

Adam Freer, MD (1747–1811)

Notes by Janet Starkey 17 August 2017

Although Freer is not listed in Wilson's list of Levant Company officials,¹ Patrick Russell MD FRS, who left Aleppo in 1772 after serving as its physician from 1750 (taking over from his brother Alexander Russell, MD, FRS, who was physician there from 1740 to 1753 and was the author of the *Natural history of Aleppo* (1756), was succeeded by Adam Freer, MD (1747–1811) as physician in Aleppo. I can give you plenty of detail about the Russells!!

There are others in the family called Adam Freer and this makes tracking the Freer in Aleppo and India somewhat complicated! A useful with information on the Freer family,² some of it speculative is on <http://boards.ancestry.co.uk/thread.aspx?o=20&m=214.1.1.2.1.2.1.2&p=surnames.freer>

His uncle, also Adam Freer, MD, the Elder, was in exile in Bremen and corresponded with the omnipresent Scottish merchant in Rotterdam, Andrew Russell.³ This Adam Freer, MD, was author of *Disputatio medica inauguralis de partu difficili* (Leiden, 1687). Between 1682 and 1689 this Adam Freer, MD, served Lord Melville, a Presbyterian in exile in the Netherlands and then in Bremen. In the National Archives of Scotland there is reference to a bond that Adam Freer had with Lord Bargany. There were annual receipts of funds to Adam Freer from Lord Bargany. This Adam Freer, MD, married Frances Cleland and had several children, Katherine 1694, Jean 1695, Ann 1696, Adam 1697, Elizabeth 1698 and George 1700. These children were looked after by his brother, George Freer, after Adam Freer's death when George was appointed as 'curator' for Frances Cleland and the children's interests in the bond.

This Adam Freer, MD was the brother of Reverend George Freer of Essendie, minister of Invernethie from 1698 and previously chaplain to Mrs Cuninghame of Enterkine — who was the grandfather of Adam Freer of Aleppo. Reverend George Freer was married to Helen Blair (born c.1660/70) 'of a good family in Perthshire', daughter of Thomas Blair of Pockmyln⁴ and descended from John Blair, the spy.⁵ They married on

¹ David Wilson, *List of British consular officials in the Ottoman empire and its former territories, from the sixteenth century to about 1856* (March 2011)

[http://www.levantineheritage.com/pdf/List_of_British_Consular_Officials_Turkey\(1581-1856\)-D_Wilson.pdf](http://www.levantineheritage.com/pdf/List_of_British_Consular_Officials_Turkey(1581-1856)-D_Wilson.pdf),

² Sometimes spelt Frier, Frere, Frer or even Friar.

³ NAS RH 15/106/494 Letter from Adam Freer to Andrew Russell 14 December 1683, cited in Murdoch, *Network North*, 111.

⁴ Kirk records for Lethendy.

26 December 1699. George was the fifth son of George Freer, minister of Lethendy and Kinloch.⁶ Adam Freer of Aleppo's father owned Essendy a small estate in Lethendy.

There are connections between the Freer family and Robert Louis Stevenson. John Alexander Steuart⁷ states that 'Later again — in 1748, to be exact — Helen's [Blair] descendant, [Reverend] Adam Freer, married Margaret Lizars, a native of Edinburgh. Here we touch French blood. Margaret's father, David Lizars, was a farmer in Damhead, on the Water of Leith,' This is Adam Freer (c.1704), the first son of George Freer. In 1782, Marion (1755–1825), daughter of Reverend Adam Freer of Innernethy, Perthshire and of Margaret Lizars married Reverend Dr George Smith in Galston Parish, Ayrshire. they had several children, including Margaret (b.1783), Jean (b.1785), Henrietta (see below); William Freer, MD; and another Adam Freer, who was born in Galston, Ayrshire 1.6.1791 and took the name Adam Freer Smith. He was a merchant in Calcutta, George (b.1800) and John (b.1801). Their daughter Henrietta married the Reverend Lewis Balfour, minister of Colinton in Midlothian. This means that if Adam Freer, brother of our Adam Freer's father (whose name I have not found) is the great-grand father of Robert Louis Stevenson.

At Edinburgh University Adam Freer (of Aleppo) was a member of the Edinburgh Medical Society in 1765–1766. After presenting a whimsical thesis on syphilis,⁸ Freer graduated from the University of Edinburgh in 1767.⁹ It was so whimsical that it was hard to take the thesis seriously, according to Mr. Royston, 'Historical sketch of the progress of medicine in the year 1809', *The Medical and physical journal* 24 (1810), 1–39 (24–25) but a copy of the thesis is included as an appendix to the catalogue of books auctioned in 1792 after William Cullen's death in 1790.¹⁰

⁵ According to Kirk records for Lethendy. Other records say she was the daughter of John Blair 8th of Ardblair and Isabel Stewart, daughter of James Stewart 1st of Ladywell.

⁶ Gerald Hamilton-Edwards, *In search of Scottish ancestry* (Genealogical Pub. Co., 1984),

⁷ John Alexander Steuart, *Robert Louis Stevenson, man and writer: a critical biography* (Kessinger Publishing, 1924), 24–28.

⁸ *Dissertatio medica inauguralis, de syphilide venerea; nec non de morbo sibbens dicto: Quam, annuente summo numine, ex auctoritate Reverendi admodum Viri, D. Gulielmi Robertson, S.S.T.P. Academiae Edinburgenae Præfetti; nec non amplissimi senatus academici consensu, et nobilissimae facultatis medicæ decreto; pro Gradu Doctoris, summisque in medicina honoribus et privilegiis rite et legitime consequendis, eruditorum examini subjicit Adamus Freer, Britannus. Pridie idus Julii, hora locoque solitis* (Edinburgh: apud Balfour, Auld, et Smellie., 1767).

⁹ Adam Freer, *Dissertatio medica inauguralis, de syphilide venerea; nec non de morbo sibbens dicto: Quam, annuente summo numine, ex auctoritate Reverendi admodum Viri, D. Gulielmi Robertson, S.S.T.P. Academiae Edinburgenae Precetti; nec non amplissimi senatus academici consensu, et nobilissimae facultatis medicæ decreto; pro Gradu Doctoris, summisque in medicina honoribus et privilegiis rite et legitime consequendis, eruditorum examini subjicit Adamus Freer, Britannus. Pridie idus Julii, hora locoque solitis* (Edinburgh: apud Balfour, Auld, et Smellie, Academiae typographos, 1767).

¹⁰ William Cullen, *Catalogue of books, chiefly medical, being the library of the late William Cullen, M.D. ... which are to be sold by public auction ... on Monday 23d January 1792* (Edinburgh: A. Guthrie, 1792).

He then replaced Patrick as physician to the Levant Company in Aleppo about 1772 (or late 1771) and served until 1781 in Aleppo during which time he sent back specimens and other information to Patrick. Hope was instrumental in securing the post in Aleppo for Dr Adam Freer as physician to succeed Patrick. In 1767 Freer was awarded the gold medal for promoting the study of botany, given annually by Hope,¹¹ for the best collection of indigenous plants.¹² Hope accommodated Freer in his house from 1764 to 1766 and even contacted Sir Joseph Banks on Freer's behalf as Freer wanted to go to explore the Arctic but Banks had already left for Plymouth when the letter arrived. In this letter Hope described Freer as 'the young man is extremely (sic) diligent and indefatigable he is sensible spirited & sober & has good and gentle dispositions.'¹³

Dr Adam Freer was instrumental in provided further information after Patrick left Aleppo. As Alexander studied plants in the last two or three years of his stay in Aleppo only, Patrick made his own botanical collection there. Subsequently Freer discovered further plants and sent dried specimens to Patrick to identify with the help of various friend, including Mr Miller.¹⁴ Freer also explored the 'sunk' village in search of the wild pistachio;¹⁵ On receipt of a tail and forepart of a 'sheeb' (*shīb*), which was shot near Spheery (Şufayrah, N 36° 1' 11" E 37° 11' 48") in 1772 when it was following the Basra caravan, Freer sent Patrick a detailed description.¹⁶ The *shīb* was a strange rabid wolf-like creature, possibly a rare wolf-dog hybrid rather than a bazaar dog or a striped hyaena. Freer sent Patrick an account of the damage made by locusts in the region in May 1776 and picked up young specimens. Freer sent Patrick a description of several birds, including one that was shot in 1778 in a garden about an hour away from Aleppo which Patrick thought might be a *Caprimulgus Americanus* (night-hawk).¹⁷ In addition, Freer supplied Hope with various botanical specimens that were sent in a parcel by Hope to Banks, so all three collections were used to prepare the catalogue of plants that appeared in *Aleppo* (1794).¹⁸

¹¹ *The Scots Magazine* 27 (1764–1765), 335.

¹² Adam Freer, *Botanical Notebook: an edition of his 'List of plants growing in the neighbourhood of Edinburgh collected, in flower 1765 as a sketch of the Calendarium Florae of Edinburgh'* (repr. Edinburgh: P. Chaney, 2001). It was previously published (as anonymous) in the I.B. Balfour, 'Eighteenth-century records of Scottish plants', *Annals of Scottish Natural History* 33 (1900), 169–74 (in part) and in *Royal Botanical Garden (Edinburgh) Notes* 4 (1905), 123–46. The ms which was part of the Hope bequest is in the library of the Royal Botanical Gardens, Edinburgh and contains Hope's additions and queries.

¹³ Hope to Banks, 17 April 1766, in Averil M. Lysaght, *Joseph Banks in Newfoundland and Labrador, 1766: his diary, manuscripts, and collections* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), 235.

¹⁴ *Aleppo* (1794), ii, 237–8, 267.

¹⁵ *Aleppo* (1794), i, 84;

¹⁶ *Aleppo* (1794), ii, 184–5. Similar beasts were shot by Antoine de Beauterne in 1766 and by Jean Chastel in 1767 in Gévauden in the French Alps (N 43° 57' 26" E 6° 26' 0").

¹⁷ *Aleppo* (1794), ii, 195, 206.

¹⁸ *Aleppo* (1794), ii, 237–8; *Aleppo Observed*, 136.

Colonel Capper, who crossed the Great Desert in 1778, was entertained by various Levant Company officials in the factory, including the consul, John Abbott, who was also a friend of James Bruce, Shaw;¹⁹ the surgeon in Aleppo, Adam Freer MD;²⁰ and the French consul, Monsieur Perdriaux, Capper described being treated for a gunshot wound in Aleppo in 1778 by a barber-surgeon, recommended to him by M Fonton, a French dragoman and then he had to seek out Dr Freer and with 'his kind assistance and care' his arm recovered.

Eyles Irwin, of the Madras Establishment, recorded that from March 1781 Freer accompanied his expedition to India via Ana, Baghdad and Basra, for in Aleppo: 'it was still enlarged by the presence of Dr Freer the physician of the factory who had the company's permission to proceed to India and both from his professional skill and his knowledge of the Turkish and Arabic languages was esteemed a considerable acquisition to our society.'²¹ Freer's knowledge of Arabic etymology was particularly useful in Irwin's description of the proper names.

Given the early support Freer received from his mentors, John Hope and Patrick, it is surprising that he did not publish any further research on natural history but he may have been preoccupied with his duties as physician and surgeon. However, Freer accompanied Captain William Fitzpatrick on an early expedition to Nepal in 1793 and the exhibition report, the first book in English in Nepal, contains some details about medicinal plants.²² The expedition lasted seven weeks, from 13 February 1793 crossing back to India in mid-April. Sent by Hastings, Kirkpatrick failed in his mission to mediate between Gurkhas and Tibetans. The exhibition report does not contain a major section on natural history. Others on the expedition included Lieutenants Samuel Scott WD Knox, J. Gerrard and Maulvi Abdul Kadir Khan. Mr. Adam Freer was the surgeon. They were the first Scots to enter Nepal. As a result they were given gifts:

Gifts to British Officials

¹⁹ A Levant Company official, probably Henry Shaw who was in Aleppo in 1775 and 1778; or Jasper Shaw who was in Aleppo in 1775, not Dr Thomas Shaw. *Pedigree Register*, 292, 326. Jasper Shaw married Helen, the daughter of a Michiel, a Greek national, in 1778.

²⁰ *Pedigree Register*, 227, 326.

²¹ Eyles Irwin, *A series of adventures in the course of a voyage up the Red-Sea: on the coasts of Arabia and Egypt; and of a route through the desarts of Thebais, in the year 1777. With a supplement of a voyage from Venice to Latichea; and of a route through the desarts of Arabia, by Aleppo, Bagdad, and the Tygris to Busrah, in the years 1780 and 1781. In letters to a lady* (London: printed for J. Dodsley, 1787), ii, 290, 347, 381.

²² William Kirkpatrick, *An account of the kingdom of Nepaul, being the substance of observations* (London: William Miller, 1811), x.

On Chaitra Sudi 1, 1849 (March 1793), Darogas Mahadeva Padhya, Damodar Jaisi, Meghu Khawas, Zorawar Khawas, and Abhaya Simha Khawas were ordered to make ready the following elephants at Garh Parsa for farewell gifts to the following persons:-

1. (Colonel) Kirkpatrick	...	One bull elephant and one cow elephant of 5 cubits each.
2. Captain W.D. Knox	...	One elephant of 4 cubit.
3. Lt. Samuel Scott	...	do.
4. Lt. J. Gerard	...	do.
5. Dr. (Adam Freer)	...	do.
6. Maulvi Abdul Qadir Khan	...	do.
7. Munshi	...	do.

RRC, Vol. 25, No. 310-11.

Freer later published an 'Account of the method employed in Bengal for the cure of the cutaneous disease, commonly known by the name of Ring Worm, the *Harpes Serpigo* of Sauvages, by means of cassanda vinegar, communicated to Dr Duncan senior', *Annals of Medicine* 5 (1800), 371-2.²³ This was summarised in *The Critical Review* (1801), 188: 'Dr Adam Freer has communicated an account of the Indian Method of curing the Ring worm viz by a decoction of the fresh bark roots tops or flowers of the cassunda cassia sophera of Linnaeus. This remedy is also said to be useful in the herpes miliaris of Sauvages and perhaps as Dr Freer observes may be advantageously extended to other cachexies and discolourations' (hard to read this!).

Freer was a surgeon with the Bengal Establishment at the same time as Patrick Russell and Claud Russell were in the Carnatic, yet I have not discovered any relevant correspondence between them after Freer left Aleppo. *The Scots Magazine*²⁴ records Freer's death on 18 January 1811 at Berhampore [Baharampur], Bengal, where he was superintending surgeon in the service of the East India Company from October 1809.

²³ This was summarised in *The Monthly Magazine* 37 (1814), 321.

²⁴ *The Scots Magazine* (1811), 797.

Robert Freer

Roger L. Emerson, *Academic patronage in the Scottish enlightenment: Glasgow, Edinburgh and St Andrews* (2008), 189, confuses Adam Freer with Robert Freer as being the person who took a chair in Glasgow. Adam's brother was Robert Freer of Essendy and Park (1745–1827). The estate of Park was in Tarbolton (Did he acquire it through his wife?). In some places Robert's birth is given incorrectly as 1747. University of Edinburgh (MA, 1765), studied medicine in Holland; Entering the army, he served as ensign and surgeon in He was Captain in the Armed Association. He Married Margaret Thomson (d.1827 aged 88); and his only son predeceased him. He went to America as a surgeon in the Revolutionary War and was present at the battle of Bunker's Hill; MD King's College, Aberdeen (1779) then in private practice in Edinburgh. In 1796 Robert succeeded Professor Thomas Charles Hope, son of John Hope, the famous botanist of Edinburgh, as Regius Professor of the Theory and Practice of Physic (later called Practice of Medicine) at the University of Glasgow and held this post until his death in 1827.²⁵ A Latin epitaph marking his grave in the High Churchyard.²⁶ According to Glasgow University website, 'in 1825, Freer successfully petitioned the Faculty to appoint his nephew, Dr Whitstone, to assist him with his teaching and examining work'.

Adam's two natural children, John and Margaret, were sent back from India into the care of a brother, possibly Robert and they inherited Robert's estate on his death.²⁷ This is likely to be John Horace Freer born in Calcutta in 1791, d 1857 in Sutton Coalfield where he was a physician and he gained his LRCSEd and MD from the University of Edinburgh (both 1809). Margaret married

Adam Freer's publications

Freer, Adam, 'List of plants growing in the neighbourhood of Edinburgh collected, in flower 1765 as a sketch of the *Calendarium Florae* of Edinburgh'. The 1764–1765 ms. is in the library of the Royal Botanical Gardens, Edinburgh. It was also published (anonymously) in the *Royal Botanical Garden (Edinburgh) Notes* 4 (1907), 123–46. [The *Calendarium* is not by Freer. It is actually by the Rev John Walker – Henry Noltie only just discovered this and Charles Withers confirmed the hand-writing].

Freer, Adam, *Dissertatio medica inauguralis, de syphilide venerea; nec non-de morbo sibbens dicto: Quam, annuente summo nomine, ex autorotated Reverendi admodum Very, D. Galilei Robertson, S.S.T.P. Académie Disburdened Praefecti; nec non amplissimi senatus academici consensu, et nobilissimae facultatis medicae decreto; pro Gradu Doctoris, summisque in medicina honoribus et privileg's rite et legitime consequendis, eruditorum examini subjicit Adamus Freer, Britannus. Pridie idus Julii, hora locoque solitis* (Edinburgh: apud Balfour, Auld, et Smellie, Academiae typographos, 1767).

²⁵ [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert_Freer_\(physician\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert_Freer_(physician)); there are some interesting thoughts, not always correct on www.ancestry.co.uk/boards/thread.aspx?o=20&m=214.1.1.2.1.2.1.2&p=surnames.freer

²⁶ Gordon's *Vade-Mecmn to the Cathedral*, Glasgow 1894; Strang's *Glasgow Clubs*, 2nd edition, 244, 246, 249, 251; *Glasgow Medical Examiner*, 11. 97–99. [can give you more detail if you need it].

²⁷ Durba Ghosh, *Sex and the Family in Colonial India: The Making of Empire*, 127.

- Freer, Adam, 'Account of the method employed in Bengal for the cure of the cutaneous disease, commonly known by the name of ring worm, the *Harpes Serpigo* of sauvages, by means of cassanda vinegar, communicated to Dr Duncan, senior', *Annals of medicine* 5 (1800), 371–2.
- Freer, Adam, *Botanical notebook: an edition of his 'List of plants growing in the neighbourhood of Edinburgh collected, in flower 1765 as a sketch of the Calendarium Florae of Edinburgh'* (repr. Edinburgh: P. Chaney, 2001).
- [Freer, Adam], 'List of plants growing in the neighbourhood of Edinburgh collected, in flower 1765 as a sketch of the Calendarium Florae of Edinburgh', *Royal Botanical Garden (Edinburgh) Notes* 4 (1905), 123–46.