

# The Alcock Album

## Scenes of China Consular Life 1843–1853

*Andrew Hillier*

*With a foreword by Robert Bickers and an introduction by Patrick Conner*



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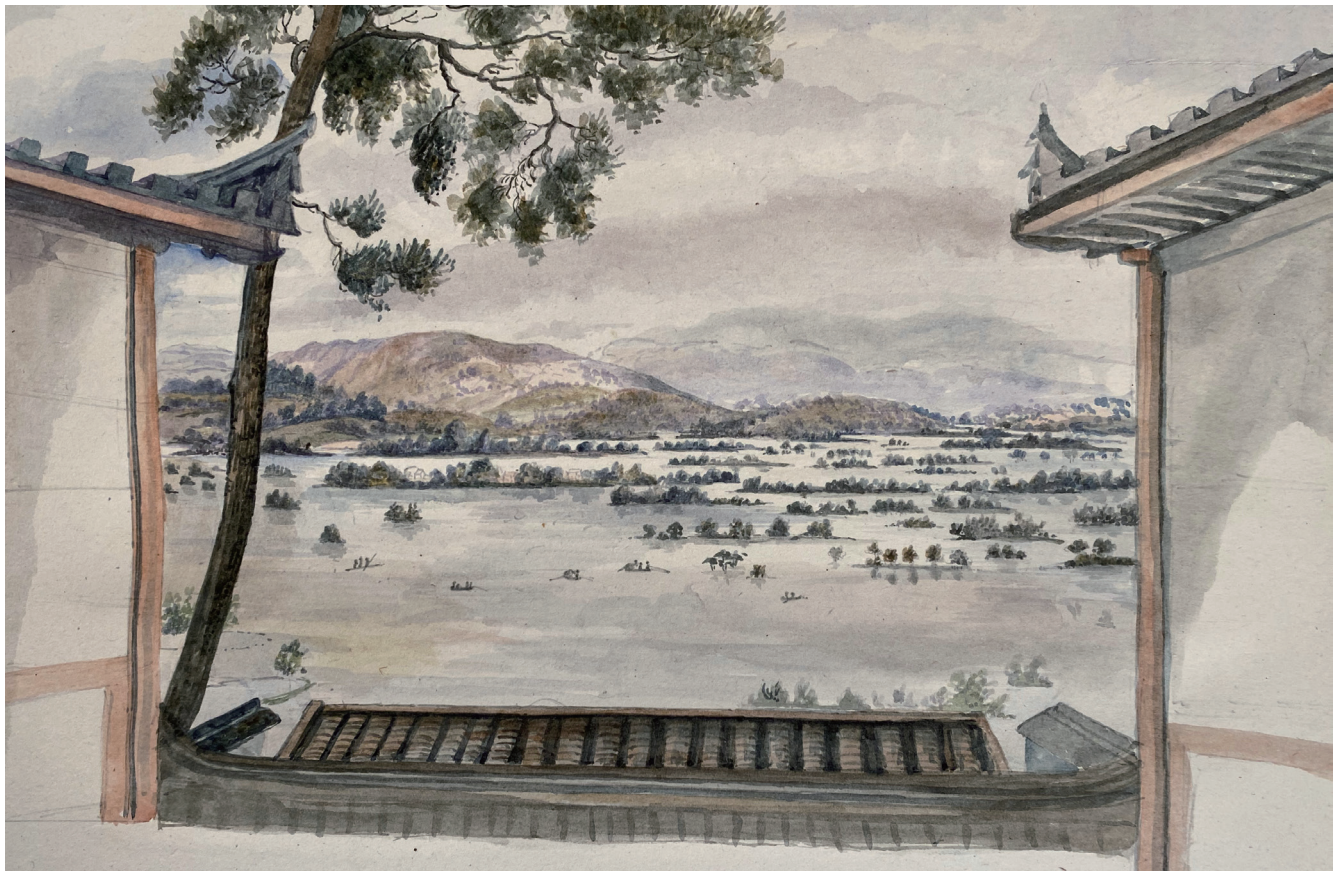
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*For Geraldine*





*From the Consulate: the valley of Min flooded, April 1845*

"All around may be seen the ample green valley, often flooded by the swollen Min in the rainy season, and beyond, the barrier of the encircling hills."<sup>1</sup>



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<i>Acknowledgments</i>		xi
<i>Foreword, by Robert Bickers</i>		xv
<i>Timeline</i>		xix
<i>List of Illustrations and Maps</i>		xxi
<i>Abbreviated Bacon Family Tree</i>		xxvii
<i>Pen Portraits</i>		xxix
<i>Abbreviations</i>		xxxvii
Introduction	To China with a Sketchbook, by Patrick Conner	1
Chapter 1	London	19
Chapter 2	Hong Kong and Xiamen	33
Chapter 3	Fuzhou	55
Chapter 4	Shanghai	97
Chapter 5	To the Hills: 1848–1850	131
Chapter 6	1851: A Year through Letters	167
Chapter 7	The Final Phase	189
Chapter 8	Aftermath	201
Conclusion		219
<i>Glossary</i>		225
<i>Description of the Album and its Provenance</i>		231
<i>List of Album Pictures</i>		235
<i>Notes</i>		239
<i>Bibliography</i>		259
<i>Index</i>		267





## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

**Some** time in 2018, when I was beginning my research into the wives of China consular officials, I noticed that the Martyn Gregory Gallery had sold a picture by Henrietta Alcock, about whom I knew nothing, save that she had been married to the Shanghai consul, Rutherford Alcock. When I called in and asked Martyn whether he knew the whereabouts of the picture, he said he was unsure but added in his unassuming way, “but we do have an album of pictures by her. I’ll see if I can find it downstairs”. “Downstairs” is sadly no more, as the Gallery has now moved, but it was then a treasure trove of China coast paintings and it took a little while before Martyn emerged with the album. As soon as I saw it, I said, “there must be a book here”, to which he replied, “well, go ahead, if you think so”. Whilst it took a while for the idea to get off the ground, not least because of the pandemic, without the enthusiasm and support of Martyn and his assistant, Oliver Harris, it would never have reached fruition. I, therefore, owe them an enormous debt of thanks.

From the outset, it has been a collaborative project, in which many people, together with some good fortune, have played a significant part. Patrick Conner, now retired, but so long associated with the Gallery’s success and still the leading authority in the field of China trade painting, digitised the entire album, provided much-needed advice about the works, and agreed to write the introduction, setting the pictures in the context of treaty port art. Terri Cheung joined the Gallery just in time to be able to provide her curatorial expertise, including researching and mapping the Alcocks’ expeditions to the Shanghai Hills and compiling an invaluable glossary.

Descendants of Henrietta's family on her father's side, the Bacons, have also contributed. Marc Whitaker put me onto the litigation in which it became embroiled and John Bury gave me access to the archives including the numerous portrait sketches made by John Bacon, Jnr. This then led me to Mathew Ronald Norman, who, by chance, had just completed his doctoral thesis which analyses those portraits, and who shared his transcripts of Charles Bacon's otherwise illegible diaries. Running alongside their assistance has been that of Robert Morton, who, again as chance would have it, was researching Rutherford Alcock's life and whose forthcoming biography will be an important addition to the scholarship in the area. Not only did he let me read an early draft of his book but he also generously shared much of his archival research, including transcripts of Henrietta's papers.

I owe a special thanks to my publishers, initially Abby Leigh Manthey, with whom I had previously worked and who embraced the project with her characteristic enthusiasm as soon as I mooted it, to her successor Sydney Stonner, who has been not only meticulous and painstaking in her approach but also an extremely constructive editor, and to the rest of the team at City University of Hong Kong Press for whom this has not

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In addition to the pictures themselves, archival sources have been key to piecing together Henrietta's life, given that nothing has been previously written about her and, again, luck played its part in turning up material. I am grateful to the following archives and their staff: the Syndics of Cambridge University Library and John Wells, the University Librarian, together with Jardine Matheson (Martin Barrow), for allowing me access to, and to quote extensively from, the Alcocks' correspondence with Harry Parkes; the Provincial Archives of New Brunswick and their archivist Janice Cook, for providing transcripts and allowing me to quote from Emma Bacon's letters to her uncle, Samuel Bacon; the City of Westminster Archives for allowing me to quote from the Alcock papers; the Alexander Turnbull Library, National Library of New