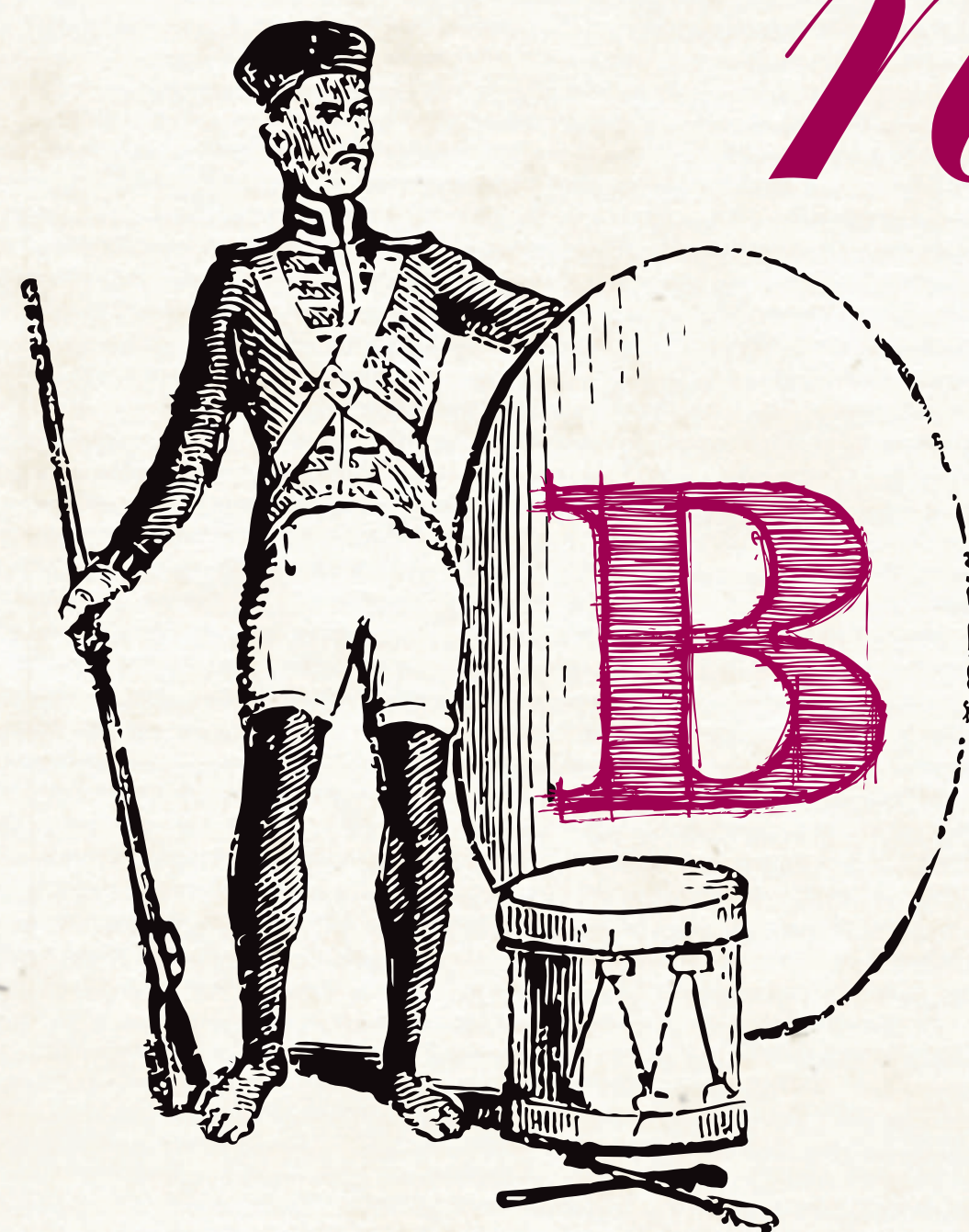


Shaping British national identity



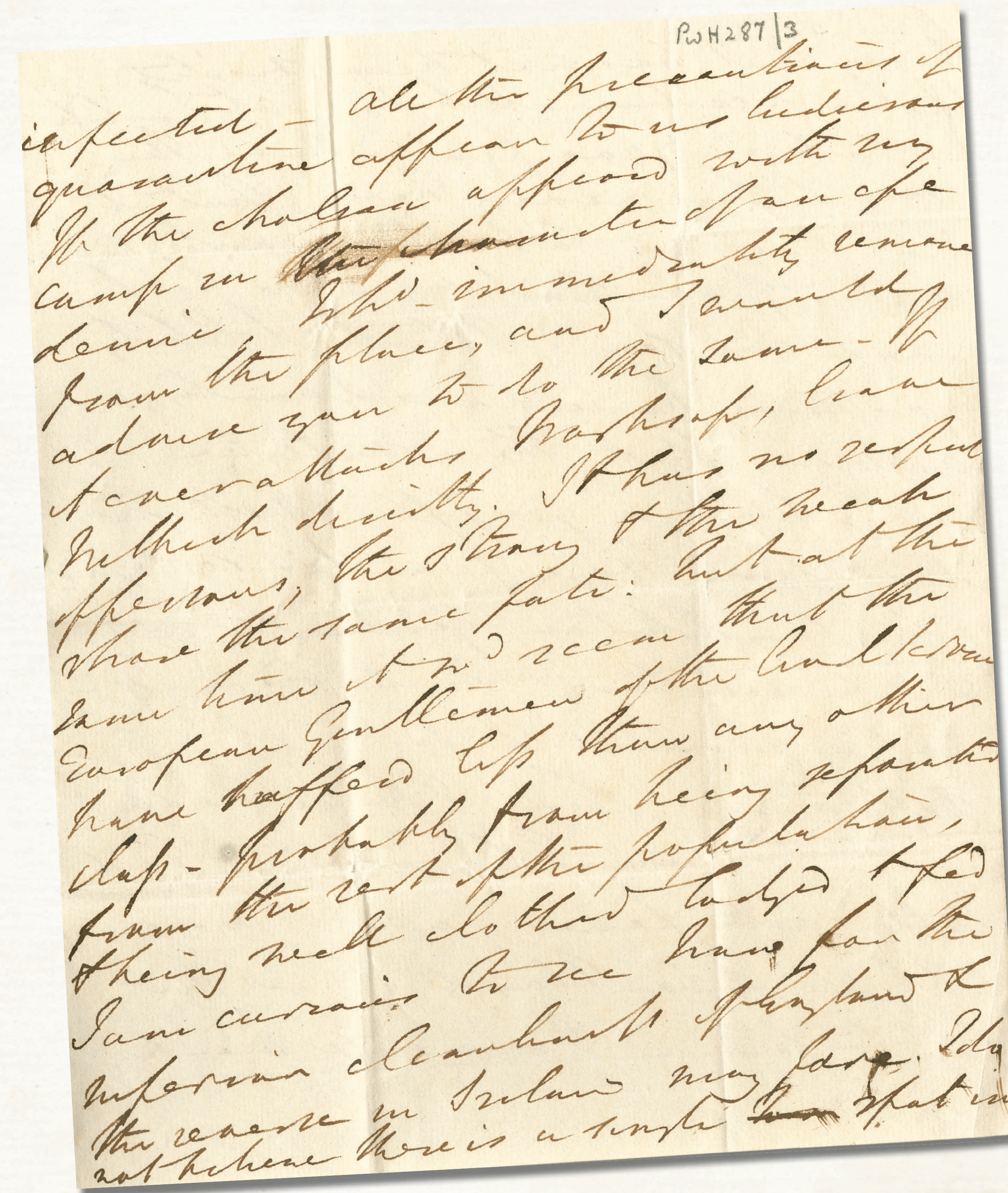
Britain's connection with India has profoundly shaped material culture and national identity. Tea drinking, for example – a quintessentially English ritual – was developed only as a result of the East India Company's trade monopoly in India in the 18th century.



Everyday items such as shampoo and 'English' mustard, as well as national treasures such as the Koh-i-Noor gem, derive from the British conquest of India. Yet the majority of people living in Britain in the 18th century knew little of India beyond the stereotypes of 'despotic' princes and 'barbaric' practices that circulated in travel writing. Shareholders were content to derive wealth from the profits of the East India Company, while imagining themselves separate from, and often superior to, Indian society.

Conquest and colonisation also impacted the socio-economic structure of British society, challenging older forms of rule. For young men in 18th century Britain, India provided an opportunity to escape the rigid class divides that defined society. Many left Britain at 16 years

Letter from Derbyshire surgeon Dr Edward M Wrench to his sisters. Wrench travelled to India with the Army in the 1850s. He was a prolific diary and letter writer, and many of his papers contain small sketches and illustrations of daily life in India. Papers of Edward M. Wrench (1833-1912) of Derbyshire Wr C 385.



Left: Extract from a letter from Lord WH Cavendish Bentinck, Camp Bahadaghur [Bahadurpur], India, to the 4th Duke of Portland, 1831. He describes an outbreak of cholera and observes that the Europeans are less affected 'probably from being separated from the rest of the population and being well clothed, lodged and fed'. Papers of William Henry Cavendish-Scott-Bentinck, 4th Duke of Portland Pw H 287/3.



Threads of Empire

Rule and resistance in colonial India



Madras was the heart of British India. The city was segregated, with the British settling in a small area named Fort St George, separated from 'Black Madras' where the Indian population lived. From *India: pictorial, descriptive and historical* (1854), by Miss Julia Corner. Briggs Collection LT310.G/C6.

old and lived all their adult lives in India, often marrying Indian women, adopting local practices and sometimes converting to Islam. Others, however, returned with enormous fortunes from trade and plunder. They bought landed estates, married into the aristocracy and bought Parliamentary seats. This nouveau riche, referred to as 'nabobs' – a vulgarisation of the Persian word 'nawab', or 'ruler' – blurred the boundaries of Indian and British society and called into question the distinct nature of British identity.