



Autograph letter, 2pp., signed 'Hugh Inglis' addressed to 'Lord Viscount Melville', mailing folds  
[and] Autograph letter, 4pp., to "Sir H. Inglis" from James Horsburgh, unsigned, mailing folds.

## **"MORE KNOWLEDGE OF THE EASTERN SEAS THAN PERHAPS ANY OTHER MAN"**

**[Two autograph letters concerning the East India Company and the War of 1812].**

### **Author**

HORSBURGH, James and INGLIS Sir Hugh

### **Publication date**

13 November, 1812.

### **Publisher**

### **Publication place**

Milton Bryand [England],

### **Physical description**

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### **Dimensions**

### **Notes**

In July, 1813, Parliament passed the Charter Act, which renewed the charter issued to the British East India Company. At this time, Robert Dundas, 2nd Viscount Melville, served as First Lord of the Admiralty and therefore played an important role in Britain's maritime activities. He had previously formed important alliances in India as part of a strategy to curtail Napoleonic influence in the

subcontinent, and had also overseen the British occupation of numerous stations and factories in China, Java, Mauritius and Réunion, as well as in India.

However, Dundas had also been forced to deal with the diminishing finances of the East India Company in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries. In fact, he was chair of a select committee established to investigate and report on the Company's state of affairs and which concluded that it should give up its official trade monopolies in India, except over tea and opium, while maintaining its administrative role. This decision was realised by the 1813 Chart Act.

The present document is a letter sent to Dundas less than one year before the Act was passed by Sir Hugh Inglis an East Indies Merchant who had served as Director and Chairman of the East India Company some years previously. The letter discusses a communication that Inglis had received from James Horsburgh, a Scottish hydrographer whose important pilot, 'Directions for Sailing to and from the East Indies, China, New Holland, Cape of Good Hope' (1809-1811), became the standard work for oriental navigation in the first half of the 19th century and had led to his appointment as Hydrographer to the British East India Company.

Inglis tells Dundas that Horsburgh "professes more knowledge of the Eastern Seas than perhaps any other man now in Europe; he is likewise well acquainted with several of the American Captains who traded to China and India and from his knowledge of their enterprising character he entertains a confidential opinion that heavy vessels will be sent to the Eastward of the Cape".

This information is of great relevance because in addition to the ongoing issues of the East India Company, the British Admiralty and Royal Navy were also engaged in a conflict in North America in 1812, in which over 50,000 soldiers and one hundred vessels were engaged. The war, which lasted until early 1815, was ultimately inconclusive and led to a lasting peace between the United States and Britain.

Horsburgh's missive, also present here, advises Inglis how best to protect "all the coasts and the innumerable islands to the Eastward of the Cape of Good Hope where American Privateers could meet...". Horsburgh further informs him that "The track round the cape and down to St. Helena is almost always the same that one sloop on the edge of Aquillas bank and one to windward of St. Helena would protect those two important points." Additional suggestions are made for the China Sea, the Philippines, the Red Sea, the Persian Gulf and Madagascar, but the majority of the letter is dedicated to intelligence concerning the war in America.

## **Bibliography**

## **Provenance**

**Price:** £3000

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