

Death of Sir Alexander MacKenzie

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The "*Birmingham Daily Post*" of yesterday says: Much regret will be felt in Birmingham at the announcement of the death of **Sir Alexander Mackenzie K.C.S.I.** who though not born within the borders of the city and for many years absent from it is still remembered as one of the brilliant band who have made King Edward's School famous throughout the land. It was in connection with the government of the great dependency India that **Sir Alexander** rose to eminence. So arduous were his labours that his health was impaired and since his retirement in 1893 he never really recovered. He suffered from a complication of diseases and yesterday death ensued at his residence, Radnor Holmbury St. Mary, Surrey.

Sir Alexander was born at Dumfries in 1842 but he came to Birmingham at an early age on his father the **Rev. J.R. Mackenzie** M.A., D.D., accepting the pastorate of the Presbyterian Church, Broad Street. Soon after his father's arrival here he became a scholar of King Edward's School, and passed through all the classes from the twelfth to the first his school career ending as head boy in the classical department and head boarder in the house of the headmaster the **Rev. E.H. Gifford**. His school career was distinguished, the Lea, Chance, and Keary prizes falling to him, and in 1859 he secured a founder's exhibition, with which he entered Trinity College, Cambridge. It is interesting to note that his college tutor was the late **Bishop Lightfoot**, who was himself an Old Edwardian. He determined to enter the Indian Civil Service and at the examination in June 1851, he obtained second place, and probably would have been first but for an attack of illness during the examination. His B.A. degree was taken in 1862, and in the same term he also carried off one of the Hooper Silver Goblets for English declamation.

He landed in India in December 1862, and was soon after selected to work in the legislative and home departments of the Secretariat of the Government of India. While thus engaged **Sir Alexander** studied the native languages, and won large rewards for passing in Hindustani and Bengali within four months of his arrival, and subsequently for high proficiency in Bengali. He was thereupon selected by **Sir Henry Harrington**, legislative member for Bengal, to act as his private secretary, and assist in the revision of the great code of civil procedure. Later – February 1865 – he was appointed Under Secretary to the Bengal Government, and a year or so later Junior Secretary. On his appointment as Revenue Secretary in 1869, he was the youngest officer who had held the post, but his success in the discharge of his duties was indicated by receipt of the special thanks of the Lieutenant-Governor (**Sir. W. Grey**.) In 1873-4 he did special duty in connection with the Bengal famine, and he worked so hard that his eyesight gave way and in May 1874, he was sent home on furlough all but blind. After eighteen months' rest he returned to Calcutta as Secretary to the Board of Revenue. In July 1876, he left Calcutta to take charge as Magistrate and collector of Moorshedabad, one of the largest districts in Bengal. Here he inaugurated the policy of entrusting to educated native gentlemen a larger share in the administration of district affairs. When **Sir Ashley Eden** became Lieutenant-Governor he recalled **Sir Alexander** to Calcutta, and in October 1877, made him Financial Secretary to work out for Bengal the beginnings of the great scheme of provincial decentralisation. He was next appointed Revenue Secretary for Bengal and a member of the Legislative Council of the province, and became an active member of the Kent Commission. In September 1881, he was appointed by **Lord Ripon** to be Home Secretary to the Government of India, and in 1884 **Lord Ripon** offered him the Chief Commissionership of Assam in view of the fact that he had in the Bengal Office made the frontier affairs of that province a special study. His "*History of the North-east Frontier*" is, indeed, the standard official work on the subject. He was unable to accept this appointment. He continued to fill the post of Home Secretary under **Lord Dufferin**, and in 1885 was selected by that Viceroy to be the next Chief Commissioner of the Central Provinces. In January 1886 he accompanied **Lord Dufferin** to Mandalay to assist in the task of organising the newly-conquered territory of Upper Burma, whence he left for England on a year's furlough. In May 1886 **Queen Victoria** pinned on his breast the jewel of a Companion of the Star of India.

In March 1887 he returned to India and took charge of the Central Provinces, where his administration won for him the high praises of both **Lords Dufferin** and **Landsdowne**, and of the Secretary of State. In November 1890 he was chosen by **Lord Landsdowne** to succeed **Sir Charles Crosthwaite** in the government of Burma. In January 1891 he was created a Knight Commander of the Star of India. His work in Burma was interrupted in 1892 by the death of his wife. **Lady Mackenzie**¹ was a daughter of the late **Col. W. Bremner** of the Madras Army, and a niece of the famous Lord of Session, **Patrick Robertson**. She died in Birmingham, and is buried in the little country cemetery at Quinton. He remained in England for some time, and towards the end of 1893 he married **Miss Mabel E. Elliot**, granddaughter of the late **Mr. J.R. McLean**, who was closely connected with the South Staffordshire Railway, (now part of the London and North-Western Railway system), the South Staffordshire Waterworks Company, and the Cannock Chase Colliery. He returned to his Indian work, and in 1895 became Chief Commissioner in Burma. He passed from this post to that of member of the Viceregal Council, but he only held this office for a few months when he succeeded to the more important position of Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal. Unfortunately he was not able to remain actively at work much longer. In May 1897 it was announced that he had been compelled to take six months' medical leave, and though he returned at the end of this period, in March of the following year he was peremptorily ordered home by his medical advisors. He accordingly vacated the office of Lieutenant-Governor. Since his return to England **Sir Alexander** has lived at South Villa, Campden Hill, Kensington, and later in Surrey. Shortly after his return a compliment which doubtless he would highly esteem was paid to him. He was entertained as the guest of the Old Boys' Association. His speech on that occasion was full of interesting reminiscences of the school, and of some of the scholars who had attained eminence not only at home, but in India also. He was a brother-in-law of **Mr. Henry Lea** and **Mr. J.W. Lea**. The funeral will take place at Holmbury St. Mary on Thursday.

¹ **Georgina Louisa Huntly Bremner**, d/o **William Bremner** and **Georgina Huntly Robertson** born 24th September 1838. [View genealogy of this family...](#)