

Sir Colin Scott-Moncrieff

Born 3.8.1836

Life story by Mike Chrimes

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1881 Colin Scott-Moncrieff Chief Engineer Burma

Colonel Sir Colin Campbell Scott-Moncrieff, KCSI, KCMG, (1836 – 1916), Under Secretary of State in the Public Works Department, Egypt was one of the most distinguished of the British engineers who practised in the field of irrigation in the second half of the nineteenth century.

He was born on 3rd August 1836 in Dalkeith Scotland, the sixth son of Robert Scott-Moncrieff of Fossaway, Kinross and Susan née Pringle.

Educated at Edinburgh Academy and the East India Company's Seminary at Addiscombe, he joined the Bengal Engineers and arrived in India in 1856. He served in the suppression of the Indian Mutiny and then joined the Indian Public Works Department, largely in the Irrigation Department of the North West

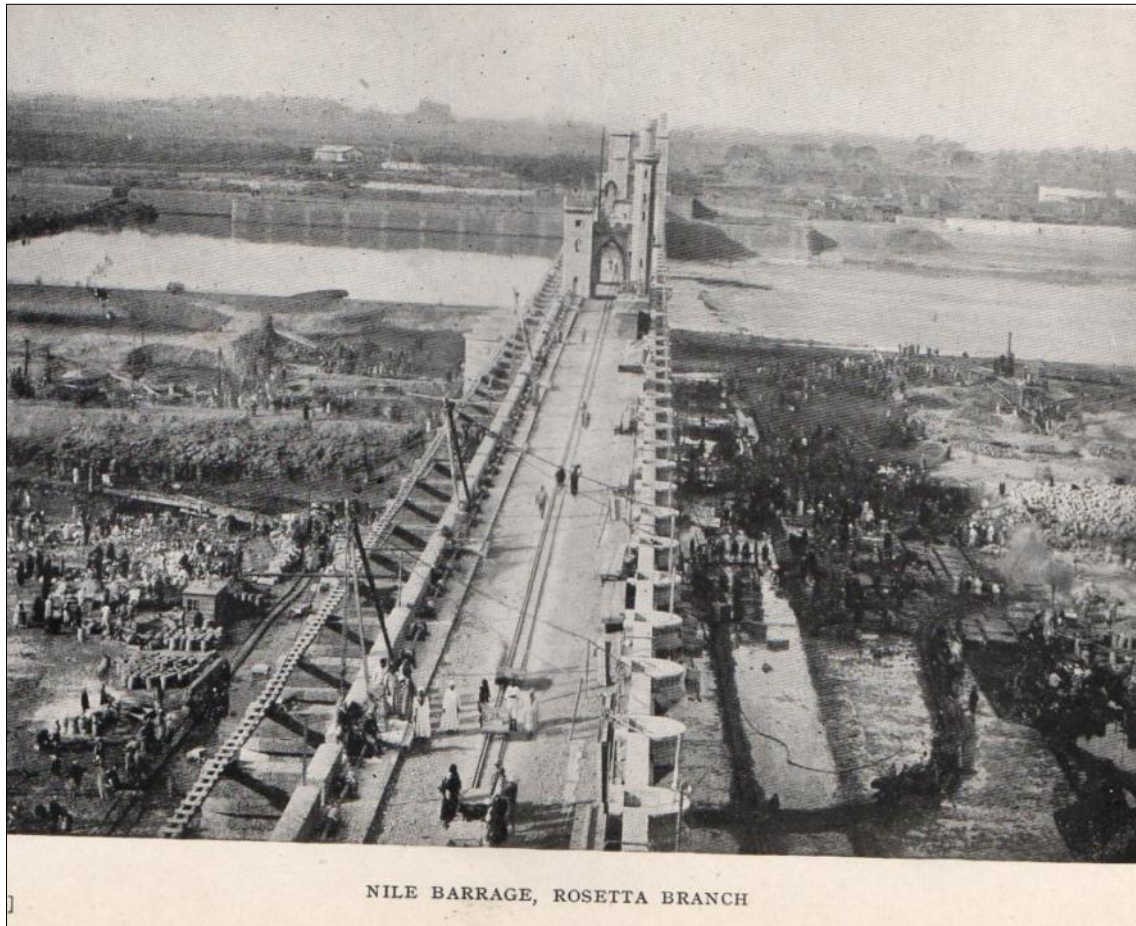
Provinces. He was six months as Barracks Engineer in Oudh and three years as Assistant Principal at Thomason Engineering College, Roorkee (now Indian Institute of Technology, Roorkee) and five years on the Eastern and Western Jumna Canals. He was promoted to Superintending Engineer on the Ganges Canal at an early age.

In 1867 Scott-Moncrieff returned to Europe to compile a masterly report on behalf of the Government of India on the state of irrigation in Southern Europe. This gave him a general insight into alternative methods of irrigation than those used by the British in the Punjab and a broader perspective than many colleagues. Years later he commented in the Indian Irrigation Commission Report on the inapplicability of Italian models to the Ganges Canal System. In May 1868, he was elected Associate Member of the Institution of Civil Engineers. He returned to India to work on improvements to the Ganges Canal.

Scott-Moncrieff was later posted as Chief Engineer in Burma and in 1878 honoured CSI. He served 1878 – 80 on the Famine Commission. He returned as Colonel for the Indian Army in 1883, but was immediately involved in irrigation once more in Egypt. He was appointed Under-Secretary of State in the Public Works Department in the British Administration which was seeking to sort out the financial problems of the country, and also the problems associated with the Nile and associated engineering works.



1890 Delta Barrage – Damietta Branch



1890 Delta Barrage – Rosetta Branch

His first challenge was the restoration of the Delta Barrage originally built by French engineers but beset by problems largely arising from leakage beneath the foundations. This work took until 1890. In the meantime, he was knighted KCMG in 1887. (While in Egypt, in 1890 he was called to Merv in present day Turkmenistan to advise on a river training problem on one of the Tsar's estates close to NW Afghanistan).

He left Egypt in 1892, being succeeded by Sir William Garston. One of Scott-Moncrieff's great achievements in Egypt was assisting in the abolition of the system of forced labour for canal de-silting known as "corvée".

On his return to Britain, Scott-Moncrieff continued as a civil servant as Under-Secretary for Scotland. Then, in 1901, his knowledge was put to good use as *President of the Indian Irrigation Commission* a major report outlining recommendations for further irrigation development throughout India. He was knighted KCSI following the completion of the report in 1903.

Scott-Moncrieff died at his Chelsea home on 6th April 1916. He outlived two wives, marrying Lucy Sturge (d.1874) in 1860, Margaret Sturge (d.1885) IN 1879, and Mary Deborah Albright in 1890. He had one son and two daughters.

Sources

Membership Records, Institution of Civil Engineers, *Engineer*, 14 April 1916, 311-312, *Engineering*, 14 April 1916 35-36, Who was Who.

Works

1859	Oude Barracks Engineer
1860-62	Thomason Engineering College Roorkee, Assistant Principal
1862-67	Eastern and Western Jumna Canals, Assistant Engineer
1868	Irrigation in Southern Europe
1871	Note on the falls of the Ganges Canal (BL OAC, Irrig Procs, 1873,1)
1871-77	Hurdwar Dam, Ganges Canal 1,056 ft long
1874	Report on the remodelling of the Ganges Canal,1872(BL OAC Irrig Procs, NWP no 107)
1883-92	Egyptian Public Works Department, Under Secretary of State
1884-90	Nile Delta Barrage Reconstruction
1888	Note on Nile Flood of 1887
1889	Note on the prevention of Sharaki Land in Egypt
1889	Note on the Wadi Raian Irrigation Project
1890	Note on the Nile Delta Barrage
1901-03	Government of India (1903) “Report of the Indian Irrigation Commission”

Note by Sir Colin's great grandson Brian Bromwich, also a civil engineer, through whose initiative this life story has been added to the Lives Retold website.

I am especially proud of Sir Colin's work in Egypt on the repair of the Nile Delta Barrages at a time when there was a shortage of cotton for the Lancashire cotton mills due to the American civil war. For this reason investment in Egyptian irrigation was increased to provide an alternative source of cotton.

Sir Colin obtained granite from the Alps (because there was no suitable rock available in Egypt) to seal the bed of the Nile and minimise leakage beneath the barrages. As a result, the upstream water level was raised by ten feet which allowed the whole of the delta to be irrigated by gravity. This was a very elegant hydraulic design which has been vastly superior to the pumping solution suggested by politicians which would have been less effective and incurred a financial penalty in perpetuity.
