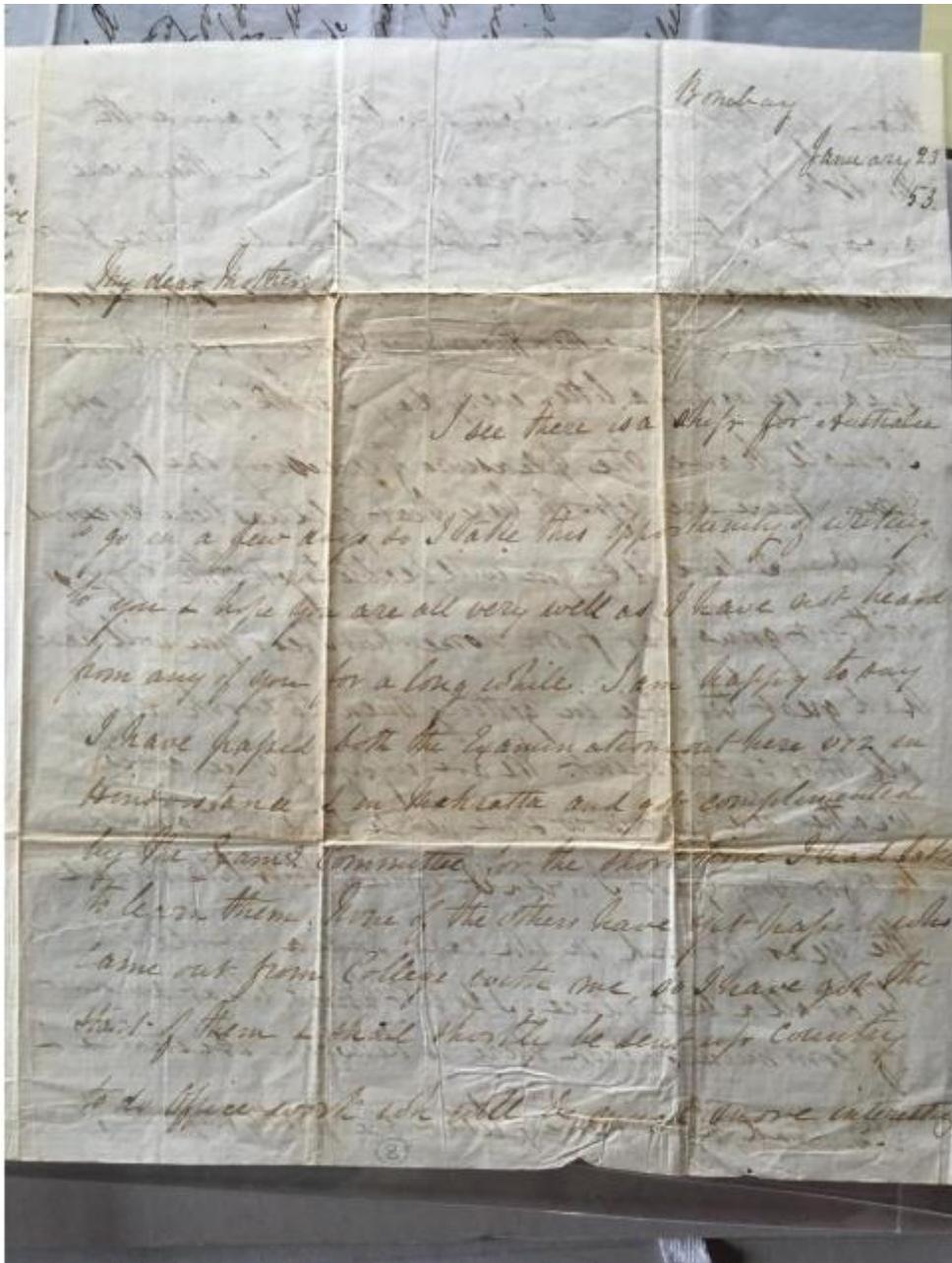


Letter 9: Exams, Hindoostanee and the Tasmanian gold rush



Bombay
January 23 /53

My dear Mother,

I see there is a ship for Australia to go in a few days so I take this opportunity of writing to you & hope you are all very well as I have not heard from any of you for a long while. **I am happy to say I have passed both the Examinations out here vis in Hindoostanee & in Mahratta** and got complimented by the Examining Committee for the short time I had taken to learn them. None of the others have yet passed who came out from College with me, so I have got the start of them & shall shortly be sent up Country to do office work wh. will I suppose give me opportunity

shall shortly be sent up country to do Office work wh (sic) will be much more interesting than dry bookwork. I am now living again with Mr Bell, but when I first came to Bombay they were away so **I took a tent on the Esplanade** where poor Ben Weeding once lived in a tent as Mrs Bell tells me. I hear from either Mr or Mrs Weeding every month and am expecting a letter every day & with it perhaps I shall have the pleasure of receiving one from you. **There are reports here that gold has been discovered in Van D. Land**, if so, you will be able to get to the digging without going far from home; but I fear you will have had great trouble in getting men to work during all the excitement. We are enjoying nice cool weather here just now; some people find it too cold, but for my part I wish it would keep like this all the year round, in wh(sic) case India would not be at all a bad place. I do not know what amount of communication there is between Australia & V.D. Land, but I fancy letters are pretty safe to go and as there is going to be a regular line of steamers from this to Australia it will be very nice both for sending letters & in case I pay you a visit some day. With regard to the Kangaroo dogs I fear they would be very expensive sending and also a great deal of trouble so tho I should like them very much I think, unless you have got them already, you had better not get them until you have an opportunity of sending them under the care of some one coming to India. If any of these immigrant Ships should be returning it would be a good opportunity and if you send me a letter with them or before them I will make arrangements for receiving them. But do not send them unless a good opportunity occurs as one can always get Arabian dogs wh(sic) tho' they are not quite so good in my estimation, do for hunting pretty well. After next month I shall be receiving £40 per month when I hope to be able to save a little, tho' as yet from travelling expenses & buying furniture & one thing and another I have not been able to do so, tho' I believe I have spent less than any other young chap who came out at the same time with me. Bombay is rather dull for the season of the year, and that I care about it at all, but rather like it of the two. I like the up Country life much better of the two from what I have seen of it & it is fortunate as I daresay I shall not see Bombay again for 6 or 7 years. I am very anxious to hear how you are all getting on, I want one of Harriets nice long letters. If you write direct to me - }Civil Service Bombay will be sufficient direction as they will forward it to whatever station I may be at otherwise send it through Mr Weeding. With much love to yourself, Fanny Harriet James & all other Relations believe me your

Affectionate Son

Thomas Weeding

I took a tent on the Esplanade

'The Esplanade' is a part of Mumbai (Bombay) now known as the Maidans. The old name 'Bombay' derives from 16th century Portugese traders who called it 'Bom Bahia' (the Good Bay). The British acquired Bombay through the dowry of Catherine of Braganza, whom Charles II married in 1661. Hard to imagine nowadays that you could marry someone and thereby acquire a major Indian trading port, but that's the 17th century for you.



The Esplanade, Bombay, ca 1860 – note the tents and large open space (Image courtesy British Library)



Bombay Harbour ca 1880

I am happy to say I have passed both the Examinations out here vis in Hindoostanee & in Mahratta

The examinations for entrance into the Indian Civil Service were notoriously difficult – note that Thomas mentions ‘none of the others have yet passed’. Despite this, Thomas was actually pretty lucky, because his exam questions would have been set by the directors of the British East India Company. The following year, the whole system was overhauled, with the Indian Civil Service being administered directly by the British Government (not the British East India Co) and strangely, the exams became even harder....

“There are reports here that gold has been discovered in Van D. Land”...

The early days of the ‘gold rush’ in Tasmania are not well documented, but it is likely that Thomas is referring to James Grant’s discovery of gold on his property ‘Tullochgoram’ in 1852. Smaller finds were reported in 1852 at Tower Hill Creek and Lefroy. However, the true gold rush in Tasmania (in terms of scale and the number of diggers involved) concentrated around Lefroy, the now ghost town which once boasted a booming main street with shops, hotels, and even a joss house built by the Chinese miners.

LOCAL INTELLIGENCE.

REWARD FOR THE GOLD DISCOVERY AT FINDAL.—James Grant, Esq., of Tullochgoram, has claimed on behalf of Keeling Richardson, the reward of £500 offered by the Launceston committee, in September last, for the discovery of a gold field in the northern side of the island. In proof that the discovered field can be profitably worked, Mr. Grant has forwarded to the committee samples of the gold which has been procured by different persons, and he states, in the memorandum which he has submitted to the committee, that of the quantity forwarded one ounce and thirty-eight grains were procured by Keeling Richardson, from about five bushels of soil, with the assistance of one man at the cradle in eight hours, although he had to carry the soil a quarter of a mile to the place of washing. One of the pieces procured, a nugget weighed thirty-nine grains;

Newspaper account of Grant’s gold discovery, from the Hobarton Guardian, 15 May 1852

