securely, he was then able to help his uncles (by now in partnership with Patrick’s brothers) to develop their sales of madeira wine in India. These years saw his advance in rank, but this was not without struggles which form a central part of his extensive correspondence. These letters also give us some insight into his domestic life, especially the children he had with Indian women. They shed light on the process of remitting money in order to purchase a Scottish estate. The acquisition of the Carnousie estate near Turriff reveals something of the contribution of Indian wealth to the process of agricultural improvement in Scotland. His entry to the landowning elite of Banffshire was cemented by a judicious marital alliance, but in between Patrick returned to India to play a significant role in the war against Tipu Sultan which culminated in victory for the East India Company in 1792. Back in Scotland, Patrick took part in another battle, when he stood in a Parliamentary by-election in 1795 against the candidate of the dominant local magnate, Earl Fife. Although unsuccessful, Patrick’s action in contesting the electoral fraud he perceived to be in operation gives us great insight into tensions in the local elite at the time. At the same time Patrick returned to India for a fifth and final time, where he assumed his rank of major-general at the head of the Bengal artillery. He was not to enjoy his estates and fortune for long, as our story closes with his brother’s bankruptcy and Patrick’s death from consumption.

The very distinctive activities of this one family, spanning both empires of conquest and commerce as well as religious divides, have a good deal to contribute to our understanding of the role of Scots in empire. The conclusion considers what these contributions were in terms of the distinctive Scottish contribution to empire, the impact of that contribution back on Scotland and the implications for our understanding of the construction of a British state and identity. One intriguing aspect is the way our story brings to the foreground the rather hidden place of madeira wine as a key cultural and material element of the construction of an imperial elite.