

# Cecil Beadon

Born 1816.

Life story compiled by his great grandson Alex Reid.

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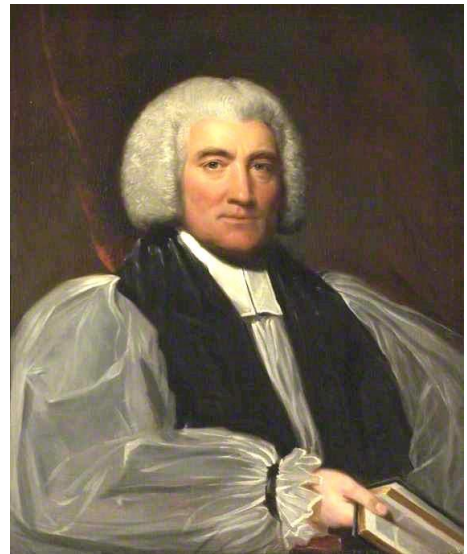
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# 1. Ancestors and Education

*The following three chapters are extracted from Volume III of the Dictionary of National Biography, published in 1885.*

Sir Cecil Beadon (1816–1881), lieutenant-governor of Bengal, was the youngest son of Richard Beadon (right), and grandson of Richard Beadon, D.D., bishop of Bath and Wells [q. v.]. His mother was a sister of the first Lord Heytesbury.

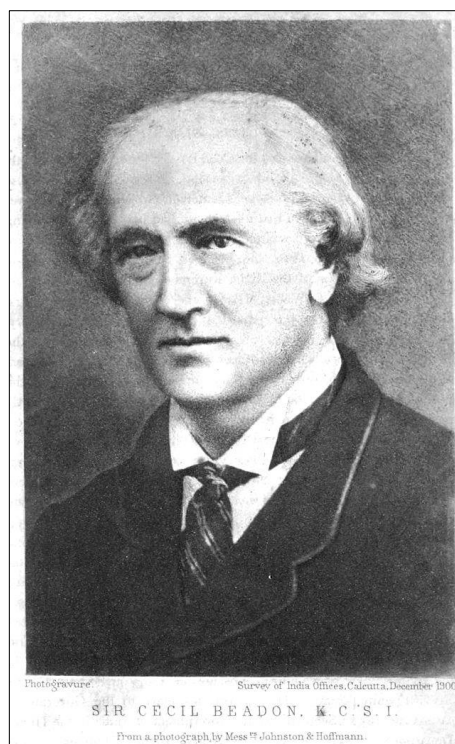


He was educated at Eton and at Shrewsbury, and at the age of eighteen was presented with an appointment to the Bengal civil service, which had been placed by the court of directors at the disposal of Lord Heytesbury, upon his nomination to the post of governor-general of India, a nomination which was shortly afterwards cancelled on the return of the whig government to office.

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## 2. Indian Civil Service

Reaching India in 1836, Beadon spent the earlier years of his service in the usual district offices held by junior civil servants, and was serving as magistrate of Murshidabad, when in 1843 he was appointed undersecretary to the government of Bengal. From that time his advancement was very rapid. After filling several posts at the presidency in connection with the revenue administration, he was selected in 1850 by the Marquis of Dalhousie to represent the Bengal presidency on a commission which had been appointed to inquire into the Indian postal system, and which resulted in the establishment of a uniform postage in that country, analogous to the English penny postage. He subsequently held in succession the important posts of secretary to the government of Bengal, secretary to the government of India in the home department, foreign secretary, member of the council of the governor-general, and finally that of lieutenant-governor of Bengal.



Beadon's career was eminently successful up to the last five years of his service. Three successive governors-general, Lord Hardinge, Lord Dalhousie, and Lord Canning, entertained the highest opinion of his judgment and ability. In 1847 Lord Hardinge spoke of his appointment as secretary to the Board of Salt, Customs, and Opium, which was deemed an improper supersession by his seniors, as 'highly advantageous to the interests of the public service.'

With Lord Dalhousie Beadon carried on a confidential and unreserved correspondence, which was continued throughout his government, and ended only with his death. It was often said in India at that time that Beadon was the only man in the country who had any influence over Dalhousie, and there can be no question that in all matters relating to the internal administration of the country, Lord Dalhousie placed the greatest reliance upon Beadon's judgment. Lord Canning promoted Beadon to the post of foreign secretary, and afterwards recommended him for the lieutenant-governorship of Bengal.

During the greater part of the mutiny Beadon was home secretary, and naturally shared much of the unpopularity with which his chief, and the government generally, were regarded by certain classes of the English community in Calcutta at that excited time. It was groundlessly alleged that Beadon under-estimated the gravity of the crisis.

### 3. Lieutenant Governor of Bengal

After having conducted the duties of foreign secretary for several years with marked ability, and served for a time in the supreme council, Beadon was placed in charge of the government of Bengal with general approval. An article which appeared a little before that time in the leading Calcutta newspaper, full of hostile criticism, not only of Beadon, but of the Indian civil service generally, highly praised Beadon's honesty and resolution, but predicted for him much unpopularity.

This prediction was fully verified. The stars in their courses appear to have fought against the new lieutenant-governor almost from the commencement. Measures, unquestionably wise, taken by him after a careful personal inspection of the province of Assam, in order to improve the condition of the important tea-planting industry there established, were followed by an unexampled depression in the tea industry, and the calamity was charged against Beadon. The unsuccessful mission to Bhután, accompanied by a gross insult to the British envoy, and the war which followed, commencing with a repulse of our troops, were equally discouraging.

Last of all came the famine in Orissa, with its terrible mortality, extending to some other districts in Bengal, and inflicting upon the lieutenant-governor's reputation for administrative capacity a blow from which it never recovered. Here again circumstances were very much against him. His health, seriously impaired by a prolonged residence in the climate of Bengal, was in so critical a condition, that he was imperatively ordered by his medical advisers to repair to Darjiling, at a time when the head of the government would naturally have wished either to remain at the capital or to visit the afflicted districts.

Beadon, at great personal risk, returned to Calcutta, when the extent of the calamity became apparent, but after a short stay was compelled by a fresh access of his malady to revisit the hills. At that time it would have been impossible for him, had he been in the full vigour of health, or for anyone else, to avert or to alleviate the calamity which had settled upon the doomed province. All was done that could have been done at that juncture, but it was all too late. Still, there can be no doubt that the lieutenant-governor's absence at a hill station at that particular juncture, unavoidable though it was, greatly contributed to an unfavourable opinion as to his treatment of the famine.

The real error dated from an earlier period, when, at the commencement of the scarcity which preceded the actual famine, the authorities, as well those of the districts concerned as the superintending authorities at the capital, the board of revenue, and the lieutenant-governor, failed to discern the exceptional circumstances of the case.

A personal visit which the lieutenant-governor had paid to the province at an early period of the scarcity failed to impress him with a due conception of the impending calamity; and his favourable view of the situation—unduly favourable, as the result speedily proved—was accepted by the member of the government of India upon whom it specially devolved to deal with such matters, and was acquiesced in by the governor-general, Sir John Lawrence, who, though entertaining misgivings, did not feel justified in overruling his lieutenant.

The report of a commission of inquiry, afterwards appointed under the orders of the secretary of state, was unfavourable to the lieutenant-governor, and that unfavourable verdict was ratified by the governor-general in council in language which, having regard to the previous concurrence of the supreme government in the lieutenant-governor's policy, was considered by many to have been unduly severe.

A few months later Beadon, who had been created for his previous services a knight commander of the Star of India, when the order was extended in 1866, left India, his brilliant reputation overshadowed, and his health seriously impaired by long residence in a tropical climate and by the anxieties of the later years of his official life.

While the success of Beadon's government was thus marred, there was much in his general administration deserving of the highest praise. The clear judgment, the unflagging industry, the independence of character, for which he had been conspicuous in his previous posts, were all turned to good account in many matters of great importance to the well-being of Bengal. His endeavour to improve the administration of justice by the establishment of courts of small causes, his development of municipal institutions, his educational policy, the careful supervision which he exercised over the revenue administration, over the police and other departments of the public service, his efforts to check Ghát murders and Kulin polygamy, his intolerance of official incompetence and neglect of duty, his discerning appreciation of merit, irrespective of creed, colour, or caste—all these things told upon the progress of the province, and proved that, notwithstanding his failure in one conspicuous instance, he was an earnest, conscientious, and, in many respects, extremely able administrator.

And in the one instance in which he signally failed, the failure is to be attributed to the sanguine temperament which was a marked feature in his character, and which in difficult conjunctures is so often essential to success. A gracious and conciliatory manner, and accessibility to all who desired to approach him on business, Sir Cecil Beadon possessed in a remarkable degree. The late Lady Canning, no mean judge of manners, is said to have remarked that the most perfect mannered men she had ever met were Sidney Herbert and Cecil Beadon.

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## 4. The Orissa Famine

*The following is extracted with acknowledgement and thanks from The Politics of Hunger in India: A Study of Democracy, Governance and Kalahandi's Poverty, by B. Currie, published by Springer in 2000.*

The extensive loss of life that took place during the 1866 Orissa famine – a disaster that affected a larger area than any previous famine in Indian history and led to the death of more than one in four of the Oriya population – prompted an embarrassed colonial government to look for ways to eliminate the mistakes and oversights that had contributed to this disaster.

House of Commons Parliamentary Accounts and Papers indicate that before this famine there was little concerted attention given to famine prevention, noting that ‘amid the wars and distractions and financial difficulties that attended the building up of an Empire, the claims of famine relief attracted small attention’. Lovett argues in his chapter on the development of famine policy in *The Cambridge History of India* that ‘the position of the British in India was not such as either to create any sense of general obligation to give relief, or to supply sufficient means of affording it’. Indeed, famine was considered to be a problem of nature that was ‘largely beyond the ability of mankind to prevent’.

In an effort to improve standards of relief and welfare provision in the aftermath of the Great Orissa Famine, the Lytton government appointed a Commission of Inquiry under Sir George Campbell to investigate its causes. House of Commons Parliamentary Papers mark this out as ‘a turning point in the history of Indian famines. The inquiry concluded that Sir Cecil Beadon’s Bengal government had failed totally to predict the coming event, had misled the central government, and had ‘blindly relied upon the law of supply and demand’. In addition to laying the blame at the door of individual officers within the colonial government apparatus, the Commission highlighted responsibilities that government held to its subjects during future periods of famine and outlined more rigorous procedures for relief provision to be adopted during crisis periods. These recommendations pre-empted a number of the widely-publicized policy guidelines advanced by later Famine Commission in 1880, 1898 and 1901.

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## 5. Family

In 1837 Cecil Beadon married firstly Harriet Sneyd (1818–1855) daughter of Major Ralph Henry Sneyd (1784–1840) of the Bengal cavalry, with whom he had ten children; and in 1860 he married secondly Agnes Sterndale (1836–1906), daughter of William Handley Sterndale (1791–1866) and brother of Robert Armitage Sterndale, with whom he had ten more.

### **Children by Harriet Sneyd:**

Col Cecil Beadon (1838–1913) who married Elinor Augusta Flora Plowden (1846–1886), a sister of Sir Henry Meredyth Plowden

Col Richard Beadon (1839–1884) who married Elinor Louisa Cooper Sterndale (1846–1907) a younger sister of his step-mother Agnes

Henry Sneyd Beadon (1842–1890) who married Elizabeth Ellen Boddam (1849–1928), a great-granddaughter of Rawson Hart Boddam

Edward Sneyd Beadon (1846–1933) who married Edith Rachel Edwards (1851–1883)

William à Court Beadon (1847–1917) who married Emily Florence Dixon (1863–?)

Rev Hyde Elphinstone Beadon (1851–1855)

Harold Archibald Beadon (1853–1921)

three children who died young born in 1842, 1844 and 1850

### **Children by Agnes Stendale:**

Helen Beadon (1861–1933) married Sir Henry Meredyth Plowden (1840–1920)

Philip Canning Beadon (1863–1864), born and died an infant in India

Lt Col Guy Cecil Beadon (1864–1915) married Olive Coates (1870–?)

Isabel Margaret Beadon (1867–1930) married Colonel William Graham Waugh McClintock (1846–1924)

Lt Col Arthur Eyre Beadon (1869–1945) married Marjory Armytage Blunt (1878–1962)

Agnes Imogen Beadon (1870–1964, right) married Judge Sir Arthur Hay Stewart Reid (1851–1930), Hilda Stewart Reid (1898–1982) was their daughter.

Eirene Beadon (1872–1897) married George William Dyson (1864–1922)



Capt Lancelot Richmond Beadon (1876–1922) married Hilda Marian née Raper (1880–1953)

Violet Beadon (1879–1949) married Archibald Campbell MA (1877–1963), Judge of the High Court of Lahore.

Cecil Beadon's sixteenth child was Imogen Beadon, wife of Sir Arthur Reid, mother of Philip Reid, and grandmother of Alex Reid, the compiler of this life story.

Cecil Beadon died on 18 July 1880 in his sixty-fifth year. He is buried in the churchyard of St. John the Baptist Church, Latton, Wiltshire.



St. John the Baptist Church, Latton, Wiltshire.

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