

The Baird Smith Memorial



The former Lasswade Parish Church to the rear of the memorial, stood here from 1796 to 1956

RICHARD BAIRD SMITH

Dr Smith and his wife, Margaret Young, had five children. The eldest, Richard Baird Smith (b 1818), was educated at Lasswade School and Dunse Academy. After graduating from the East India Company Military College, he was commissioned in 1836 into the Madras Engineers. He served there and with the Bengal Engineers, where his training in geology, civil engineering and irrigation were invaluable in his work on canals and bridges.

He served in the army of the Satlaj in the first Sikh war (1845) and in the army of the Punjab in the second (1848).

In 1856, Richard Baird Smith married Florence Elizabeth de Quincey, daughter of Thomas de Quincey, the writer, who lived for some years at Polton.



De Quincey Cottage

Dr RICHARD SMITH

Dr Smith (b 1794) served as a surgeon in the Royal Navy before taking up private practice in Lasswade in 1818. He continued here until his death in 1863. He was widely and greatly respected locally for dedication to his patients, whom he would visit from his home at Springbank in all weathers, often riding his shaggy brown pony, Paddy.

On one occasion, hearing cries of distress from the River Esk at School Green, he rode into the swollen river and saved a young boy from drowning.



THE EAST INDIA COMPANY

Founded as a trading monopoly in 1600, The East India Company had by 1834 become a managing agency for the British government of India. Over the years they expanded their hold. By 1857, everything from Afghanistan to Burma, from the Himalayas to Ceylon was under the Company's rule or influence. Eventually, to ensure the stability that trade required, they raised forces of their own and became an active power in the politics of the country. The transformation of the Company into an imperial power, with its own armed forces is an extraordinary story. The Company also had enormous influence in London, arising from its role in the development of overseas trade, in the advance of Empire and in the evolution of the modern bureaucratic state.

THE INDIAN MUTINY

By the mid 19th century, there was growing dissatisfaction with British rule. Harsh land policies, the rapid introduction of European civilization, and reforms such as the ban on the self-immolation of widows, angered Hindus, who felt their customs and religion threatened.

In the army, the sepoys were dissatisfied with their pay and with changes in regulations, while new leniency, such as abandoning flogging as punishment, eroded their discipline. All this came to a head over new cartridges, greased supposedly with fat from cows (holy) and pigs (unclean). To use the cartridges, the sepoys had to bite off the end, which was offensive to their religious sensitivities.

At Barrackpore, a sepoy of the 34th Native Infantry shot at his sergeant-major and also severely wounded the British adjutant. He was hanged and the regiment disbanded, but they were considered by the majority of sepoys to have been unjustly treated.

Then, 85 troopers of the 3rd Light Cavalry in Meerut refused to handle the new cartridges. They were arrested, court-martialled and each sentenced to ten years hard labour. Shackled in leg and arm irons they were led off to imprisonment. The following day, enraged sepoys broke into the gaol and released their comrades. A mob entered the cantonment and murdered every European or Indian Christian they could find. The Mutiny then spread far and fast. Fighting was frequently ferocious: acts of heroism as well as atrocities were committed on both sides.



In 1857, early in the Mutiny, Richard Baird Smith was instrumental in saving many lives by his strategic planning during uprisings in the the Rurki and Mist area.

RELIEF OF DELHI

Later that year, Richard Baird Smith was ordered to take up duty as Chief Engineer at Delhi, which was seen as the centre of peril. The city had been occupied by 30,000 mutineers, trapping a large number of British residents, with little supplies of food and water. British troops besieging the city were outnumbered by six to one. Baird Smith saw that a decisive blow was needed to recapture Delhi and prepared a plan of attack against its formidable defences.

Fortunately, an action at Badi-ki-Serai enabled the British force to occupy the famous Ridge, overlooking the city walls: and this was instrumental in their eventual success.

Despite sickness and being badly wounded in the ankle by a shell splinter, Baird Smith urged his Commander, General Wilson, to mount an immediate assault. Eventually, in accordance with the plan, three days of bombardment by siege guns made breaches in the defences. The subsequent assault, in which, among others, a column of 1,000 men of the 75th Highlanders took part, was horrendously exposed to withering enemy fire, and in six hours, the British lost 66 officers and 1,104 men. However, a party of the Bengal Engineers blew up the Kashmir Gate, a firm foothold was established inside the walls, and the city was finally relieved after six days hard fighting.



CONSEQUENCES

The siege of Delhi, which lasted for more than three months and during which 30 actions were fought in the extreme heat of the Indian summer, was the turning-point of the Mutiny, which eventually fizzled out.

In 1858 the East India Company was dissolved, and the administration of India became the responsibility of the Crown.



Companion of the Bath

HONOURS AND HIGH APPOINTMENTS

During his army career, and during the mutiny, Richard Baird Smith was several times mentioned in dispatches. After the mutiny, his services and talents were recognised with many honours and high appointments, including:

1858, Companion of the Bath, Master of the Mint at Calcutta.
1859, Senator University of Calcutta, ADC to Queen Victoria, appointed Colonel, Secretary Public Works Department Indian Government .

In 1861 he was given responsibility to carry out the Survey of the Great Famine in India, which included planning the necessary relief work - Richard Baird Smith died in 1861.

• Richard Baird Smith died in 1861 and Dr Richard Smith in 1863
This memorial was erected by the countrymen and friends of father and son, both here in Scotland and in India.



Lasswade and Polton based on an early 19th Century Map

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