

An Architect in Shanghai



**The letters of
William Kidner, ARIBA
and James Kidner
1864-1874**

**presented by
Simon and James Kidner**

Introduction

The letters and newspaper cuttings that follow record that part of the career of William Kidner spent in Shanghai from 1864 to 1876.

William was born on 16th February 1841 at Durston, near Taunton, Somerset, the second son of William Kidner, a farmer, and his wife, Ann née Smith. In 1851 the family farmed at Bickley Farm, Milverton, Somerset. William junior does not appear to have embarked on an architectural career immediately as he was working as a builder's clerk in 1861 and at that time was living at 11 Bessborough Gardens, St John's Westminster. His RIBA nomination paper gives no indication of his training but he probably studied at University College London since his proposers were Professor Thomas Leverton Donaldson and his pupil Edward Augustus Gruning; he certainly worked for his third proposer, George Gilbert Scott, as he emigrated to Shanghai in 1864 to build Scott's Holy Trinity Church and set up practice there after it was completed in 1869. His brother James had joined him in 1866. While in Shanghai William visited various places in China and Japan. In his spare time he joined the shooting club and came to be regarded as the finest shot in China. In 1872 William was back in England but had returned to Shanghai by Christmas 1873. In about 1874 he engaged as assistant John Myrie Cory, a Carlisle architect who had also been in Scott's office between 1867 and 1869, and had spent fifteen months in the United States in 1870 and 1871. On his return Cory had bought a partnership in the London Roman Catholic practice of a relative Joseph Cory Scholes, but this had apparently not proved a success. In 1875 Cory became a partner in Kidner's Shanghai practice which reached its peak in 1877 with two large bank commissions. Kidner withdrew from the partnership with Cory early in 1878, as he was in London in March answering questions on Joseph's Conder's paper on Japanese architecture, read at the RIBA by T Roger Smith.

In 1877 William Kidner had married Jamesina Nicol Crosbie, daughter of James Crosbie, a bank agent of Elgin and his wife Helen Nicol. They married in Kensington in London. A year later their son, Percy Crosbie, was born. He became a managing director of Vauxhall Motors. They also had a daughter Helen Crosbie. Kidner had met his wife through Jamesina's eldest sister whose husband was John Andrew Maitland. He had made his fortune in the Far East and was head of the Freemason's Lodge (the Northern Lodge of China) to which William belonged.

Sometime before 1881 Kidner returned to England, for in that year was living at 13 Randolph Road in Maida Vale, London. He may have based himself temporarily in Elgin where he designed two large American-influenced houses. Whether Kidner had visited the USA himself, or had drawn upon Cory's knowledge of American architecture is not clear. The commission for Lesmurdie came through Jamesina's other sister as she had married an Elgin JP, Charles James Johnston. It was for them that William Kidner designed Lesmurdie.

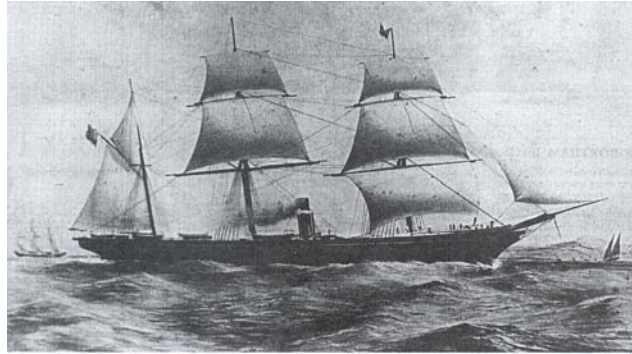
In 1884 or 1885 Kidner gave up his Elgin practice and emigrated a second time to design buildings for the British North Borneo Company. Kidner was back in London by 1892 and on 19th November 1894 he read a paper entitled 'Notes upon the architecture of China' written by Frederick M Gratton of Shanghai at the RIBA.

William Kidner died on 31 March 1900 and is buried at Hampstead Cemetery.

The letters transcribed here were sold at auction at a Sotheby's sale of Postage Stamps of the Far East held at Hong Kong on 4th May 1995.

Front cover: Holy Trinity in about 1870, from the Mellerick Album held at the Chinese Museum, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia.

<http://www.chia.chinesemuseum.com.au/objects/D001631.htm>



SS Ceylon

Steam Ship *Ceylon*

Friday 12 February 1864

My Dear Sister¹,

This I shall post at Malta.

You may perhaps receive it the same time as the one I posted at Gibraltar. I think I told you in that letter that we expected to reach there (Gibraltar) at 9.00 o'clock p.m.-Monday- it was 12 p.m.- and the night being rather rough we beat about the bay all night & went in at 7 o'clock next morning. We left again at 10 o'clock, so that we only got about 2 hours on shore. Plenty of time to see everything in the town, but not the fortifications which I understand are the strongest in the world. It is a very pretty place to look at from the sea but you find the town very dirty and the inhabitants seem to be of every country in the world. We got lots of nice vegetables & salads here & for the last two or three days have had plenty of green peas on the table. These too we got wonderfully cheap. I bought a Spanish box of as good cigars as I ever smoked for 4/-, which in England would have cost 35/- or 40/-. I was quite surprised to see on the neutral ground between Gibraltar & the Spanish ground a hunting party in full chase - the huntsmen dressed in scarlet just as you would see them in England - I suppose they were officers of the garrison.

So about 10 o'clock we started again, went round the rock (which looked more beautiful when gradually presenting to our view its different sides) & entered the Mediterranean.

We steamed along well & in sight of the African coast until yesterday when the wind began to blow hard & the rain to pour down in torrents & so it continued all day. This morning the rain has ceased but the wind still blows as much as it did yesterday. We were obliged to amuse ourselves as well as we could by playing chess & cards & walking; & towards the evening the saloon became so warm that somebody proposed to have the skylight opened & so it was. Presently a good heavy sea came over & down the opened skylight & nearly drowned two gentlemen who were sitting under. This made a little stir & much amused us. We had a good laugh last night. I was about to take a drop of warm brandy and water & having poured the spirit into the tumbler requested the steward to pour the hot water on the sugar which I was holding up in the spoon. He did so & immediately the glass cracked. Oh sir! Said he, that is caused by your having two lumps of sugar, you should have taken only one — of course all the company laughed who heard him. I remarked that I was unable to understand his reasoning & begged that he would explain himself. I should be very glad to inform you, he replied, but really I have no time for scientific discussion at present. (laughter). If you will read a book on the subject matter by a relative of mine you will know all about it. (Great laughter). So you

¹ William's sister is Ann, aged about 21, and a year or so younger than William. His family was made up of elder brother John, aged 26 in 1864 and responsible, with his mother, for Bickley farm since his father had died nine years earlier; James, aged 20; Mary, aged 17; and Samuel, aged 16. See family tree on page 23.

belong to a scientific family I suppose, said I. He replied that he flattered himself he had that honour, but still he did not take for himself or any of his relatives the credit of discovering the point under discussion as that was due to Sir Isaac Newton. I dare say you think it very foolish to hold any argument with a saloon waiter & more so to write & tell you about it, but you have no idea how easily we are amused with anything of the sort & how difficult it would be for me to make this a letter of decent length (considered that it comes from foreign parts) without filling it with such trash as the foregoing.

We are now close to the island of Pantallaria (I don't know if I spell it rightly) or rather were before I began to write. A pretty place, mountainous & dotted all over with white houses. It was a penal settlement when held by King [Bomba] but I don't know if Victor Emanuel makes the same use of it. I think not. It is 140 miles from Malta which place we shall reach about midnight & leave tomorrow evening. This will give us a good time to see the place well & I hear that there is a good deal worth seeing.

Now I have managed to fill the sheet I consider my duty well done.

Remember me kindly to all my friends, and with much love to all at home, believe me to be your affectionate brother.

William

Steam Ship *Nemisis*

12 am Thursday 25 Feby 1864

My Dear Sister,

According to promises, I shall give you a short account of my journey through Egypt.

We arrived at Alexandria at 4pm on Wednesday the 17 inst. 3 or 4 hours sooner than we expected. It is the most wretched, Godforsaken hole I have ever seen. The streets are most inconveniently narrow and covered all over with filthy mud and slush, some places knee deep & nowhere less than 6 inches. This I assure you is no exaggeration. The omnibus in which I had the pleasure of being conveyed to the station broke down in the principal thoroughfare in consequence of one of the fore wheels having sunk so far into the mud that the mules were unable to pull us out. We sat impatiently in the vehicle for half an hour expecting every minute to be capsized. At last we got out through the side windows & jumped from the wheels onto the raised footway. We finished the journey to the railway on donkeys, the commonest & best way of getting about. The donkeys are larger & much better than in England. A boy runs on in front leading the donkey & shouting at the top of his voice in broken English "Make way for the great Captain, make way for the great General". We had lunch here & I shall never forget the meal or any I have eaten in Egypt. Nothing fit to eat & the charges most unreasonable. We saw Pompey's pillar, Cleopatra's needle, the Pacha's gardens & other curios of Alexandria. The country between this place & Cairo is very fertile but flat & uninteresting. A few villages composed of the most wretched looking mud hovels, a mosque & a clump of palm trees occasionally break the dull uniformity & monotony of the prospect, which is now & then enlivened by a glimpse of a few sailing boats passing up and down the Nile, and hordes of buffaloes & camels wandering along the banks. The cotton fields are very extensive. (This ink is very thick). At Kaffre Zayat², about halfway to Cairo, we partook of a dinner at the expense of the Viceroy³.

² Kafr El-Zayat lies on the south bank of the Rosetta branch of the Nile. Passengers from Alexandria to Cairo had to disembark and have lunch while the train cars were transported across the Nile in boats.

³ Khedive Ismail (1863-79)

This repast was composed of a few very small & very tough fowls & any number of unsavoury dishes the names of which I cannot tell you. We did not impose much upon His Highness' liberality.

At Cairo we found the accommodation little better than at Alexandria although we quartered at the first hotel. The town is certainly much better. The large promenade in the centre of the town is planted with orange, lemon & pomegranate trees in avenues & reminds one of St James' Park. It is peculiarly interesting to watch the motley groups passing and repassing in the streets on account of the variety of costumes & grades of society they exhibit. The rich are very picturesquely clad but the poor wretched clothed. The women cover their faces with a thick veil leaving two small holes for the eyes. Wherever you go you are bothered to death by guides or "dragomen"⁴ as they are called, & Arab boys who run about after you crying, "backshish", which means money. We did the usual amount of donkey riding here, saw the pyramids, & etc.

The journey across the desert to Suez is as miserable as you can imagine, one vast sandy plain in every direction only relieved every now and again by an Arab encampment & a string of camels. We stopped in the desert for refreshment, such as it was. A sour biscuit for which they had the conscience to charge 6d & a bottle of bad beer 2/6.

At Suez I saw even less to admire than at Alexandria. In the square stood a large pond of filthy stagnant muck. The grub here was perhaps a little better than that at the other places, but this bad enough. I can assure you I felt thankful when I found myself on board this steamer, away from their flies and lice & sitting before some good wholesome food. We got a fine view of Mount Sinai on leaving Suez harbour. We have had delightful weather for the last 5 or 6 days, warm of course but not so hot as it is generally in the Red Sea. The Thermometer reads 86° F today in the shade. We have a double awning spread over the quarter deck & large swinging fans in the saloon, worked by lascars⁵, so that with these appliances, iced drinkables & light clothing we do not find the heat very oppressive. We had an amateur theatrical performance last night. We passed the island of Perim⁶ this morning at 9 o'clock. This is the place Mr. Gidley chaffed me about. I shall post this letter at Aden where we expect to arrive at 5 or 6 o'clock this evening. I hear there is little to be seen there.

Remember me very kindly to Mr & Miss Castle & family & Miss Bluett & family & any other family of my acquaintance. With much love to all at home, I remain my dear Sister, your affectionate Brother,

William

In 1866 William's younger brother, James, set out to join him. James had trained as an articled clerk to Henry Perry, a builder and surveyor, in Crewkerne⁷, Somerset. There is a view that James also qualified as an architect, but I can find no evidence to support this.

⁴ Dragoman: Interpreter or guide. The term was first used of diplomatic officials at the Turkish court, who were appointed by the Turkish government, which disliked using the language of any non-Muslim nation; these officials had considerable importance. Arabic *targuman* 'interpreter'.

⁵ lascar: an Indian sailor

⁶ Perim lies at the entrance to the Red Sea from the Gulf of Aden.

⁷ 1861 census

SHANGHAI,

July 3rd 1866

My Dear Sister,

We arrived at Hong Kong on the morning of the 21st June. I left in the steam ship *Aden* for Shanghai on the following day dropped anchor off Shanghai at 10am on the morning of the 26th June. William came off to the ship to meet me he was looking very well indeed.

Altogether I enjoyed my voyage from England very much indeed, we had no rough weather as I was led to expect, the China sea was as smooth as a fish pond.

Hong Kong is a very pretty place, situated on the slopes of a hill, the houses run down to the water edge - we slept there one night, found the hotel accommodation very good, especially for the East.

Shanghai is a very nice place, very much nicer than I expected to find. It is very much like a European town, it consists of an English, a French, an American & a Chinese settlement. The Chinese settlement is very dirty but not as bad as I had imagined. The Chinese themselves are a very barbarous looking set especially the lower classes.

William is very comfortable now, has a good house & everything very nice - the servants here seem to be the greatest nuisance; one of William's has this morning bolted with his cash box but I do not think that he had much in it. Two or three days ago he caught one of his coolies carrying off 5 bottles of wine. I shall not be bothered with many of them, I keep one boy a sort of valet. He looks after my clothes, waits on me at table etc. I am now looking out for a good pony⁸, which I cannot well do without here, as there is no other means of taking exercise here but riding.

You should have received 5 letters from me since I left England. I have posted from Gibraltar, Malta, Galle⁹, Singapore & Hong Kong.

William unites with me in love to all & believe me to remain, my dear Sister,

Your truly affectionate Brother,

James

p.s. William does not intend writing this mail, he sends Mother his best thanks for the articles she sent him. All our gloves were spoilt with mildew & damp. J.K.

⁸ These came from Mongolian horse dealers, shaggy furry little creatures looking as much like large dogs or bears as horses'. In March they were clipped, revealing their shapely legs, powerful bodies with strong backs and short necks. 'The first month with one's China pony was one long tussle, marked by many bruises and some bites and since they invariably locked the bit behind their teeth, controlling their speed was far from easy'. They were untrustworthy. There were larger ponies available at a price, ie. from Turkestan. Most people had China ponies, but of which type James had is anyone's guess.

⁹ Galle is on the southern coast of Ceylon (Sri Lanka).

North China Herald and Market Report

July 28 1866

Shanghai Racquet Club

A meeting of members in the Racquet Club was held on Thursday afternoon, Mr Fisher in the chair, at which were present, Messrs Kidner, Thin, Hislop, Dent, Tate, Turnbull, Gundy, Hardy, Cann, Bell and Merry.

....and Mr FISHER proposed

That the courts be 70 feet long by 35 feet wide.

This resolution however finding no seconder, fell to the ground, and it was proposed by Mr TURNBULL, seconded by Mr BELL, and carried with one dissentient

That the Courts be 65 feet long by 33 feet 6 inches wide.

Mr TATE proposed and Mr BELL seconded, the adoption of the following rules,

That it consist of fifty playing and an unlimited number of honorary members

That all those gentlemen who have signed the share list and paid their first call, do now constitute themselves into a club, to be called the Shanghai Racquet Club.

This having been carried, Mr MERRY proposed, and Mr TATE seconded,

That Mr C. LUCAS, Mr COUTTS, and Dr PARKER constitute the Bar committee.

.....

That Mr KIDNER be empowered to draw detailed plans, and make estimates for the cost of construction of the proposed new Courts, the same to be laid before the general Committee. This resolution was carried.

July 28 1866

Meeting of Volunteers

At a meeting of the Volunteer Corps held Monday afternoon [it was proposed that the best weapon available should be procured. An amendment for the adoption of the Long Enfield was followed by a further amendment proposing the Short Enfield].

...Mr Kidner then proposed as a fourth amendment, and Mr Pearson seconded

That there be no alteration in the weapon used by the corps but that at future rifle meetings with the exception of the next, any Enfield rifle of bona fide government pattern be admitted.

Mr Kidner's amendment being carried...

Shanghai

24/10/66

My Dear Sister,

We are both well and happy but just at present have very little pidgin¹⁰ coming in – we have lots of jobs in hand which have been going on for some time but no new jobs – the merchants and the Community generally are just now very short of cash - but I am in hope times will soon mend with us.

William has sent Mother 6 small chests of tea per steam ship "Ajax" which left here yesterday, she may expect to receive it in about 3 or 4 months from the date of this letter.

William, myself and a friend have just invested in a house boat for going up the country shooting in -- it is fitted up with beds and every convenience for living. William starts on Friday for a ten days excursion in it, if the weather is fine he will have a very jolly time of it. I have been up twice for a day at a time, we get good sport pheasant shooting. We take it in turns, on goes up one week and the other the next. We cannot both get away at the same time. We generally start away from here in the evening of say today & by the morning when we awake we find ourselves about 30 or 40 miles up in the country. We shoot all day & in the evening turn towards home and by the next morning about 6 or 7am reach Shanghai. The Shanghai Sales commence on the 31st inst. & last for three days.

The rifle shooting for prizes takes place on the 11th 12th & 13th inst. I hope to win something. I find I cannot shoot nearly so well as I could at home the climate effects one so, the intense heat sickens one & shakes the nerves.

The Shanghai Boat races come off tomorrow and next day. I do not take much interest in this enclosed I send you a scrap cut out of our local paper, supposed to be written by a Chinaman respecting the crews of the American and English boats written in "Pidgin English". I will give you a translation of some of the words—(savey - understand) (rantchu - rants) (Thoub - Club) (yulo - row) (chow-chow- eat)

Please tell mother I have sent to "Ben" for 6000 rounds of bullets & wads for myself and William for our small bores, in addition to the last lot, and have directed it to be sent [overland] ask her please to pay for it, I will direct Ben to send her the bill it will amount to about three or four pounds.

We have not now heard from home for two mails. Think you might manage to find time to write every mail. If you do not write you cannot expect to hear from us,- and you may rest assured that you will not for the future.

William unites with me in love to all and believe me to remain,

Your truly affect' Brother.

James

¹⁰ pidgin – a corruption of the word 'business'

Shanghai

24/11/66

My Dear Sister,

By this mail I send John three papers, they contain an account of our rifle meeting - by which you will see that William has now two prizes and myself one. Mine is worth \$175 or about £40.0.0. For my prize I have sent to Harvey's of Exeter for one of his loading guns it will cost altogether about £60.00 the value of my prize and the amt. I realize for my gun which I now have will about cover it. If you would like to see it before it is sent out you must go to Harvey's soon after the receipt of this letter, as he will get my order the same time as you get this letter & I have told him to send it off to me, Chop, Chop - (quickly). The prizes are to be given away on Tuesday next. In the evening there is to be a dinner at the Club given by the prize winners to the unsuccessful competitors and officers of the Corps.

I was very unfortunate at the meeting. During our practice before the meeting I was marking much better shooting than anyone else, but caught a bad cold and was in bed for three days before the shooting & more than that I had two whitlows¹¹ rising one on each of my fore fingers, which was very much against good shooting. I daresay John will laugh at the [Quirk].[] made for the prizes, but I can assure him he would not do better if he were out here. After passing a summer out here your hand is not so steady as it is at home, our rifles are smooth bores or nearly so, and the sun and glaring light which we get here is very unfavourable to good shooting. Sometimes at about 400 or 500 yards the sun is so bad that you can scarcely see the target.

We are now talking about getting Snider's breech loaders from England in place of the gas-pipes¹² which we have at present.

I hope you have sent off the furniture as our new house is now quite finished, we talk of going into it in about a week.

You must not expect letters from us often, as you do not write to us. Before last mail, we had not read a line from any of you for two months. I think it is a little too bad. How have you enjoyed your visit at Walton - Remember me to the Bishops when you write to them.

William unites with me in love to all and believe me ever to remain,

Your truly affect' Brother,

James

¹¹ A whitlow is an inflammation near the fingernail

¹² Previous British Army Rifle was probably the 1853 pattern Enfield Rifle (referred to in the letter as a gas-pipe), a muzzle loader, percussion cap (struck by a hammer action). A paper cartridge was loaded first, then a bullet would be rammed down the barrel. The introduction of the breech loader was a great step forward. Snider's British patent was 1865. They were probably in limited production prior to this. They could fire 6 to 8 rounds a minute, which was fast for its time. Had an effective range of 500 yards. The bullets were soft nosed, unintentionally the fore runner to the dum dum, because of this its piercing ability of wood, steel etc. was limited, but wounds would be severe.

The North China Herald and Market Report

24 November 1866

Volunteer Meeting

A meeting of Volunteers was held yesterday afternoon to consider the propriety of adopting, a new weapon for the corps. After a few remarks by the chairman, Sir E. Hornby, Mr CANN proposed and Mr MERRY seconded—

That the Snider converted Enfield breach-loading rifle, carrying the Boxer regulation army ammunition, be obtained; and that the order for one hundred of above arm be sent to Messrs Maclean & Breuell for execution.

This was carried after some discussion by 11 to 9.

Mr MERRY then proposed—

That to meet the expenses hereby incurred each Member shall advance the sum of Tls 10, and if the necessary amount be obtained, the order shall be given and the balance paid out of the funds of the corps, on receipt of the arms.

He thought the proposition was very fair as, if ordinary care were taken of a rifle, the owner would be tolerably certain to receive back his Tls¹ 10 when he left the corps. Some security that the weapon would be taken care of was wanted, as at present many members very much neglected those entrusted to them, there being no fine. The re-armament was not a question which affected the shooting men as had been suggested. It was an object that all should be armed with a useful weapon, and that in use with the English army was for many reasons the most convenient.

Mr J. Kidner having seconded this resolution, Mr TODD proposed and Mr KELLY seconded an amendment [that more time was needed and more people should be consulted].....

Mr Merry and Mr Kidner referred to the difficulty which had been found in inducing Volunteers to express an opinion, on previous occasions, as proving the uselessness of this course....



Left, James Kidner in the uniform of the Shanghai Volunteer Corps

15 December 1866

PAPER-HUNTING

Among the various proofs of madness which Chinese have daily opportunity of noting against the Anglo-Saxon race, few must appear to them more conclusive than Paper-hunting. Pheasant and snipe shooting at a great expenditure of time and labour, when both these birds might be bought in the market, is rank folly; throwing a ball at a man in order that he may knock it away, to give a third the pleasure of running after it, is an instance of strange eccentricity; rushing about a confined court in frantic endeavour to drive a small ball against a wall, is inconceivable folly—though this has a remote resemblance to the native game of shuttlecock. But for two men to gallop frantically over field and creek, at imminent risk to life and limb, with a dead certainty of innumerable spills, and a grave probability of manifold duckings,—for the mere purpose of scattering bits of paper, which others take a delight in following up under similar difficulties, is rank madness. Moving out of the house at all when it is at the option of the mover to sit down and smoke, is silly enough. But if the “uncontrollable fierceness” of the barbarian nature impels us to move about, we might surely find sufficient excitement in galloping along a level road where means of crossing creeks had been provided, instead of selecting the roughest possible country and urging our ponies to jump over creeks, at the risk of laming them and hurting ourselves. What possible pleasure, for example, can the rider of the horse which came to so condign grief at the Stone Bridge on Tuesday have derived from his exploit; or what peculiar gratification is there in standing on one’s head in a ditch, in uncertainty whether the next man may come on the top of you? Then, too, as if the very risk of falling into a ditch were not sufficient, men voluntarily swim the Soochow creek; and if an eccentric pony elects to extend his experience of notation beyond the effort necessary to reach the opposite bank, his master swims about after him. Verily, the barbarian mind is fearfully and wonderfully constituted.

Possibly it would puzzle an Anglo-Saxon himself to describe the exact gratification he derives from paper-hunting; though fully aware how intense the enjoyment is. No particular sense—either sight, smell or touch—is gratified by touching the red cowl of the winning “Fox”; nor is there any especial delight in standing on one’s head in a ditch. Yet the man who has achieved these two feats, goes home with a wonderful feeling of satisfaction. The fact is that Anglo-Saxons only can appreciate Anglo-Saxon enjoyments. There is no accounting for taste...

The highest flight of a Chinaman’s ambition is a repute for knowledge of the classics, and for ability to compose flowing sentences out of the most crab-bed characters. The idea of the same man studying for a degree of Siu tzi in the morning, and going Paper-hunting in the afternoon, is utterly beyond his comprehension; and because it is so, China is the stagnant country it remains. The mind reacts upon the body and the body on the mind. If one is allowed to become torpid, the other is tolerably sure to follow its example. It certainly cannot be charged against Anglo-Saxons as a race, that they often give either the opportunity. With a fair share of thew and sinew, they combine a strong inclination to use them. A fund of energy appears implanted in them, which finds vent in cricket, hunting, rackets and various other violent exercises, which, in their turn, impart a righter and more active tone to the mind. No one of the prevalent amusements in Shanghai satisfies their craving for excitement more pleasantly than paper hunting, and the man who first adapted his old schoolboy practice to China-pony riding, deserved well of his co-residents.

The North-China Herald February 9th 1867

CHURCH MEETING

Shanghai, 9th January 1867

THE TRUSTEES OF TRINITY CHURCH

Dear Sirs—In anticipation of the Meeting of Pew Renters to be held on the 29th Inst. I have the pleasure to hand you the following report on the progress of works connected with the building of the New Church.

After the approval of our plans by the meeting held on the 10th January, 1866, every effort was made to proceed with the works without delay, but a serious difficulty was found in obtaining bricks of the quality required, on account of the suspension of work by the Shanghai Brick Company by whom we had expected to be supplied. In order to overcome this obstacle for a time, it was determined to enter into a separate contract with Messrs. Farnham & Co. to pile the ground, which contract was signed on the 18th January, and the works were actually commenced on the following day.

We found the ground unusually hard for Shanghai, so much so, that a large gang of coolies working in the ordinary manner could only drive two or three piles a day. Their mode of working was therefore dispensed with and machines employed instead. In some parts we came across the foundations of the old Church and it is satisfactory to know that the piles, which are of the same kind as those used for our new building, were in an excellent state of preservation.

The foundation for the proposed tower and spire has been made at the N.E. corner of the building instead of the S.E., as originally intended, in consequence of the ground at the S.E. corner being a little softer than that at the N.E., and therefore not so well adapted to bear the increased weight.

During the time the piling was going on some enterprising gentlemen undertook to work the plant and clay pits of the defunct Brick Company and to supply us with bricks for our Church. On the strength of this a contract was made with Messrs. Farnham & Co., on the 21st of March for the completion of the edifice, in accordance with the design approved by the promoters within eighteen months from that date. The whole of the piling was completed by the 22nd of May, over 6,000 piles having been driven, and on the 24th the chief corner stone was laid with a masonic ceremony by the Deputy Provincial Grand Master of English Freemasonry for China, in the presence of H.B.M.'s Consul, the trustees of the Church and most of the European residents in the settlement.

A thick course of granite was soon laid over the heads of the piles, which gave us a thoroughly good foundation to work upon and nothing but bricks were wanting to allow the building to rise rapidly, but unfortunately the new Company supplied us so slowly that the bricklayers were compelled to stop work, and the five foot basement was not completed until the end of September.

This new Brick Company, finding this speculation anything but a paying one, ceased to work after supplying us with about 200,000 bricks, and the difficulty we met with at first again presented itself. Samples of red bricks were got from Soochow and from Japan, but neither would answer our purpose. Eventually an arrangement was effected with Chum-shun-li to manufacture at the Company's factory 6,000,000—the number we estimated would be required to complete the building. He set to work in earnest and has now satisfactorily executed his contract so that no further hindrance can occur to the works as

far as the supply of bricks is concerned. The delay that has taken place is not altogether to be regretted inasmuch as it has allowed the lower portions of the building to become thoroughly consolidated before receiving the weight of the superstructure.

The progress made with the stonework has been much more satisfactory, considering that the labor involved in working intricate mouldings in hard granite is immense and, moreover, that we have not been able to get anything like a good supply of such skilled workmen as are necessary.

The stone to be used in the upper portions of the building will be that obtained from Ningpo which is much more easily worked than granite, so that we now get on a little faster. The Plinth which is far the heaviest part of the Stonework is quite finished and the brickwork raised in some parts six or seven feet above it.

The shafts and mouldings for the superstructure are also in a forward state.

The timber which was all specially ordered for the building, has arrived and the construction of the roofs will be commenced forthwith.

By a letter received by the last mail I learnt that the orders for glass, Tile-pavements, Ironwork &c. sent to England in August, have been put into execution. I have also received particulars from Messrs. Haden & Sons of Trowbridge as to the warming apparatus, and by the next mail I am promised some account of the pulpit and other costly fittings, concerning which you required some information before sending definite instructions to my agent.

In conclusion I must express my approval of the excellent manner in which Messrs. Farnham & Co. are carrying out the works. Taking into consideration the difficulties we have had to surmount at the commencement of our operations, the subscribers will be prepared to learn that the building cannot be finished by the exact date specified in the contract. It will be ready however for consecration by Christmas of the present year.

I have the honor to be,
Dear Sir,
Your obedient servant,
W. KIDNER

To

Wm. G. Cuthbertson, Esq.
Hy. Dickenson, Esq.

Shanghai

8 March 1867

My Dear Sister,

I forward for mother the duplicate of a 10£ bill which I sent her by the last mail to pay a small account for goods I have ordered of Smith [Elon] & Co. of Cornhill.

We had not the pleasure of receiving anything from you by the last mail.

Since I last wrote we have eaten the plum pudding you sent us & very good it turned out. My friends seriously talked of getting up a sort of round robin expressing their approval of your work, for me to send you by this mail but up to this moment I have not received it. Two or three gentlemen desired me to send their portraits at the same time.

The filberts, too, are excellent as also the cheese. I trust you will continue your present this year and for as many others as I remain in China.

People say things are looking up a little this year but we find business pretty much the same. I fancy no new buildings will be commenced for many months in consequence of lack of funds. The losses on tea & silk have been enormous and shirtings¹³ & other imports have also lost considerably.

You seem to have had unusually hard weather at home this winter. We have had three falls of snow here at one time the ground was covered a foot deep.

Remember me kindly to all my friends you see & give love to Mother & the young ones¹⁴ at Bickley¹⁵, your affectionate Brother,

Wm Kidner

¹³ Shirtings were rolls of cotton suitable for making up into shirts and such-like.

¹⁴ The 'young ones' were Mary Lyng Kidner and Sam Kidner, aged 20 and 19 respectively

¹⁵ William's mother, Ann, and his siblings lived at Bickley Farm, near Milverton, Somerset. His father, also named William, had died in 1855

Shanghai

May 23rd 1867

My Dear Brother,

Enclosed are some samples of Chinese Corn for you to try some experiments with. Packet No 1 contains the produce of one ear (126 corns) of rye or wheat, I do not which. I thought when I saw it growing (before it was ripe) that it was barley, but was mistaken. When it ripens the husk opens and the corns are exposed in the state of those I sent you. It grows in six rows up the stalk instead of in two as our barley. Packet No 2 contains China barley it is the produce of one ear (85 corns), it grows all round the stalk something like wheat.

Packages 3 & 4 contain light and dark red barleys each the produce of one ear 83 & 81 corns respectively I fancy these are bastard sorts as I have never seen crop of them only a few plants here and there amongst the white.

I think it will be worth while to plant these samples next year and see if they come to anything, the Chinese grow immense crops of either sort. They sow in October and November and are now in the midst of harvest but of course the times of year are no criterion for you to go by as you have a very different climate to what we have here, of course the ears I send you are above the average yield, as I take good care to select large ones as samples.

We have very nearly finished our new racquet courts, they will be the finest in the world. That is saying a great deal. I am going in for lots of exercise. I get up at 5am every morning and play at racquets for two hours, and take 1¹/₂ hours gymnastic exercise every evening. I think I might not suffer from liver or biliousness after that. I have turned my pony out to grass to give him a little rest.

Our spring Rifle meeting took place on the 1st & 2nd inst. William won 3 prizes and I none. I do not know what is the matter with me I get so nervous when I am shooting for anything that I can scarcely hold my rifle. Whereas in practice I shoot on an average much better than anyone else here. Wm. shoots about 25 per cent better for prizes than he does at any other time.

I am the second marksman in the Corps, William the 4th. You will see an account of the Rifle meeting and the Race meeting in the papers which I send you.

I hope farming at home is paying better than Architecture out here, if it is not I am sure you will soon be back whitewashing. We have not commissioned a single new building for at least 10 months. The merchants have no money so cannot spend it. The new Tea & Silk season is just commenced I hope there will be lots of money made! If there is not I am sure I do not know what will become of the place, everyone will be bankrupt I suppose, it is very nearly as bad as that now.

We have a rifle match pending with the Hong Kong Rifle Club. I do not know when it will come off. I suppose not till the Autumn as it is now too hot.

Please remember me to any of my friends when you see them. Wm. unites with me in love to all and believe me to remain,

Your truly affect' Brother,

James

The North China Herald and Market Report - Nov. 4th 1867

Mr KIDNER, the architect, read his report on the progress of the work.

THE TRUSTEES OF TRINITY CHURCH

SHANGHAI

DEAR SIRS — I beg to hand you the following report on the works connected with the erection of the new Church at this place.

Since the date of my last report, 9th January 1867, the walls have been carried up about 15 feet all round the building, the granite shafts to the nave and aisle arcades, the porch, chapels and apse have been fixed, and in most cases the capitals set upon them ready to receive the brick arches. The roof timbers have been worked and framed together at Messrs Farnham and Co.'s yard, where they are now stored under cover.

The tile pavements, iron screens, gas fittings, eaves guttering, drain pipes, Glass and other fittings, which I informed you in my last report had been ordered from England, have arrived, and the warming apparatus, ordered later, has been shipped in the *Durham*.

The bricks manufactured for the building have been deposited in the Church compound.

Stained glass has been ordered of Messrs. Clayton and Bell for the windows on the clerestory stage in the west end and the rose window in the gable over, as a memorial to the late Mr L.G. Dunlop. All the lights will be filled with appropriate scriptural subjects from suggestions by the Revd. C.H. Butcher. The entire cost of the work has been met by the Freemasons in Shanghai.

During the ten months which have elapsed since I last reported progress, I am sorry to say much less has been done towards the completion of the building than I then led you to expect. The principal cause of the delay has been the inability on the part of the contractors to obtain a good and regular supply of skilled stonemasons. At the commencement of the year they all struck work for higher wages, and it was a long time before the contractors could arrange for proceeding with the work and then only at a considerable pecuniary loss to themselves. At other times large numbers left us through some petty misunderstanding with their foremen or squabbles among themselves. Then again the discharge of a few bad workmen would sometimes cause us the loss of a whole gang, and in consequence of a custom which prevails among them, that every man must begin and finish the particular piece of work on which he is engaged, we were frequently compelled to send away men who were very useful for roughing out the stones and bringing the mouldings into something like proper shape, but unable to finish them as nicely as we desired. About June last, you are aware, the funds at your disposal were exhausted and from that time the works were carried on with less spirit and activity than formerly, until the beginning of September when they were altogether suspended.

The walls have been covered up with straw to protect them in some measure from the effects of rain, but if the work is not resumed at once a more substantial covering must be substituted, or the heavy rains and frosts which we may expect during the winter months will cause considerable damage.

I have the honor to be, Dear Sirs,

Your obedient servant,

WM. KIDNER

Shanghai, 21th Oct., 1867

North China Herald and Market Report
Nov. 10 1867

SHANGHAI RIFLE CLUB

This newly formed Club held a Rifle Meeting on Monday, when there was a fair attendance at the Range, the shooting was pretty successful considering the unfavourable state of the weather. There was a bright sun shining the whole of the day, and also a variable wind puffing from the right, which however abated somewhat towards the evening.

The first competition was for the Match Rifle Prize at 700, 800 and 900 yards, 7 shots at each range. This was won by W. Kidner with a score of 51. At first it appeared likely that the old Enfield would be successful, but the longer ranges told in favour of the small-bores. The following are the principal scores:—

	700 yds	800 yds	900 yds	Total
Wm.Kidner, Kerr ¹⁶	16	19	16	51
J. Kidner, Kerr	8	17	12	37
W. Pearson, Enfield	18	10	5	33

SECOND DAY.

For the Military Rifle Prize, 7 shots each at 200, 400 and 600 yards, there were twelve entries.

William Kidner and James Kidner made the capital score of 55 points each, and W. Pearson 50. On shooting off the tie, William Kidner made 5 points against 2, and thus became the winner. The following are the principal scores:—

	200 yds	400 yds	600 yds	Total
Wm.Kidner.....	18	22	15	55
J. Kidner.....	21	18	16	55
W. Pearson.....	14	17	19	50
F. Evans.....	8	17	16	41
P. Maclean.....	15	21	4	40

There was no wind to affect the steadiness of the aim, but the sun shone so strongly in the eyes of the competitors, during the latter part of the afternoon, that it was almost impossible to see the target at all. In consequence of the firing taking up a longer time than was anticipated, it was determined to postpone the Handicap Sweepstakes until the next meeting

The North China Herald and Market Report

Nov. 16, 1867

Summary of News

A Rifle meeting was held in the early part of the week, when two prizes were shot for; both of which were won by the Captain of the Club—Mr Kidner. The relative strength of the marksmen is now so well known, that we think a system of handicapping might be introduced with advantage. Otherwise the shooting is a foregone conclusion, and competitors are disheartened from entering.

North China Herald and Market Report

Dec. 31, 1867

RIFLE MATCH — HONGKONG v. SHANGHAI

Hongkong has been victorious in the above match, beating us by 50 points. It will be seen from the subjoined analysis of scoring, that the shooting of their eight was singularly even. Their first and second scores each topped our first and second by two points. There is a difference of twenty, only, between the aggregate scores of the first six in each team; but the two lowest on the Shanghai side, introduced on account of the unfortunate absence of two of our best men, are 39 behind the two Hongkong lowest.

SHANGHAI	200 yds	400 yds	600 yds	Total.	Bulls.	Centres	Outers	Misses.
W. Kidner	29	32	33	94	8	18	4	—
W. Pearson	27	25	6	58	6	6	8	10
P. Maclean	27	27	23	77	6	11	10	3
F. Evans	19	31	9	59	4	5	14	7
L. Cameron	26	32	25	83	7	11	11	1
W. Harton	24	30	14	68	6	6	13	5
A. Coulter	22	7	6	35	2	5	6	17
R. Bishop	18	22	5	45	0	7	12	11
	192	206	121	519	39	69	78	54
HONGKONG								
Lieut. Turner, 73 rd Regt	30	32	23	85	9	11	8	2
Capt. Gibson, 73 rd Regt	28	25	19	72	5	10	11	4
A.W. Glunne	25	30	18	73	6	9	11	4
E.L. Woodin	29	27	10	66	2	14	8	6
H.T. Holmes	28	31	8	67	6	9	8	7
C. Bottomley	27	22	4	53	3	5	13	9
M. Moore	32	37	27	96	12	14	3	1
C. Wagner	24	25	17	66	4	12	7	7
	223	229	126	578	47	84	69	40

Shanghai

April 12th 1871

My Dear Sister,

The English mail came in last evening it brought a letter from you, glad to hear you are all well. We received a letter from Cameron the mail before last, he seems to have enjoyed himself very much during his stay with you, or any rate he says he did & that he was delighted with everything. I expect he will be out again very shortly, as the manager of the A.B.C. here was very sick indeed about a month ago with brain fever & I fancy Cameron was telegraphed for to take his place. I don't know for certain that he was¹⁷.

We are having very hot weather just now for the time of the year, the thermometer is now standing at 85° in the shade 20° higher than the same day last year. We have had a very dry season indeed, have had no rain to speak of for the last 7 months. It generally rains cats & dogs about this time of the year. I expect when it does come we shall get a surprise of it.

The spring snipe shooting has commenced but we cannot hope for any good sport until we have had a good quantity of rain, the ground at present is so dry that there is nothing for them to feed upon. I am going upcountry to look for them at the end of this week.

Our sales come off the end of this month they last 3 days during which time no business is done, the white community keep holiday.

My hyacinths are now in their prime those I planted in glasses have not thrived very well but the ones I planted in mulch are very fine & good. I won't attempt growing any more in water as they are a great deal of trouble & when they come out are not nearly as good as those grown in mulch. You should have received the lily roots I sent you long before this.

We move into our new house the first of next month I have been busy with the garden for the last fortnight it will look very nice in another month, there is a capital croquet lawn in front of the house with turf like velvet the only trouble is that there are only married ladies to play with, which is rather a draw back. As I am of the opinion that having a lot of nice young girls to join in the game is its great attraction.

Every one who goes home now seems to come out married in fact it seems to be the proper thing to do. We have now I see by the Hong list 150 ladies in Shanghai.

Our rifle shooting commences tomorrow; have sent a programme inside the Puck paper. I think you will be rather amused with Puck. Of course you will not understand many of the jokes not knowing the parties referred to. Puck is a paper as you will see just started by amateurs for their own amusement, not for gain.

Please congratulate Ann for me.

Remember me to my old friends when you see them.

William unites with me in love to all & believe me to remain,

Your affect Brother, *James*

¹⁷ By 1875 Ewen Cameron was manager of the Hongkong & Shanghai Banking Corporation. He was the great-great grandfather of David Cameron, Conservative Party leader. William designed the first offices of the HSBC.

Shanghai

Aug 24th 1872

My Dear Sister,

I received a letter from you yesterday. Glad to hear you are all well.

You must not expect to keep William in the country as I am sure he will soon get tired of the quiet & your ways of living won't suit him as they used to. You must expect some change after eight years' residence in the East. I received a short letter from William dated, Wimbledon, sorry to hear he has done no good in the shooting, he is considered to be the best shot in China, with the rifle. I don't know how it is that you have received no news papers lately as they have been sent regularly addressed to William at Bickley.

We are now pretty well through the summer. I have enjoyed better health this summer than any previous one. I had a croquet party here yesterday my lawn is a very good one. Croquet has been all the rage here this summer, it is a capital game for the hot season. Of course you can't play until the sun sets.

Our Volunteer Corps¹⁸ here is to be armed with Henri-Martini rifles, (we have Sniders at present). I have written to William about them as we want him to get them for us.

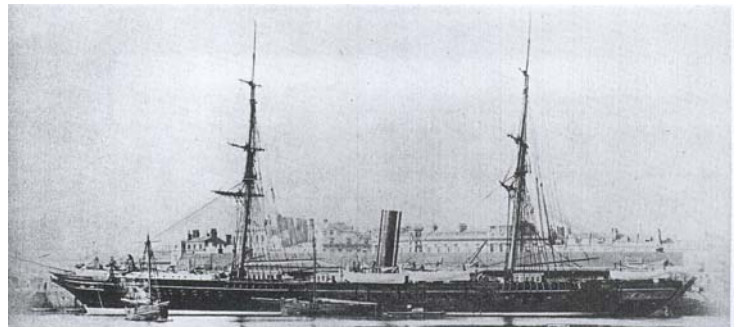
Please remember me to any of my old friends you may meet.

Please give my love to all & believe me ever to remain,

Your affectionate Brother,

James

This must have been one of the last letters home sent by James. He left Shanghai in the late autumn of 1872, and is believed to have been heading home to England. When he was at Galle in Ceylon for some reason he changed his mind, for he embarked on the P&O steamship *Baroda* (right) on 9th January 1873 and left for Sydney. The *Ceylon Observer and Fortnightly Summary of Intelligence* records his departure. The P&O SN Company log¹⁹ records that at 2.15am on 12th January 'Mr James Kidner, 1st Class Passenger departed this life' and that at noon Captain Walshe, 'Committed body to the deep'.



¹⁸ the "Martini-Henry" rifle. 0.45in (Martini = the breech and Henry = the barrel. The patent by Martini for the breech was registered in 1868). The Volunteer Corps must have received a very early issue of this weapon. The Corps was established in 1853 in the face of the Small Sword rebellion, and reorganised in 1860 when faced with another rebellion. It was virtually disbanded in 1862, leaving only the Rifle Club. However, the massacre of missionaries and the French consul in Tientsin in 1870 frightened the inhabitants of Shanghai into convening a special meeting of the municipal council which resolved, 'That the *Shanghai Volunteer Corps* shall consist of Artillery, Mounted Rangers and three companies of Infantry'.

¹⁹ P&O S.N.Co – Nautical Reports July 1872-June 1875. National Maritime Museum reference P&O/40/15, folio 22.



During William's visit to England in 1872 he arranged for the photographs, *above*, to be taken at Taunton. He took that of his mother Ann (and perhaps others) back to Shanghai where it was copied for an oil painting.

Shanghai

24 December 1873

My Dear Brother²⁰,

In great haste I write a line to inform you that I have at last sent off the portraits. I ought to have done so months ago. They will go forward by the next P&O mail steamer and will be delivered to you at Nynehead²¹.

You will have to give up the enclosed Bill of Lading to the party who delivers the case and to pay any railway charges. Freight to Southampton I have paid. Enclosed with the portraits are two Japanese gems for the girls and also Jim's watch which I thought mother may like to have.

I am just off up country for 10 days shooting; more to get away from the festivities here than anything else. Just now eating and drinking is absorbing all the attention of the community and I don't feel I can take the same liberties with my stomach which I could a few years ago – getting old you know.

Your affectionate Brother, *William*

²⁰ 'Brother' is his elder brother John (1838-1926).

²¹ Nynehead is Heywood Farm at Nynehead, 4 miles north of Wellington, Somerset.

SHANGHAI

19 September 1874.

My Dear Brother,

Don't think that I value your letters in the ratio of infrequency in which I return them, but it is in a measure extensively gratifying to hear direct from you seeing how seldom I do. You delight me with your cheerful prospects of farming affairs, which I trust will be fully realized. You are right; 'tis time we do things much quicker than our fathers did, and, maybe we do them better. I think so. But the battles of life are so hardly fought now, that men break down after a short campaign compared to the life-long easily-going exhaustions of old times which our ancestors looked upon as a mere pastime. The substitution of mechanical for manual labour has undoubtedly been a great help to farmers; to everybody in fact. A boon to the producers and consumers of every article of use and luxury. There is one thing especially, still to be done by farmers if they would prove themselves worthy of the age. To do as the great masters of commercial industry have been bound to do, but to do it with a better grace than they have done it. To recognize the abject condition of their dependants, voluntarily to improve their status, and help by one means and another to organize and instruct the working classes to take care of themselves. You will I have no doubt disagree with me, but I look upon the recently formed Union of Agricultural Labourers as a healthy symptom of assurance that the people are roused in earnest to insist upon rights which should long ago have been conceded to them. We, John, should be the last men, men whom fortune and some radical changes of the day have helped forward, to set up a conservative cry of class distinctions. A cry, sometimes I know, characterized by harsh exaction of what can be got from those considered inferior and by a cringing, servile obsequiousness to those whom society has placed a grade or two higher.

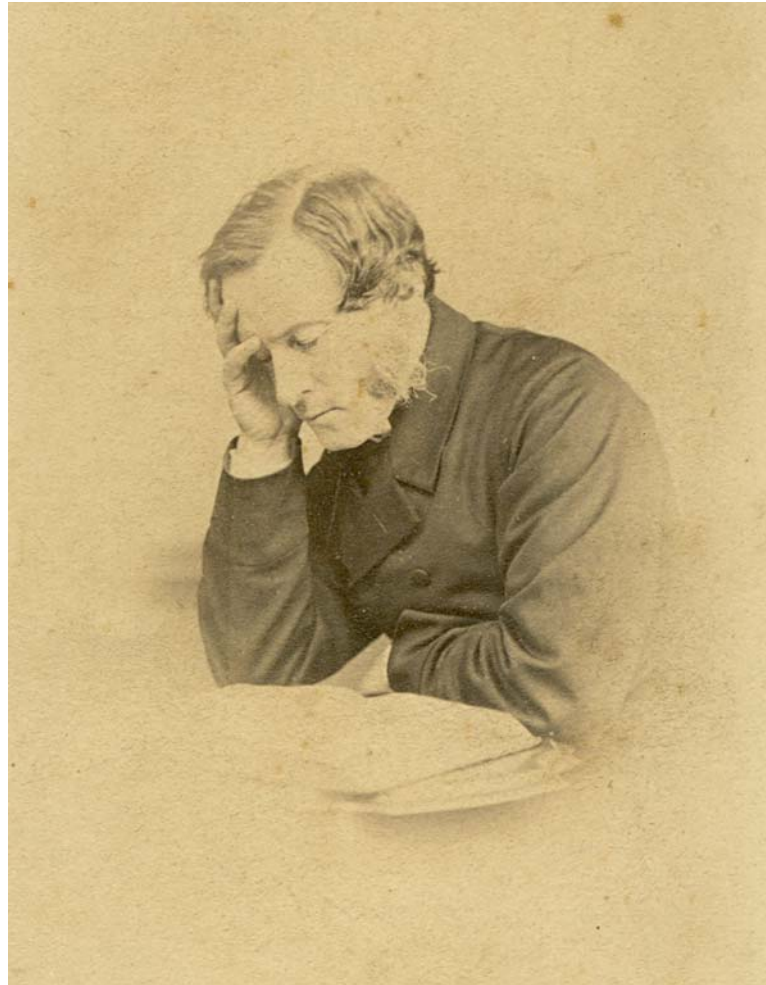
But I am beginning to moralize and to moralize in a strain you will probably not appreciate.

With much love I remain,

Your affectionate brother,

William

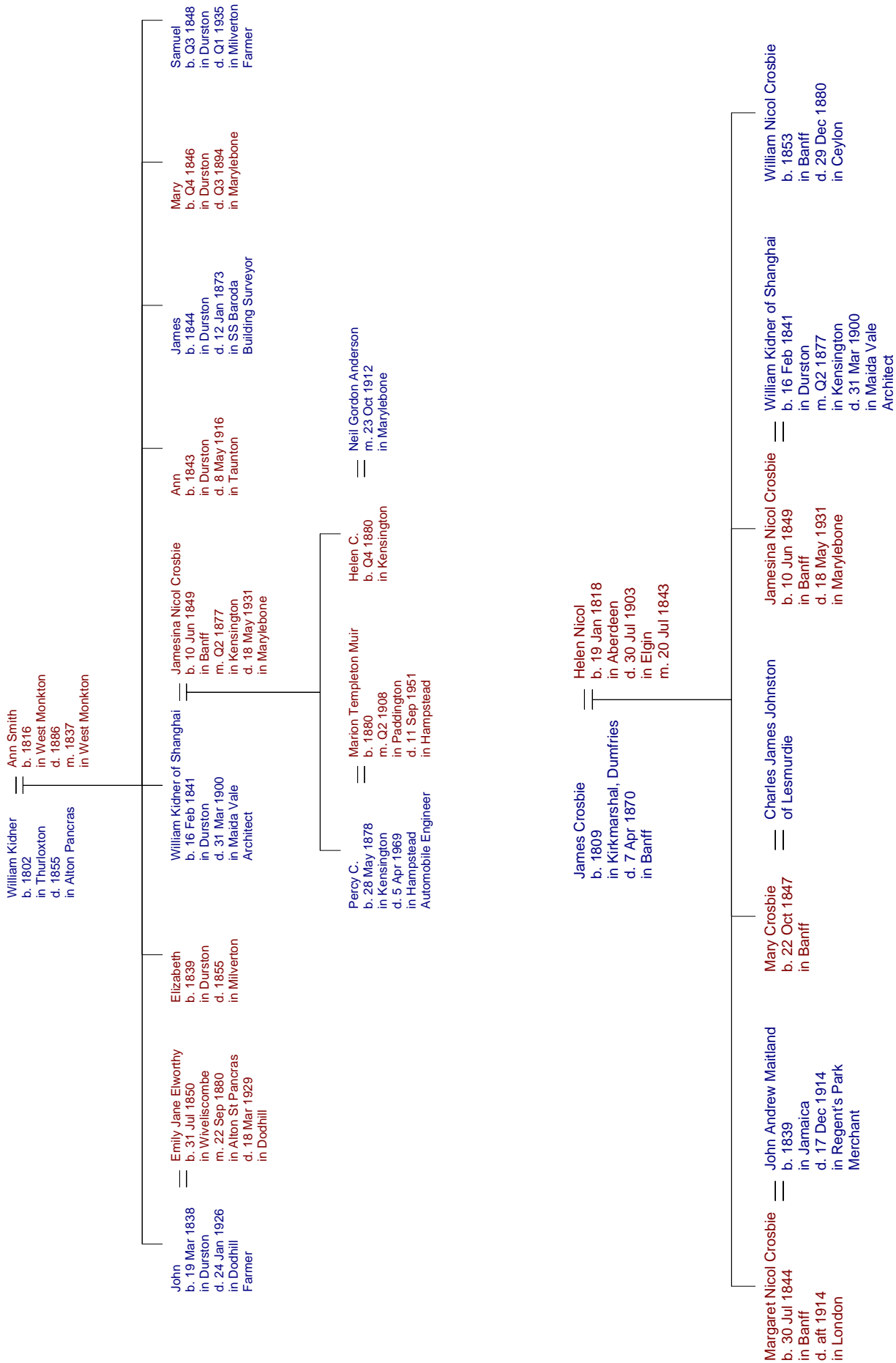
Holy Trinity Shanghai was erected to Cathedral status on Sunday 23rd May 1875.



William Kidner
1844-1900



William and Jamesina's gravestone at Hampstead Cemetery, Fortune Green Road, London NW6 (Row F8, Grave 112)



Appendix 1

TO ALL TO WHOM these presents shall come **JAMESINA NICOL KIDNER** at present residing at 13 Randolph Road Maida Vale in the County of Middlesex **JOHN ANDREW MAITLAND** at present residing at Triston Place in the County of Sussex formerly at Cravenhurst Eastbourne in the County of Sussex Esquire and **EGBERT IVESON** at present residing at 11 Hyde Park Square in the County of Middlesex Esquire SEND GREETING WHEREAS William Kidner late of 13 Randolph Road aforesaid Esquire was the registered owner of all that piece of land situate at Shanghai in China and known as Lot 917 in the Books of Registry at the British Consulate General at Shanghai aforesaid and held under Title Deed number 910 and containing by admeasurement 2 mow 7 fun 8 li and 9 hauo bounded on the North by Lot 578 on the south by Lot 577 on the East by the Lower Yuen Ming Yuen Road and on the West by the Upper Yuen Ming Yuen Road which said Lot is held in perpetuity from the Chinese authorities and is subject to the yearly rent of One thousand five hundred cash per mow and to the restrictions and conditions contained in the said Title Deed. And the two dwelling houses outbuildings godown and office buildings thereon Together with all buildings rights easements and appurtenances whatsoever to the said premises or any part thereof then or theretofore enjoyed or reputed as part or member thereof or appurtenant thereto AND WHEREAS by an indenture dated the fourth day of June One thousand eight hundred and seventy-seven and made between the said William Kidner of the first part the said Jamesina Nicol Kidner (then Jamesina Nicol Crosbie) of the second part and the said John Andrew Maitland and Egbert Iveson of the third part and duly registered at the British Consulate General in Shanghai

Postscript

Shanghai restores cathedral to Church

By Richard Spencer in Beijing

(Daily Telegraph, Filed: 14/06/2004)

Shanghai's former Anglican cathedral, spiritual home of Britain's colonial classes in the Far East for almost a century, has been handed back to the Church after years of communist neglect in response to a surge in support for Christianity in China.

The China Christian Council and leaders of China's officially sanctioned protestant Church were allowed to place wooden signs bearing their names on the front wall of the cathedral last week.

They intend to clear the debris of half a century of official occupation and, they say, re-install mahogany fittings to the interior to match Sir Gilbert Scott's original design. They even hope to rebuild the spire.

Situated in old Shanghai's international settlement, the Anglican church has a red brick and white stone frontage, which would not be out of place in an English suburb.

For 90 years it gave spiritual solace to Britons and others a long way from home as Shanghai grew into one of the world's largest port cities. For many, it was a prosperous but uneasy period, with the new wealth of Chinese trade being made in the midst of a collapsing empire and consequent civil war.

Much of the Shanghai world of colonial garden parties, gangsters, warlords and Chinese and White Russian prostitutes has been described in novels. The most famous, *Empire of the Sun*, by J G Ballard, opens with the 11-year-old protagonist wearing his chorister's cassock and being shown Second World War films in the cathedral crypt.

Like him, many of the colonial children were educated at the cathedral school, set up along the lines of a London cathedral choir school.

The cathedral was closed after the city was "liberated" by the communists in the civil war in 1949. For much of the time since it has been a police station and latterly a visa office.

It will now become the local headquarters of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement, the official title of the state-approved protestant Church in China. According to Ding Guangxun, chairman of the organisation's national committee, the government is showing its support for freedom of religion.

In fact, the government is increasingly alarmed by the growth in Christianity in China, mostly in "underground" or non-approved Churches, either protestant evangelical or Roman Catholic, which are subject to state persecution. There is also an official Catholic Church but its adherents are not allowed to recognise the Pope's authority.

It now seems to be reacting to this by bolstering the officially sanctioned Churches, which up to now have been tolerated but not encouraged except when they serve a political purpose. In addition to Holy Trinity, major publicity was recently given to an order to build two new churches in Beijing.

Richard Chilvers, of Christian Solidarity Worldwide, which campaigns against the persecution of Christians in China, said there were 80 million church-goers in China, mostly underground. "There is a massive divide between the Three-Self Patriotic Church and the majority of Christians, who are not prepared to be told what to talk about and how to worship."

Tess Johnston, a former US diplomat and expert on the city's colonial era buildings, said: "If you know what a Victorian 'high church' looks like, that's what the old photographs show - all dark mahogany, altar railings, the lot. I hope that the authorities have the wood and the know-how."